

2008 Distance Education Survey Results

Tracking the Impact
of eLearning at
Community Colleges





About the Instructional Technology Council

The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) provides exceptional leadership and professional development to its network of eLearning experts by advocating, collaborating, researching, and sharing exemplary, innovative practices and potential in learning technologies. An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges, ITC represents higher education institutions in the United States and Canada that use distance learning technologies. Based in Washington, D.C., ITC was founded in 1977 as the Taskforce for the Uses of Mass Media for Learning. As instructional technology has evolved, so too has ITC which has provided national leadership for more than 30 years on an array of distance learning/elearning issues. With nearly 500 colleges and universities, ITC continues to grow, along with higher education interest in electronically-mediated instruction. For more information about ITC, visit the Web site at www.itcnetwork.org.

Introduction

ITC created this annual survey in response to the growing need for national data related to distance education program creation and development, and for key issues related to faculty and students. ITC set out to develop a survey instrument that would track national data and trends longitudinally and generate specific data regarding real and relevant problems facing emerging and established eLearning programs for administrators and campus leaders.

In fall 2004, the ITC board of directors created a set of relevant questions, and devised a survey instrument and strategy for this annual national survey. They limited the number of questions so respondents could complete it within a reasonable time frame. They conducted their first survey in spring 2005. They revised and adjusted the more burdensome and time-consuming questions and submitted a new survey to ITC members in fall 2005. In fall 2006, they distributed the survey to members of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

How the Survey was Conducted

The questions are divided into four categories - general information, administration, faculty, and students. ITC sent an e-mail invitation to all of the designated institutional representatives identified in the ITC membership and to the AACC members who had responded to the 2007 survey, who were not already ITC members, to a total of 500 institutions.

ITC used an open-source solution -- PHP Surveyor -- as the platform for the survey. Representatives from 139 institutions completed the 2008 survey. Statistically, the respondents represented an appropriate cross-section based on 1) the number of responding institutions, 2) the regional distribution of responding institutions, and 3) the type of responding institution (based on the categories outlined in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education - www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications).

Distribution of Results

The final results were presented in February 2009 at ITC's annual meeting at eLearning 2009 in Portland, Oregon. Members of the ITC board of directors will present the results in a special forum at the AACC Annual Convention in April 2009 Phoenix, Arizona, "A Crash Course on Distance Education." ITC will distribute the results to those who completed the survey, to ITC members, and to the presidents of all AACC-member institutions.

The Data

Respondents completed 139 surveys out of the initial distribution of slightly more than 500 -- a 30 percent response rate. The completed surveys were reviewed to ensure a representative sample of AACC- and ITC-member institutions participated, confirming an acceptable response rate (139/500) with an acceptable distribution based on size and location of institutions. The survey questions are sorted into four categories: general information, administration, faculty, and students.

The individual completing the survey on behalf of his or her institution was usually the distance education administrator.

In Focus:

The Higher Education Opportunity Act



In August 2008, Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). The final version is more than 700 pages with supporting documents and is comprehensive in scope. The law's overall theme is to increase accountability across higher education, including distance education.

A summary of HEOA provisions relevant to distance education include:

1. The law provides an updated definition of distance education, replacing "telecommunications" with "distance education" to read, "the use of one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously."
2. The Secretary of Education is required to produce an annual report regarding its distance education demonstration projects (no current or future projects are funded).
3. The law requires national accrediting agencies to:
 - Demonstrate they have effective standards for evaluating program quality.
 - Create review teams that are well-trained and knowledgeable with respect to their responsibilities regarding distance education.
 - Monitor significant growth in distance education enrollment. A review is required if distance education enrollment increases by 50 percent in one institutional fiscal year.
4. The National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council is asked to compare the quality of distance education with campus-based courses. However Congress does not providing funding for this report.
5. Colleges are required to have "processes" that establish that "the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same

student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit."

ITC worked with other higher education lobbyists and congressional staff to address concerns with regard to the student authentication provision (number five) which could add greatly to a college's administrative costs for distance learning and could infringe upon the privacy rights of students. After extensive discussions, members of Congress added the following "clarifying language" to the HEOA to provide context for the provision:

"The Conferees expect institutions that offer distance education to have security mechanisms in place, such as identification numbers or other pass code information required to be used each time the student participates in class time or coursework on-line. As new identification technologies are developed and become more sophisticated, less expensive and more mainstream, the Conferees anticipate that accrediting agencies or associations and institutions will consider their use in the future. The Conferees do not intend that institutions use or rely on any technology that interferes with the privacy of the student and expect that students' privacy will be protected with whichever method the institutions choose to utilize."

This language delineates the limited scope of "student authentication" ONLY pertaining to a student's use of his or her username and password. It leaves the door open for more elaborate solutions, but only as they become tested and cost-effective. It also ensures the protection of student privacy.

Conclusion

In the months since the passage of the HEOA, an emerging national dialog has focused on the intent and implications of the student authentication provision. Regional accrediting agencies are drafting new guidelines for distance education programs.

Clearly, an undercurrent of the discussion is the assumption that fraudulent activity is occurring in online courses. Sadly, there is no definitive national data to confirm or refute this assumption. We know that distance education programs are vigilant in monitoring for fraud and dishonesty -- and based on the realities of the HEOA -- programs will have to redouble efforts going forward to ensure course and program integrity. ITC will continue to do what it can to assist both regional accrediting agencies and the US Department of Education in drafting new policies and guidelines that manage costs and protect student privacy.

2008 Survey Results

GENERAL INFORMATION

Institutions Surveyed

Most of the respondents identified themselves as Associate's Colleges (89 percent) or Associate's Dominant Colleges (7 percent).

Distance Education Enrollment Growth

Respondents reported comparative enrollment trends in distance education for Fall 2006 to Fall 2007 (the most recent full year of data available for most colleges in November 2008). Campuses reported an 11.3 percent increase for distance education enrollments, substantially ahead of overall national campus enrollments, which averaged less than two percent. This is consistent with the 12.9 percent distance education enrollment growth the Sloan Foundation reported in "Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States 2008." Sloan also found that nearly four million higher education students enrolled in online courses in 2007, and more than 20 percent took at least one online class.

Last year, survey respondents had reported an 18 percent increase in eLearning enrollments from Fall 2005 to Fall 2006. A number of factors could contribute to this less robust enrollment growth rate. Online enrollments have been growing rapidly for years and these rates could not be sustained indefinitely; some campuses have limited enrollment for course quality, retention and persistence reasons; and, limited resources are starting to slow the ability of online programs to sustain historic growth rates.

Direct Report Line

In 2008, 68 percent of respondents indicated that they reported to the vice president for academic affairs or an academic dean; this was statistically unchanged from the previous year. Nearly four percent of respondents indicated they report directly to the president and 3.1 percent indicated they report to a library administrator.

Non-Credit Offerings

Sixty-four percent of campuses reported they offer noncredit distance education courses. This

was down three percent from the previous year. The slight decline may reflect the realities of the worsening national economy. Such courses are often pegged for professional development and updating skills. Corporations often cut or eliminate this type of activity during economic downturns. A college's community education or business outreach divisions usually offer noncredit online courses.

ADMINISTRATION

Comments from Survey Respondents

Challenges for Administrators:

- *Finding the right fit within the organizational structure of the college, since online is integrated college wide. We need to find ways to be a part of conversations, such as planning, etc. because our structure is different.*
- *Finding dedicated, qualified faculty -- not all instructors who want to teach online do a great job. Providing oversight and mentoring to make sure faculty are doing an adequate job. Also, compensating them well for all of the work needed to develop courses.*
- *Convincing faculty of the need to become capable technologically as more and more students demand that faculty use the technology they depend upon in everyday life.*
- *Deans and department chairs need to provide incentives to faculty to develop and review online content, intellectual property issues, and evaluate their online teaching and course delivery. They need to become more knowledgeable about what constitutes quality online offerings and the time staff need to develop and oversee quality.*
- *The distance education program generates lots of interest -- sometimes too much -- and it is difficult to channel all of the suggestions and interest into productive areas and uses.*
- *A new organizational structure. Recently decentralized distance education department. Academic deans now setting schedule and staffing faculty positions. Not sure they have the buy-in to online.*

CHART 1: GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge 8 = least challenging

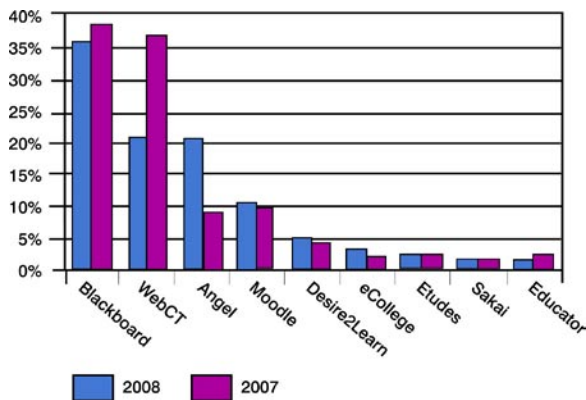
Challenge	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Support staff needed for training and technical assistance	1	1	1	1	1
Adequate student services for distance education students	2	2	3	5	2
Operating and equipment budgets	3	3	2	2	3
Adequate administrative authority	4	5	4	4	5
Faculty acceptance	5	4	5	3	4
Adequate space for training and technical assistance	6	6	6	7	7
Organizational acceptance	7	7	7	6	6
Student acceptance	8	8	8	8	8

Learning Management System Usage

Fifty nine percent of respondents indicated they use Blackboard/WebCt (38.3 percent for Blackboard, 21 percent for WebCt). This is down dramatically from the previous year when 77 percent indicated they use Blackboard/WebCT (38.3 percent for Blackboard/39 percent for WebCT). The past four years have seen a trend in the decline in usage of Blackboard/WebCT.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated they were considering switching LMS platforms in the next few years, a consistent trend for the past three years. Seventy-seven percent indicated they restrict the number of LMS platforms the campus will support -- this is statistically unchanged from the past several years.

TABLE 1: LMS USAGE



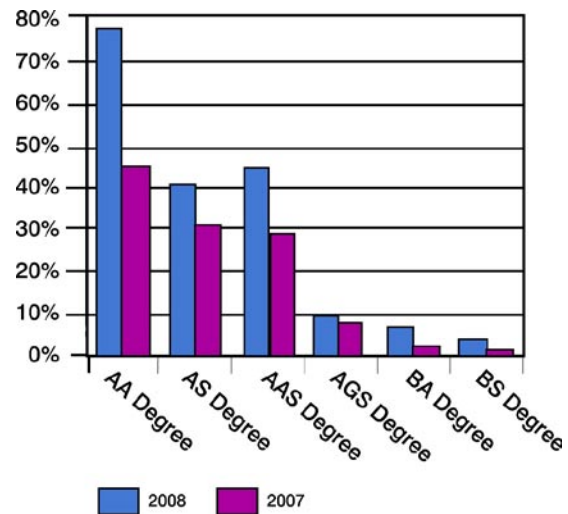
The most significant changes from the previous year include: continued changes in WebCT and Blackboard LMS platform adoptions, a dramatic increase for the Angel LMS platform, and an apparent leveling off of interest in open source solutions like Moodle and Sakai.

Accessibility Compliance

For the first time, ITC asked a question about accessibility compliance. Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that most or all of their online courses were in compliance. Twenty-six percent indicated that at least some of their courses were in compliance. Only one percent indicated that none of their online courses were in compliance.

Online Degrees

The survey asked respondents whether their institution offers online degrees as part of their distance education program. An online degree, was defined as "at least 70 percent of coursework need to complete the degree is available online." Seventy-four percent indicated they offer at least one or more degrees online -- up 10 percent from last year.



Course Evaluation

- 90 percent of institutions use student evaluations (81 percent in 2007)
- 64 percent use some type of administrative review (unchanged)
- 58 percent use peer evaluation and (unchanged), and
- 60 percent use campus standards or best practices (unchanged)

Data suggests some stabilization in course evaluation but reflects a significant increase in the use of student evaluations. The lack of completion of student evaluations emerged as a major challenge last year. Clearly, programs focused on this issue this year.

Course Enrollment Caps

Eighty-seven percent of respondents cap online class enrollments, a number that has not changed in two years. The typical enrollment cap by class type has also not changed in two years.

- 25 students for introductory math
- 24 students for introductory English composition
- 30 students for Introductory political science

Class Hosting

With regard to hosting their online courses, respondents indicated that:

- 50 percent own and maintain their own servers (down from 55 percent in 2007)
- 40 percent outsource their server needs to a third party such as an LMS provider, publisher, or out-sourced IT provider (32 percent in 2007)
- 10 percent share servers with others such as a system, district or consortium (12 percent in 2007)

The data confirms that fewer colleges are hosting their online courses. This could reflect budget and staffing reductions at a growing number of institutions.

Course Content Development

Colleges often have the option to purchase content from a content provider, such as a book publisher. Eighty percent of respondents indicated they develop their own content. Eighteen percent use publisher materials and two percent contract or license from another content provider.

Most Difficult Classes

Respondents identified courses that have been difficult to offer due to faculty resistance and/or pedagogical challenges. This list has not changed in the past four years of the survey. The most difficult courses listed included:

- Lab-based science
- Speech
- Clinical requirements
- Fine arts
- Nursing
- Math
- Industrial technology
- Foreign language
- Computer hardware

Course Equivalency

Regional accreditation agencies require that the content and rigor for distance education courses is the same as that for face-to-face courses. Eighty three percent of respondents indicated that their online courses were equivalent to their face-to-face courses, while nine percent said they were superior. Only eight percent said their online courses needed improvement.

Services and Technology Support

Regional accrediting agencies also require colleges to offer the same student services and support to their distance education students. With growing numbers of online students, campuses also are recognizing the need to introduce or expand additional virtual services and support.

The 2008 survey confirmed data received from previous ITC surveys -- colleges have consistently aimed to offer online students a broad array of student services. The charting below reflects a few changes. Some respondents requested the survey offer a clearer breakdown and the category, "no plan to offer." This year's survey also added three options: campus portal, audio podcasting and vodcasting.

CHART 2: STATUS REPORT: STUDENT SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Service/Technology	Currently offer	Plan to offer in next year	Plan to offer in two or more years	No plan to offer
Audio/Video streaming	72%	13%	8%	6%
Campus testing center for distance education students	79%	3%	5%	12%
Dedicated Web site for distance education program and students	84%	3%	7%	5%
Distance education-specific faculty training	93%	4%	1%	1%
Help desk and technical support for distance education faculty	93%	3%	3%	---
Help desk and technical support for distance education students	89%	7%	2%	1%
Online admission to institution	82%	10%	3%	4%
Online counseling and advising services	67%	12%	12%	8%
Online information and application for financial aid	87%	6%	3%	2%
Online library services and resources	94%	3%	2%	---
Online payment of tuition and fees	88%	6%	3%	2%
Online plagiarism evaluation	59%	13%	9%	18%
Online registration for courses	92%	4%	2%	1%
Online student course evaluation	86%	8%	4%	1%
Online student organization, Web site and services	56%	13%	12%	18%
Online student orientation for distance education courses	71%	19%	5%	3%
Online textbook sales	82%	7%	3%	7%
Online tutoring assistance	60%	22%	7%	10%
Campus Web portal	61%	16%	16%	6%
Audio podcasting	62%	27%	4%	6%
Vodcasting	45%	30%	14%	9%

Outsourcing Selected Services

This year the survey asked whether colleges have changed the amount of services they have outsourced to outside vendors. Fifty-two percent of respondents indicated they used the same number of outsourced solutions in 2008 as in the previous year, while 30 percent increased, and 18 percent decreased their outsourcing.

Distance Education Fees

Forty percent of respondents reported they charge students an additional per-credit fee for taking distance education courses, a decrease of five percent from last year. The minimum collected was \$2 and the maximum was \$90, with a median average of \$19. Likely, campuses are beginning to integrate related program costs into existing budgets, reducing the need for a separate fee. The issue of whether to assess a separate student fee is tied closely to the culture of the institution.

BLENDED/HYBRID AND WEB-FACILITATED COURSES

ITC added this new section to the 2008 survey due to popular demand. A blended or hybrid course is defined as one that blends online with face-to-face delivery (30 to 79 percent of the content is delivered online, with online discussions and some face-to-face meetings). A Web-facilitated course (also called Web-enhanced or Web-assisted) is a face-to-face course that uses the Web to facilitate activities (one to 29 percent of content is delivered online). These courses often use a learning management system (LMS) or Web pages to post the syllabus and/or assignments).

Type of Course Formats Offered

Respondents were asked to identify the types of technology-delivered credit courses their institution offered by format:

- 72 percent offer completely online classes
- 14 percent offer blended or hybrid courses
- one percent offer cable or telecourse courses
- 1.4 percent offer other forms of telecourse classes
- three percent offer interactive television courses
- less than one percent offer audio courses

Blended/Hybrid Courses

- 64 percent are continuing to increase the number of these courses each term
- 20 percent are offering about the same number of these courses each term
- 13 percent are offering these courses for the first time
- 2 percent are reducing the number of these course each term
- 1 percent do not offer these courses

Web-Assisted, Web-Enhanced or Web-Facilitated Courses

Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated they are continuing to increase the number of Web-assisted, Web-enhanced or Web-facilitated courses each term. Nine percent are offering about the same number of these classes each term, and four percent do not offer them.

Interactive Video Courses

Given the growth of online courses and degrees, other more-established technologies such as interactive video classrooms, have been neglected. Thirty percent of respondents reported they are offering the same number of interactive video courses each term, while 22 percent are reducing their number. Thirty-five percent have deactivated their network or have never offered interactive video courses. Fourteen percent are increasing them each term.

FACULTY

Comments from Survey Respondents Challenges Administrators Found with Regard to Faculty:

- *Always funding. Getting enough qualified and interested full-time faculty to teach online. Competition from other nearby colleges. Effective quality assessment methods.*
- *How to require review and revision of courses after they have been taught for three years. Requiring faculty to participate in training before developing and delivering distance courses.*

Administrators identified the greatest challenges they have experienced with regards to faculty who teach at a distance. For the past four years, they have consistently ranked workload issues as the number one challenge.

CHART 3: GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR FACULTY TEACHING DISTANCE EDUCATION CLASSES

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge - 7 = least challenging

Challenge	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Workload issues	1	1	1	1	1
Training	2	2	2	3	4
Compensation	3	3	3	5	2
Technical support	4	5	5	6	5
Buy-in to electronically-delivered instruction	5	4	4	4	3
Recruitment	6	6	6	2	6
Intellectual property and ownership issues	7	7	7	7	7

Faculty Training

Seventy-one percent of the respondents indicated their colleges required their faculty to participate in a training program to teach at a distance (the same as 2007, up from 57 percent in 2005). Those who responded “yes” were asked to identify how many hours of training were required:

- 61 percent require more than eight hours of training
- 9 percent require less than eight hours of training
- 30 percent require exactly eight hours of training

Testing

A core issue for many colleges is to what extent they should require students to take proctored tests as a means to eliminate cheating. Respondents indicated there is significant flexibility:

- 91 percent allow both on-campus and online testing (blended)
- 50 percent allow exclusively online testing (non-proctored)
- 39 percent allow testing to be exclusively on campus (proctored)

Full-time/Part-time

Sixty-four percent of distance education courses are taught by full-time faculty, and 35 percent by part-time faculty. These figures are essentially unchanged since 2006 and are consistent with the historic full-time/part-time faculty ratios at most community colleges.

Faculty Location

Given the virtual nature of the online classroom, campuses are beginning to explore the possibility of allowing faculty to be located off campus. This year’s survey marked a major change in institutional practice -- a 20 percent shift toward allowing faculty to be located away from campus. Respondents to the ITC survey reported:

- 63 percent (83 percent for 2007) require distance education faculty to be located on-campus

- 37 percent have faculty located in other cities in the state, in other states, and/or in other countries

Limiting the Number of Classes Taught

Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated their institution limits the number of distance education classes a full-time faculty member can teach each semester to .47 of a full teaching load. Sixty-five percent indicated they do not impose such a limitation. These figures are consistent with responses for the past two years.

STUDENTS

Comments from Survey Respondents

Challenges Administrators Found with Regard to Students:

- *Student experience with technology and software.*

The survey asked administrators to rank the major challenges they face with regard to students.

The 2007 respondents indicated a dramatic shift -- they ranked completing student evaluations was their number one challenge. This year they returned to listing this problem as number five or six. Assessing student learning and performance in distance education classes emerged as their primary challenge in 2008.

Completion Rates

Administrators indicated the average retention rate for students taking courses at a distance was 65 percent (down from 72 percent in 2007), while the average retention rate in face-to-face courses was 72 percent (down from 78 percent in 2007).

Traditional/Non-traditional Students

Fifty-two percent of the students taking distance education courses were “traditional,” or 18 to 25 years old, while 46 percent were “non-traditional,” or older than 26 years. Distance learning students appear to be getting younger -- in 2007 46 percent were 18 to 25, and 52 percent were in the older age group.

CHART 4: GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION CLASSES

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge - 8 = least challenging

Challenge	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Assessing student learning and performance in distance education classes	1	3	2	2	2
Orientation and preparation for taking distance education classes	2	2	1	1	1
Computer problems and technical support	3	4	3	6	3
Low student completion rate	4	6	5	4	6
Providing equivalent student services virtually	5	5	4	3	4
Completion of student evaluations	6	1	6	5	5
Cheating	7	7	7	-	7
Recruitment/interest in distance education by students	8	8	8	8	8

Gender

Administrators said that 59 percent of their distance education students are female (41 percent male).

Student Demand

Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated their college is NOT offering enough distance education courses to meet the student demand, while 31 percent reported they are meeting the demand. These numbers are consistent with the 2007 survey.

Student Authentication

The survey asked a new question to learn about practices at colleges, as related to the expectations of the Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA). Ninety-six percent of the respondents indicate their college requires students to authenticate their identity -- using a unique username and password -- to access their online courses. Only four percent do not.



OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

The ITC survey is now in its fourth year. Although it has not yet established a regular base of participants, the results have remained consistent from year to year and correspond with data collected by other large national surveys, such as the Sloan Foundation's annual survey, "Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning" (see www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/online_nation.pdf) and the US Department of Education's "Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2000-2001." (see <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003017>).

The authors have seen a balanced, statistically-significant participation since the survey's inception and the results have documented the evolution and progress of online education at community colleges. With four years of data, ITC can confirm major trends and benchmarks in online education that should be of tremendous value to program and campus administrators.

Observations Challenges for Distance Learning Administrators:

Our college has not made an adequate investment for the development of a high-quality online learning program.

Getting administration and faculty to realize that distance education is NOT a classroom put online. It requires a great deal of planning, training and forethought.

Lack of access by students in rural areas to the Internet at the speeds they need to participate in the class.

Lower than traditional classroom student success rates.

Keeping up with the Rapid growth in Web-enhanced courses.

Stability.

Switching to a new learning management system with limited support staff to train faculty and students.

The authors offer the following observations:

1. Student demand for distance education courses at community colleges continues to grow. The rate of growth for distance education (an 11 percent increase for 2006-2007) far outpaced the growth rate for traditional enrollments. Seventy percent of the respondents reported that student demand exceeds current class offerings. The percentages for enrollment growth and student demand have remained consistent during the past four years of survey data.

2. Colleges have significantly increased their number of blended or hybrid and/or Web-enhanced or Web-assisted courses. As many online faculty return to the traditional classroom, they bring what they liked about online teaching with them.

3. Student completion rates for distance education courses continues to lag behind their traditional counterparts (a seven percent gap according to the 2008 respondents). Just six years ago, national figures showed 50 percent completion rates, so the numbers have improved significantly, but there is still a way to go.

4. Providing adequate student services and technology support services to distance learning students remains a priority on most campuses. The 2008 survey shows that colleges have rapidly expanded their services to meet accreditation expectations of "equivalency." Many have completed this transformation, and are now exploring adding new technologies and virtual services.

5. A realignment of the market for learning management system (LMS) continues. The merger of Blackboard and WebCt has prompted a number of campuses to review their LMS commitments. The data suggests a continued volatility as 31 percent of the campuses surveyed indicated they are considering switching from their current LMS (where Blackboard/WebCT have seen a near monopoly). There has been a marked growth by competitors to Blackboard/WebCT -- namely Angel. It will be interesting to see in future surveys whether the interest in open source solutions such as Moodle Sakai has indeed leveled off.

6. Administrators continue to identify "support staff needed for training and technical assistance" as their greatest challenge. This has been true during the entire four-year history of the ITC survey.

7. Administrators have consistently identified workload issues as their greatest challenge related to faculty.

8. Always a concern, assessing student learning and performance in the distance education environment emerged as the greatest challenge for students in 2008.

9. Distance education administrators appear to have buy-in from faculty and students. Administrators consistently mark issues of student acceptance, recruitment and interest in distance education as their least greatest challenges.

Trends

Online programs are well-established at most two-year institutions and have become accepted into the existing administrative structure. Institutionalization can be a double-edged sword. In the past, distance educators have served as change agents and transformational leaders.

Online programs have grown rapidly, cross academic and administrative divisions, and have often been forced to generate greater efficiencies of scale as they have struggled with fewer resources than they would have otherwise liked - to implement state-of-the-art programs with all of the bells and whistles.

Distance education has generated a great deal of dialog and introspection among academic departments. One respondent lamented that she experiences "decreasing flexibility and responsiveness as institutionalization increases." As online programs mature, they are increasingly viewed as mainstream, have become a part of the campus bureaucracy, and are losing several of the program characteristics that made them stand out initially.

Becoming mainstream within the campus administration carries the risk of potentially diminishing the ability to effect change. On the other hand, being accepted into the administrative structure, can improve chances for increased budgets, staffing, space and priority.

ITC will continue to monitor emerging key trends, including:

- Ninety-six percent of online programs already authenticate student access to online courses.
- Many colleges are increasing their use of blended/hybrid and Web-enhanced/Web assisted courses.
- Online courses represent the only real growth in enrollments at most colleges.
- Online courses, with their technology base, are increasingly attractive to "millennial" students.
- Online courses continue to be the "change agent" at campuses, allowing for updating and improved services for students and faculty. They also serve as the primary vehicle for adaptation and change for faculty and the institution.
- Trends indicate colleges are increasingly moving their distance learning programs away from IT operations to the academic side of the institution -- reporting to the vice president of academic affairs or academic dean.
- The quality of distance education instruction is improving continuously as colleges redirect more institutional resources to distance education. Programs are focusing on quality, consistency, assessment and retention to address latent concerns.
- Colleges face significant challenges for offering a seamless on-campus relationship among departments and the administrative structure as more traditional administrative units feel threatened by the rapid growth of online courses on their campus. Many distance learning administrators have noted the emergence of control issues -- as the leadership debates whether to "centralize" or "decentralize" their distance education operation.

Is Your Online Program Typical?

Administrators always wonder where their online program is normal or typical as compared to those at other institutions. Is the program consistent with national trends? Four years of survey data can now allow us to answer these questions by providing a composite of a typical online program:

The program:

- Is under-staffed, working in cramped conditions, with an inadequate budget.
- Has become THE primary source for enrollment growth at the college.
- Functions “outside the box,” often working more efficiently, creatively and productively.
- Invigorates faculty -- offering new challenges and opportunities.
- Leads the institution in dealing with issues of assessment, content, course quality, and learning styles.
- Often struggles to obtain the understanding, acceptance and support from campus leaders, who are unfamiliar with this method of teaching and learning (a generational disconnect).
- Does not offer enough classes to come close to meeting student interest/demand.
- Provides students dynamic access to higher education -- making educational

opportunities available to many for the first time.

- Functions at the leading edge in the attempt to understand and serve the new wave of millennial students in higher education.
- Has become a significant “change agent” at the college -- prompting increased faculty training and professional development, causing educators to rethink of how they teach, and provides a catalyst for integrating technology into instruction.
- Offers a stark challenge to the business-as-usual approach at most institutions -- contrasting with the traditional needs of college campuses such as buildings, parking lots, narrow organizational structures, etc.
- The key administrator reports to the academic side of the institution (dean or above).

Conclusion

The results of this survey are intended, first and foremost, to be of value to distance education practitioners. The distance education landscape is changing rapidly, and the need for relevant data and information has never been more important. This is new ground for most college administrators. They are being asked to support new staffing, space and budget requests -- often with a fixed or shrinking budget. College administrators want to make sure they are making the right decisions that will benefit their students, faculty, staff and greater community, and make the very most of limited resources.

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