Distance Education at What Price?

by **Brian M. Morgan**

Look before you leap. Many institutions don't fully understand the impacts of providing distance education. Those impacts, in particular the tangible and perceived costs, are important to access before venturing into online education.

Colleges and universities can use my report, *Is Distance Learning Worth It? Helping to Determine the Costs of Online Courses,* and its companion Web site to learn the areas that must be evaluated, what effects online courses may have on an institution, what costs are involved in establishing this type of venture, and what costs and possible problems may be encountered with ongoing course offerings.

What often happens is higher education institutions begin offering online courses without realizing the expense (1) to get started and (2) in the long run. To be successful, institutions must properly plan, convert material, and evaluate their distance education offerings. Nonetheless, some institutions will never have the resources to be able to do this themselves without considering a partnership.

The Web site affiliated with my report provides a worksheet that allows individuals to enter data specific to their institution and generate an estimate of costs associated with online courses. This site was developed from research data gathered during the generation of the report. By attempting to account for all costs involved, the site can provide an institution with an overview of the costs of introducing and maintaining online courses.

Online education may not even be the approach that some wish to take, but that is a decision that can't be made until all the factors—including the financial ones—are weighed.

The full report and interactive worksheet are available online at www.marshall.edu/distance/. *e*

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How Distance Education Affects Faculty Compensation

by **Gary A. Berg**

The popularity of distance learning is surging in higher education. One 1995 study indicated that a third of higher education institutions offered distance education courses and that a quarter planned to do so in the next three years.[1] With the majority of these courses being developed by faculty members, this represents a potential change in traditional faculty roles. If distance learning courses reduce or increase faculty compensation, this is likely to have long-term effects on faculty and, by extension, the whole of higher education.

My paper in the June 2000 issue of the *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks (JALN)*, "Early Patterns of Faculty Compensation for Developing and Teaching Distance Learning Courses," reports an investigation into direct and indirect compensation (including royalties, training, and professional recognition) for this effort on the part of faculty members. Economic models for distance learning are also examined with respect to attempts to reduce labor costs. The primary questions this paper attempts to answer are: What are the current policies

and practices in higher education for compensating faculty who develop and teach distance learning courses? Will the increased use of distance learning courses alter overall labor conditions for American faculty?

Data on how faculty members are compensated for developing and teaching distance learning courses in American higher education are limited and distance learning is defined differently in various data sources. In addition, the policies and practices of distance learning in America are changing quickly as evidenced by both the numerous references to task forces and committees formed and the variety of institutional approaches to faculty agreements. However, one emerging theme from

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the data is the tendency toward treating distance learning courses as regular load for faculty and not including a royalty structure in these agreements. Although there is some conflict in the data over the trends for compensation in the form of course development fees and training, the most important areas of compensation are direct payment for teaching courses and indirect royalty payments.

The full article from *JALN* is available at www.aln.org/alnweb/journal/jaln-vol4issue1.htm. *e*

Endnote:
1. National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report: Distance Education in Higher Education Institutions, U.S. Department of Education, 1997 [nces.ed.gov/pubs98/distance/index.html].

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Faculty Weigh in on Distance Education

by **The National Education Association**

The National Education Association (NEA) polled more than 400 instructors who teach distance learning courses to tap their perceptions and identify the strengths and weaknesses of distance teaching and learning. Three-quarters of the instructors surveyed are positive about distance learning. This optimism is rooted in technology's ability to extend educational opportunities to students who cannot take courses in a traditional, on-site setting. The most significant finding is that quality and access are central considerations that dictate how faculty members feel about teaching and learning, regardless of whether the forum is a traditional classroom or an online environment.

The poll also found that faculty's zest for distance learning is tinged with some apprehension about the future. Almost uniformly, distance learning instructors report that preparing and delivering distance learning courses requires significantly more time and effort than traditional classes. Most believe this fact will not be reflected in salary schedules. However, their enthusiasm for offering an education to more students outweighs this concern.

Technical support definitely matters to the success of distance teaching and learning. Three-fourths of the instructors rate the technical support, library, and laboratory facilities for their courses as excellent or good.

Faculty members believe Web-based courses do a better job of giving students access to information, helping students master the subject matter, and addressing a variety of learning styles. However, they believe traditional courses do a better job of strengthening group problem-solving skills, verbal skills, and oral presentation.

The picture of distance learning presented in this report is representative of distance learning as it is occurring at traditional public two-year and four-year institutions with NEA members. These distance learning courses are taught by full-time faculty to relatively small classes of students using technologies that are highly interactive. The results of this poll may not apply to distance learning courses at other types of institutions.

The full report is available online at www.nea.org/he/abouthe/dlstudy.pdf. *e*