

# ED414513 1995-00-00 Extending the Reach: Distance Delivery in Career Counseling: ERIC Digest.

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## Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

<a href="#">Extending the Reach: Distance Delivery in Career Counseling: ERIC Digest.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">DEVELOPING DISTANCE CAREER PROGRAMS.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">CONCLUSION.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">REFERENCES.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>



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## Extending the Reach: Distance Delivery in Career Counseling: ERIC Digest.

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OVERVIEW

Generations of rural people have relied on resource industries for their livelihoods. In

many areas, these career opportunities have been eroded by changing trade policies, technology, and the depletion of renewable resources. Career education and counseling are more important in modern rural societies than ever before, but providing services to a dispersed population by conventional means is costly and, in many cases, impractical. Modern technologies now allow career counselors to deliver their services from afar.

## DISCUSSION



### Distance Career Counseling.

Distance education grew out of efforts to provide academic courses in schools that could not afford conventional methods of teaching. However, Pelton (1991) emphasized the need for sensitivity to geographic and cultural differences to avoid using communication technologies for "mindless megatraining" (p. 5). In distance career counseling, four factors must be considered.



1. Community Characteristics: Most career counseling theory is rooted in an urban-industrial environment and value system. For example, job-search skills include some forceful techniques that make sense in a competitive labor market where employers do not know one applicant from another. However, the more informal hiring practices in many rural communities make it improper to use tactics such as follow-up telephone calls for making oneself more visible. However, there are differences between rural communities in terms of location, history, transportation links, and economic base. Some communities embrace a set of values and practices that approximate those of urban society; others have very different customs. Where communities lie on the rural-urban continuum has a major influence on the career education needs of residents.



2. Nature of the Labor Market: Conventional career development theory assumes a diverse, specialized labor market. Most rural communities have a narrower range of occupational opportunities and are more generalist, with people engaging in multiple activities in both formal and informal labor markets. Because rural communities are not smaller versions of urban society, career paths and career values are significantly different. In fact, rural Canadians likely have more in common with rural people in other nations than they have with urban Canadians (Whitaker, 1988).



3. Rural Communities in Transition: Rural labor markets are changing. Non-traditional businesses and occupations are emerging, but the process of economic diversification is uneven. Some communities are quick to seize opportunities while others avoid the risk and uncertainty of change. Communities have a significant influence on people's occupational goals and expectations, propensity for risk-taking, approaches to problem-solving, and self-concept, all of which are important to career development.



4. Rural Culture: Environment shapes language. People develop a sense of the meaning of words from personal experience. Shared language is fundamental to any teaching. Experiences with career education programs show that it is important to understand the implications of even a simple word such as "work." When most people think about going to work, they envisage working for an employer in exchange for money and fringe benefits. In non-industrialized areas, work entails not only wage-earning labor but any activity that contributes to the standard of living of the household (Hill, 1983). Rural careers involve a wide range of non-market activities. Distance career counselors must develop sensitivity to the differences between their own culturally-derived assumptions and those of their clients, and use language that the client finds meaningful.

## DEVELOPING DISTANCE CAREER PROGRAMS

Distance career counselors use a variety of communication technologies to deliver programs. Each technology has strengths and weaknesses and the choice depends on the task, the availability of equipment, and the cost. An effective means of distance counseling is audio-teleconferencing: it is accessible, affordable, and a comfortable medium for discussion. The author's programs generally incorporate 8-12 teleconferences of 90-120 minutes each (Cahill, 1994; Cahill & Martland, 1994; Garlie, Lilly, & Mulcahy, 1994). Most clients use temporary sites fitted with portable equipment which has been shipped to host communities before the program begins. Any facility that has regular telephone service is viable: hospitals, schools, and community organization offices. Each site has a microphone and speaker box which are linked to other sites, allowing participants to speak and listen to each other. The system ensures confidentiality, which is important to promoting free and open discussion of personal matters. It also allows counselors to use guest speakers. Young, rural women have been introduced to nontraditional occupations via role models in teleconference sessions; others have been provided information on rural-development initiatives through their interaction with a panel of community and government representatives. Guests participate from their homes or offices, making it convenient to engage competent resource people.

The widespread use of video-cassette players allows counselors to demonstrate skills and to stimulate discussion of sensitive issues using video. Video cassettes have been produced to give parents ideas for helping their children explore career options, to

encourage young women and teen-aged mothers, to help career drifters examine their lives and their feelings, and to teach peer and lay counselors to aid others.

Print materials are also integrated into programs. Workbooks explain career development issues and strategies and provide clients with a record of their experiences. Supplementary materials give information on the local labor market. Counselor handbooks offer detailed suggestions for delivering the programs. By adding their own supplementary materials, counselors can adapt the programs to any locality.

In developing and delivering distance career counseling programs, several factors will enhance success:



1. Partnerships: Community-based partners, whose mandate and/or activities agree with the program, must be actively involved throughout. Possible partners include schools, community colleges, co-operatives, development associations, business organizations, farm associations, unions, rural women's associations, youth groups, and native organizations.



2. Program Content: Variations among rural communities demand that programs remain flexible and adaptable. Within a general framework, local considerations may require career counselors to add, drop, or modify program content.



3. Program Delivery: Many community associations are willing to volunteer their facilities. In one program, participants used fax machines to introduce themselves and handle information requests during the program. A local coordinator received bulky materials and distributed them to participants as needed.



4. Program Administration: Many administrative tasks can be simplified with local on-site coordinators. Local knowledge can help avoid problems.

## CONCLUSION

Society's ability to communicate rapidly and cheaply over long distances is changing the way institutions function. Career counselors can develop programs that meet the needs both of rural residents wanting to pursue careers in larger urban centers and of those wanting to create their niche in a changing rural society. To be successful, career

counselors must provide partners with a realistic assessment of the effort required, give adequate support throughout the process, and establish regular communications to monitor progress, address problems, and develop mutual feelings of trust and inclusion. The experience of the Centre for the Development of Distance Career Counselling demonstrates the effectiveness of using communications technologies to help people in remote communities explore alternatives and manage their careers. Counselors have only begun to tap the potential unleashed by new media. As distance career counselors develop their media skills, they will discover new ways to improve the quality of career services to remote communities.

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