



**Status of Distance Education
In Arkansas**

August 2004

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The following document is an update to reports compiled by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) entitled *Status and Progress of Distance Education in Arkansas Higher Education* (1999) and *Arkansas Higher Education Instructional Technology Report* (2000). Both reports were submitted to the House Interim Committee on Education and the Senate Interim Committee on Education. The purpose of this report is to provide information on national trends in distance education since the 1999 and 2000 reports were published, and to present the status of distance education efforts at two-year and four-year public institutions in Arkansas.

Education at a “distance” began in the 1870s with correspondence courses and continued as a fundamental component of adult education for more than 100 years. As new educational delivery systems have been initiated over the past three decades, correspondence courses are no longer the only option for students seeking off-campus instruction. Modern technology has created learning opportunities that are not constrained by considerations of time and place; rather, learning has become an anytime, any place endeavor. As stated in the 2000 ADHE report, “The goal of distance education is to foster effective learning that surmounts time, place, and space barriers. Distance education provides comprehensive access, equity of opportunity, and responsiveness to educational needs for all by combining the best technology practices with the best teaching and learning practices.” (*Arkansas Higher Education Instructional Technology Report*, 2000.)

Today's distance education is not simply the addition of technology to instruction; instead, it uses technology where appropriate and creates new approaches to the teaching/learning process. Distance education provides universal access to educational opportunities through the use of compressed video, videotapes, computer conferencing, and Internet-based courses. The use of distance education in instruction provides flexibility and convenience. It encourages the student to be a self-directed learner, while the role of the instructor evolves from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side.” Learning is tied more to what the student can accomplish than how effectively the instructor can teach.

Courses and programs delivered through distance technology, identified in this report simply as distance education, have rapidly become an important component of higher education. Although this phenomenon creates opportunities to serve new student clienteles and encourages instructor innovation, the concept raises many questions.

This report is organized around answers to some of the most frequently asked questions dealing with distance education. The first part of the report focuses on national trends and data related to distance education, while the second part addresses distance education efforts in Arkansas. Questions and answers are grouped under the following broad areas of interest:

- Has distance education been a success nationally?
- Who participates in distance education?
- How is quality in distance education programs evaluated?
- What is the future of distance education nationally?
- What is the status of distance education at Arkansas public institutions?
- What programs are currently being delivered through distance education by Arkansas institutions?
- What are the ADHE criteria and guidelines for approving distance education programs?

HAS DISTANCE EDUCATION BEEN A SUCCESS NATIONALLY?

In order to measure the effectiveness of distance education at the national level, both successes and failures must be considered. In the mid-1990s, dot-coms were touted as the new education delivery system that would revolutionize higher education. By 2002, most companies formed for the sole purpose of providing the content and software to deliver college courses to anyone in the world had either changed their mission or gone out of business. A *Wall Street Journal* article quoted in a National Education Association article notes, “The message is that distance education has not proven to be an easy way to make money.” The article alludes to the fact that there are more failures than successes in this arena, and that experience shows that large-scale distance education efforts have found many ways to fail.

One primary reason for the failure of these large-scale programs was a lack of student acceptance, which resulted in low enrollment, higher costs, and more faculty time than expected. Many ventures also failed because they could not operate a corporate culture within a university environment. When speaking of the NYU Online failure, a for-profit arm of New York University (NYU) that spent \$25 million on seven courses, the authors recommended that the program should have taken advantage of the university's resources and worked more closely with professors on campus. As one professor of the institution noted, students pay for faculty reputation in traditional programs, an enhancement that was not available with the online program (National Education Association, 2002).

Some pure for-profit programs such as the University of Phoenix have been successful, as have non-profit programs such as Penn State's World Campus and the University of Maryland University College (UMUC). These institutions have taken a slower, less flashy approach. UMUC, with its significant military connection, may be the single largest online education provider with 26,500 students worldwide. Some community college programs such as Northern Virginia Community College are also doing well.

Many institutions have been faced with faculty concerns including quality control, online communication, and the time demands of distance education programs. According to faculty who teach online, it can turn into a 24-hour a day job. To compensate for lack of

interaction, many online programs promise to respond to student emails within 24 hours, which has caused some professors to avoid distance education.

On the positive side, distance courses give students with outside responsibilities, such as jobs and families, an opportunity they would not have otherwise. John F. Ebersole, Associate Provost and Dean of Extended Education for Boston University, said online education, despite its sputtering, has already proven to be highly successful. He cited a study by Eduventures, an education-industry organization, which found that 92 percent of public institutions that provide distance-education courses and institutions that have incorporated online education into their mission are thriving. "We're learning from the failures of those who pioneered," Mr. Ebersole said. "Those that are taking these lessons to heart are experiencing considerable success." (Carnevale, July 2004).

The effectiveness of distance education on student performance, test scores and attitudes has been studied by comparing traditional teaching with distance education. Results from experiments comparing traditional sections and virtual sections of students (Shutte, 1997, LaRose, Gregg, and Eastin, 1998) show that instruction provided online can result in improved performance and test scores. Student attitude ratings equal to those of the traditional section were also evident. In another study, Johnson, et al. (2000) found that students' satisfaction with their learning experience tended to be slightly more positive for students in a traditional course format, although there was no difference in the quality of the learning that took place. Results of this study support the argument that online instruction can be designed to be as effective as traditional face-to-face instruction. Wegner, et al. (1999) also studied student success in terms of the effects of Internet-based instruction on student learning. Student test scores and satisfaction survey results from an Internet-based test group were compared to a control group whose instructional opportunities were from traditional, in-class models. Researchers found no significant difference between the test scores of the two groups. Additionally, while statistically significant data could not be produced in the areas of student perceptions, general observations supported that, overall, students in the Internet-based instruction group had a more positive feeling about their experience than the traditional in-class group.

Almost without fail, researchers report that student learning is equal or greater for distance education courses when compared to learning in traditional classroom settings. When differences are found between the two delivery methods, the differences are usually in the area of student satisfaction with instructional support. There is sometimes discomfort with a new way of learning.

While distance education seems to answer a lot of student needs, the fact that dropout rates are typically higher than those for campus-based learning cannot be ignored. "Retention varies," says Mayadas, alluding to the high retention rates of distance education providers such as Northern Virginia Community College, one of the biggest community college distance education providers in the country. Many need and enjoy the stimulus of being around a peer group to share reactions and to help each other (Thomas, 2004).

On the surface, taking courses via distance education appears to be a quick and easy way to learn. It's not. Personal characteristics and learning styles play a big part in the success of the distance learner. A lot depends on the student's ability to organize time and resources. In addition, factors such as the length of time it takes to get a distance degree and the fact that services for distance students might not be equal to those on campus have much to do with participants not completing the program. Lambert suggests that not everyone is blessed with the discipline and motivation that distance learning requires. "Despite what's said about the electronic classroom, it's a lonely way to study," he says. (Thomas, 2004).

It is important to note that past and current research on the success of distance education focuses on student success in courses, not entire programs of study. Until more programs are offered entirely through distance education and national data become available, the success of these programs will continue to be a source of debate. However, there is general agreement among national distance education experts on the following points:

- Successful distance programs seem to serve a specific need, such as enhancing technical skills of employees or serving students who would not otherwise be able to enroll in college.
- Traditional colleges and universities that develop distance programs to create opportunity for nontraditional students and supplement the education of traditional students are more likely to succeed than those who design programs solely for generating revenue.
- Distance programs that are consistent with the practices of the entire institution, whether pure for-profit or non-profit, seem to fare better than those that create financial and philosophical conflicts within the institution.
- Most failed distance education efforts did so based on cost and profitability, not quality.

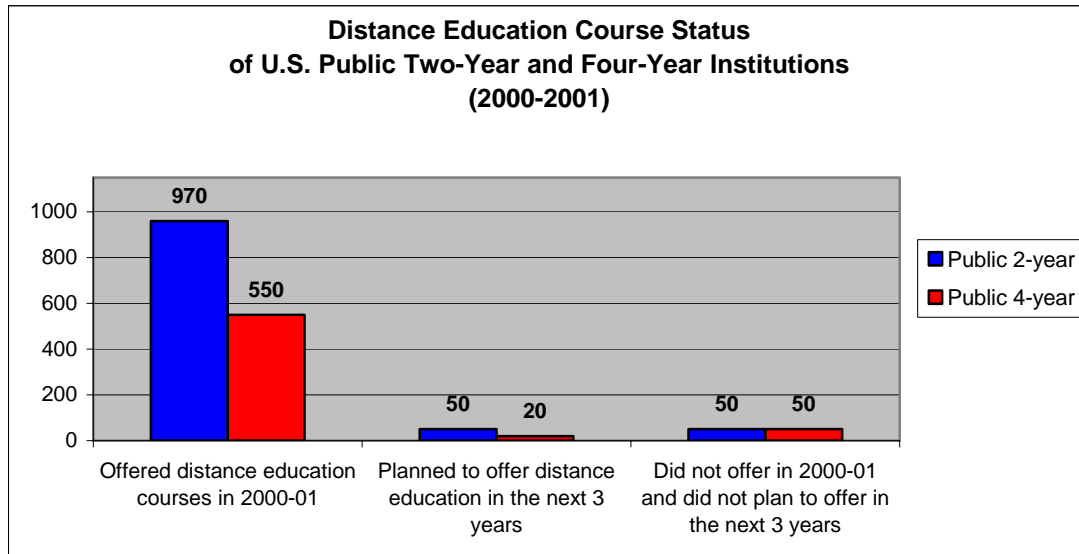
WHO PARTICIPATES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Information from the National Center for Education Statistics 2000-01 (NCES) Postsecondary Education Quick Information System (PEQIS) provides the most current national data available on distance education at two-year and four-year institutions (Sikora, 2003). NCES defines distance education as education or training courses delivered via audio, video (live or prerecorded), synchronous (simultaneous) computer technologies, and asynchronous (non-simultaneous) computer technologies.

Public Two-Year and Four-Year Institution Participation in the U.S.

The level of participation among the 1,690 public schools reported during the 2000-2001 academic year is shown in Figure 1 below. Distance education courses included those designed for all types of students--elementary and secondary, college, adult education, and continuing and professional education.

Figure 1.



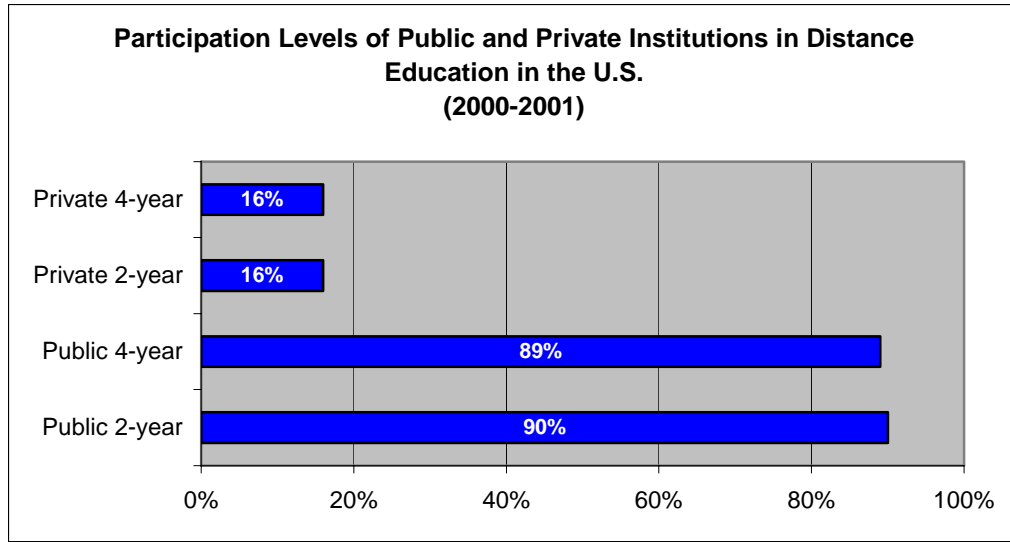
For institutions that did not plan to offer distance education, the following reasons were given:

- Lack of fit with the institution's mission
- Concerns about course quality
- Limited technological infrastructure
- Lack of perceived need

Public and Private Institution Participation in the U.S.

As shown in Figure 2 below, when considering institutional sector, public institutions are far more likely to offer distance education courses than are private institutions.

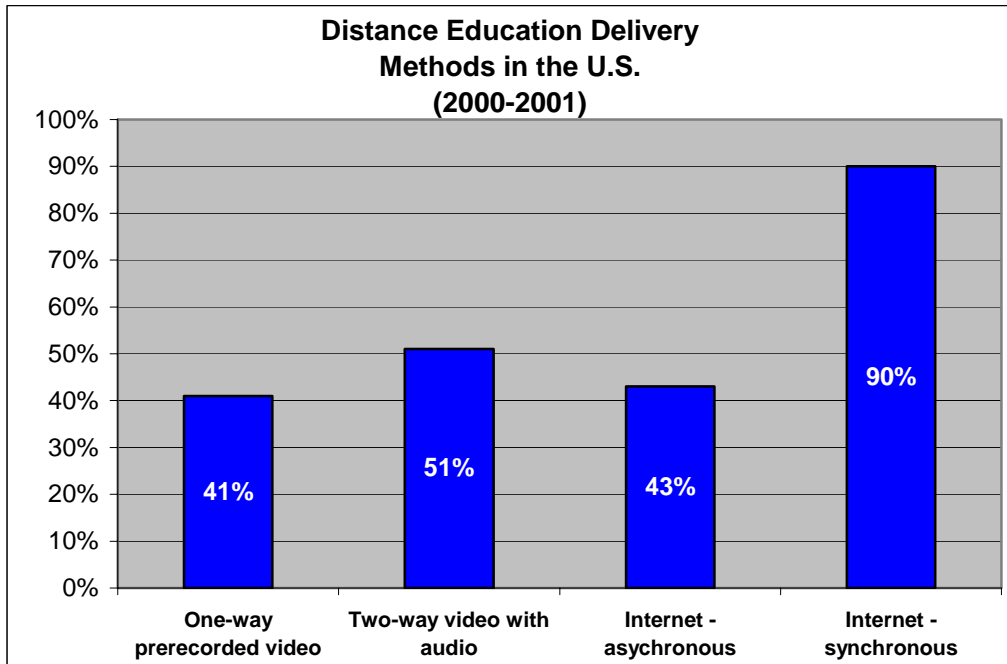
Figure 2.



Distance Education Delivery Methods in the U.S.

As indicated by NCES data for 2000-01, the Internet and two types of video technology were most often used as primary modes of instructional delivery for distance education courses. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3.



National Student Enrollment in Distance Education

During the 2000-2001 academic year, there were an estimated 3.1 million enrollments in distance education courses offered by two-year and four-year institutions. Of this number, 2.9 million (94 percent) were enrolled in college-level, credit-granting distance education at the undergraduate level.

More than 127,000 different distance education courses for any level or audience were offered by two-and four-year institutions during the same period of time. Of the 118,100 different for-credit, college-level distance education courses, 89,600 (76 percent) of the courses were at the undergraduate level.

In its report, *A Profile of Participation in Distance Education: 1999-2000*, NCES provides demographic details of undergraduate and graduate students who participated in distance education in 1999-2000. Results indicated that students with greater family and work responsibilities tend to participate in distance education at higher rates than their counterparts with fewer family and work responsibilities (Sikora, 2003).

HOW IS QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS EVALUATED?

With the emergence of technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance, it became clear that guidelines for quality assurance were needed. The *Interregional Guidelines for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* outlines a statement of commitment adopted by the regional accrediting commissions, including the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (HLC-NCA), for the evaluation of electronically offered degree and certificate programs. The approach of the regional commissions in this set of commitments is aimed at ensuring high quality in distance education. As stated, regional accrediting commissions are committed to:

- Traditions, principles, and values, which have guided the regional commissions' approach to educational innovation.
- Cooperation among the eight regional commissions directed toward a consistent approach to the evaluation of distance education informed through collaboration with others.
- Good practice among institutions.

The eight regional accrediting commissions have also adopted a set of criteria for distance education entitled *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*. The Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET), a membership-supported organization for providers and users of educational

telecommunications founded by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, initially drafted these practices. *Best Practices* is divided into five separate components, each of which addresses a particular area of institution activity relevant to electronically offered degree and certificate programs.

- **Institutional Context and Commitment**
 - The institution's role and mission must be consistent with the program being proposed.
 - The institution's budget and policy statements reflect a commitment for students enrolled in electronically offered programs.
 - The institution assures adequacy of technical and physical plant facilities, including appropriate staff and technical assistance, to support its electronically offered programs.
 - The organizational structure houses a clear, well-understood process for electronically offered programs to be conceived, authorized, and implemented.
 - Articulation and transfer policies judge courses on learning outcomes, not modes of delivery.

- **Curriculum and Instruction**
 - Academically qualified persons participate fully in the decisions concerning program curricula and program oversight.
 - A coherent plan is presented for students to access all courses necessary to complete the program.
 - The importance of appropriate interaction between instructor and students and among students is reflected in the design of the program and in the technical facilities and services provided.

- **Faculty Support**
 - The institution provides ongoing appropriate technical, design, and production support for participating faculty members.
 - The institution provides faculty and staff orientation and ongoing training to help them become proficient in the uses of the program's technologies.

- **Student Support**
 - The institution has a commitment--administrative, financial, and technical--to continue the program for a sufficient length of time so that all admitted students can complete the program in a publicized timeframe.
 - Prior to admitting a student, the institution must inform the student of the required technologies used; assist the student in understanding the learning objectives; inform the student of all support services including interaction with faculty and other students; and assist the student in understanding independent learning expectations in a technology-based environment.
 - The institution provides appropriate services for students, understanding that the students will not be physically present on campus.

- ❑ Strategies and practices are implemented by the institution to involve distant students as part of the academic community.
- **Evaluation and Assessment**
 - ❑ Documented assessment of student achievement is conducted in each course and at the completion of the program, by comparing student performance to the intended learning outcomes.
 - ❑ When examinations are employed, they take place in circumstances that include firm student identification.
 - ❑ The institution must have in place effective policies and procedures to assure the integrity of student work.
 - ❑ Overall program effectiveness is determined by the extent to which student learning matches intended outcomes; retention rates and student satisfaction; faculty satisfaction; access to students not previously served; and cost effectiveness.
 - ❑ Institutions must evaluate electronically offered programs in the context of the regular evaluation of all academic programs.

Drawing upon the work of WCET, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and regional accrediting bodies, the Southern Regional Education Board developed *The Principles of Good Practice* to assist colleges and universities in providing high-quality distance education. ADHE uses criteria drawn from both *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* and *The Principles of Good Practice* when evaluating distance-delivered course and degree program proposals.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION NATIONALLY?

A recently published article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled, Distance Education: Keeping Up With Exploding Demand (Carnevale, January 2004), provided several insights through interviews with leaders in the field. Carnevale forecasted that the recent explosion in distance education enrollments is likely to continue over the next 10 years, forcing many institutions to seek outside help to manage rising distance education student populations and demands for the latest technology. "The biggest issue is that distance learning, from an industry perspective, is going to continue to grow by leaps and bounds," said John G. Flores, Executive Director of the United States Distance Learning Association, a nonprofit group that promotes distance education. "You're going to see more and more students not only accessing more distance learning, but also expecting it."

"To accommodate that growth, many colleges may start buying online courses from one another and from outside vendors," said Sally Johnstone, Director of the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. She expects the growth of outsourcing to begin gradually and said

that small colleges in particular will need to seek outside help as they attempt to expand their distance education programs without spending too much money on course development. "The cost of doing business in higher education will continue to rise," according to Ms. Johnstone, "but you don't want to sacrifice quality."

Experts say institutions may eventually buy courses the way they now purchase textbooks. Such a change is foreseeable because technological improvements have helped create courses that consist chiefly of interactive teaching activities overseen by computerized tutors. A live professor at the college buying the course would facilitate the course and field students' questions. "The faculty will continue to be the one to teach the courses," said A. Frank Mayadas, Director of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's grant program for online education. "They'll have plenty of opportunity to customize these things."

Some vendors are already selling online courses. The Learning House, in Kentucky, develops online-course content for colleges and universities. Carnegie Mellon University is developing a project called the Open Learning Initiative that will sell online courses covering subjects that include chemistry and economics.

Outside vendors may also be better equipped than many colleges to make sure the most up-to-date technology is included in online courses. Janet K. Poley, President of the American Distance Education Consortium, says colleges may struggle to keep up with student demands for the latest and greatest technology. As students' Internet services improve, they will expect more video and audio clips, along with other bells and whistles. "Without question, the technology is just getting stunningly better," Ms. Poley said. "Educationally, we're going to be able to do lots of stuff that we haven't been able to do with largely text-based courses."

Colleges that don't choose to buy packaged courses may find that they cannot keep up with other institutions' offerings and may become the early victims of a distance-education shake out that some observers say is sure to come. Andrew S. Rosen, President and Chief Operating Officer of Kaplan, predicted that *U.S. News & World Report* will eventually rank online programs in the same way traditional programs are ranked now.

Johnson, et al. (2000) found that primary among the challenges for the future is how to meet the expectations and needs of both the instructor and the student, and how to design online courses that provide a satisfying and effective learning environment. From the perspective of program developers and instructors, understanding these issues is critical for the development and implementation of quality online instruction.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT ARKANSAS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS?

Student enrollments in distance education became a part of the state-tracking database in 1999. As defined, distance education includes courses taught using video and audio tapes (via mail), broadcast and cable television, one way and two way compressed video, and Internet-based instruction. Data reports include all public two-year and four-year institutions with the exception of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

Of the 10 four-year institutions and the 22 two-year institutions reporting in 2004, all had student enrollments in distance education courses. As seen in Table 1 and Table 2 below, distance education headcount enrollments have grown at both the two- and four-year colleges since 1999. Arkansas two-year institutions have seen more of an increase in distance education enrollment as a percentage of total enrollments than have the four-year institutions. In 1999, 3.6 percent of the total enrollments at two-year colleges were enrolled in distance education courses, compared to 18.2 percent in 2004.

In 2004, there were 811 more students enrolled in distance education courses at two-year public institutions than at four-year institutions. Combined enrollment figures for 2004 show that of the 160,519 enrollments in all reporting institutions, 24,221 (15 percent) were enrolled in distance education courses.

Table 1.

Arkansas Public Two-Year Institutions Distance Education Enrollment: Unduplicated Headcount 1999-2004

Year	Total Two-Year Enrollment	Distance Education Enrollment	Distance Education % of Total
1999	54,295	1,970	3.6%
2000	55,658	2,887	5.2%
2001	57,629	4,058	7.0%
2002	61,103	6,639	11.0%
2003	66,036	9,338	14.1%
2004	68,836	12,516	18.2%

Table 2.

**Arkansas Public Four-Year Institutions
Distance Education Enrollment: Unduplicated Headcount
1999-2004**

Year	Total Four-Year Enrollment	Distance Education Enrollment	Distance Education % of Total
1999	85,347	2,143	2.5%
2000	86,420	2,957	3.4%
2001	86,153	4,175	4.8%
2002	88,218	6,877	7.8%
2003	89,083	8,797	9.9%
2004	91,683	11,705	12.8%

The Annual Report on Fall Enrollments presented to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) in February 2004, showed a significant increase in distance education full-time equivalent (FTE) students generated statewide via various forms of distance learning. (See Table 3.) As noted, undergraduate FTEs increased at a faster rate than graduate FTEs. In fall 2004, distance education FTEs represented 5.7 percent of the statewide FTE total of 82,675.

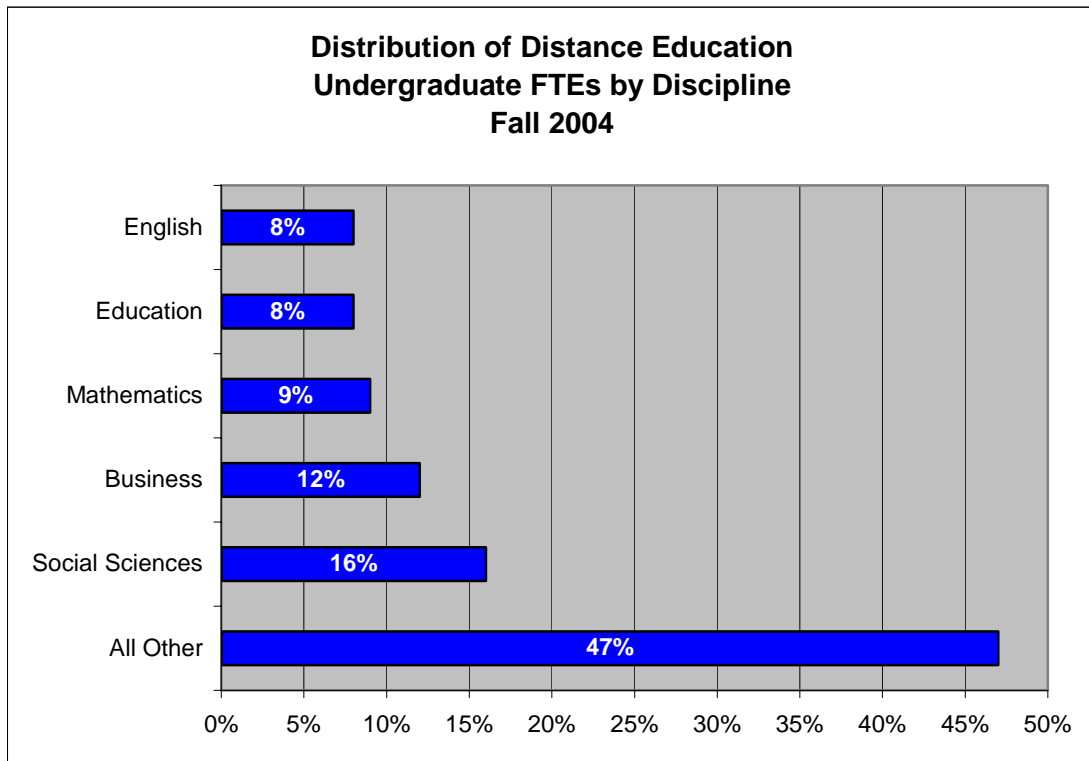
Table 3.

**Change in Arkansas Distance Education
FTE Enrollment
2003-2004**

	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	% FTE Increase
Undergraduate FTE	2,568	4,175	63%
Graduate FTE	400	510	28%
Total	2,968	4,685	58%

In fall 2004, undergraduate FTEs accounted for 89 percent of total distance education FTEs produced. Figure 4 shows the distribution of distance education FTEs by the disciplines most heavily represented.

Figure 4.



As seen in Table 4, 28 of the 32 public institutions increased their distance education course offerings from fall 2003 to fall 2004. During this one-year period, 448 distance education courses were added, increasing the total number of distance courses from 1,083 to 1,531.

Table 4.

**Arkansas Distance Education Courses*
Fall 2003 and Fall 2004**

Campus	2003 Courses	2004 Courses	Course Offering Increase/Decrease
ASUJ	139	158	19
ATU	66	87	21
HSU	5	6	1
SAUM	3	19	16
UAF	110	140	30
UAFS	56	59	3
UALR	143	245	102
UAM	40	56	16
UAPB	6	6	0
UCA	27	36	9
Four-Year Total	595	812	217
ANC	33	36	3
ASUB	34	44	10
ASUMH	12	37	25
ASUN	26	33	7
BRTC	13	24	11
CCCUA	57	63	6
EACC	14	12	(2)
MSCC	8	11	3
NAC	12	31	19
NPCC	11	10	(1)
NWACC	30	47	17
OTC	20	30	10
OZC	39	55	16
PCCUA	28	37	9
PTC	51	73	22
RMCC	7	7	0
SACC	6	18	12
SAUT	33	48	15
SEAC	27	55	28
UACCB	0	12	12
UACCH	27	34	7
UACCM	0	2	2
Two-Year Total	488	719	231
Grand Total	1,083	1,531	448

*Multiple sections of a single course are counted once.

Arkansas Distance Education Survey

In May 2004, ADHE staff surveyed Arkansas chief academic officers (CAOs) regarding distance education efforts on their campuses. The survey was designed as a means to gather information not reported through the ADHE SIS and a forum for chief academic officers to present their thoughts on critical distance education issues.

1. How have courses/programs offered through distance technology supported the mission, role, and scope of the institution?

Arkansas CAOs generally summarized the mission of their institutions as providing increased opportunities to pursue higher education to residents of Arkansas and stated that distance education supports this mission by:

- Providing increased access and flexibility for study to students who work and/or have family obligations that prevent full-time or traditional enrollment.
- Providing increased access to those who are geographically isolated from higher education.
- Providing an opportunity to take classes that are transferable in order to fulfill a degree requirement.
- Providing training that enhances employment options including technical skills, adult education, workplace training, and continuing education.
- Providing training that enhances the personal growth and development of the student.
- Providing supplemental instruction to students enrolled in traditional on-site delivered classes.
- Providing a means for newly activated military personnel to complete study regardless of duty location.
- Providing methods of study that prevent students from dropping out.

2. Generally, what types of students enroll in distance instruction (age, gender, full-time, part-time, degree-seeking, etc.)? Why do these students choose courses/programs offered through distance technology?

The profile of distance education students varies from campus to campus in Arkansas, but generally mirrors the profile of the institution's traditionally enrolled students. Those who enroll in distance education courses include full-time, part-time and concurrently enrolled high school students; students who work full- or part-time; degree and non-degree seeking; undergraduate and graduate level; minority students; students ranging from high school age to seniors over the age of 70; and students with physical disabilities.

By far, the most commonly cited reason for students enrolling in distance education was flexibility of scheduling, but the various needs for flexibility offer additional insight into the importance of distance delivery options. CAO responses are summarized below.

- Students who need to balance work and family responsibilities while pursuing higher education seek flexibility in accessing instruction.
- Traditionally enrolled 18- to 25-year-old, full-time students who must work desire flexibility to accommodate jobs.
- Non-traditional students enrolled as full-time, degree-seeking students who also work full-time use online courses when they cannot fit required courses into limited nights and weekends.
- Non-traditional students who have returned to college for a graduate degree must schedule around existing job responsibilities or the need for a class that is not offered locally.
- Students who choose interactive video classes usually do so to reduce travel time and expense. Students who choose online courses usually do so for flexibility in scheduling.

3. When considering all of the institution's students enrolled in courses, what is the number and percentage of those enrolled in online courses only?

All institutions reported that most Arkansas students enrolled in online courses are also enrolled in on-campus courses. More than one-half of the institutions indicated that fewer than 5 percent of their students enroll exclusively in online courses. Reasons presented for the lack of students who take online courses exclusively included:

- Institutions that are just beginning to engage in distance education do not offer a sufficient number of courses for students to choose online only.
- A few courses are offered only online, so students have no choice but to participate in distance education.

4. What is the institution's online course completion rate? Online program retention rate?

Of the institutions that reported an online course retention rate, the results ranged from 51 percent to 83 percent. One institution indicated that online completion rates vary significantly by subject. Other institutions cited insufficient data or results similar to face-to-face instruction.

No institutions provided online program retention rates due to no approved online programs; institutional data that does not differentiate distance delivery; insufficient data; or inability to calculate.

5. How is faculty and student satisfaction determined for courses/programs offered through distance technology?

Student satisfaction is generally determined by a survey that is administered consistent with the delivery method of the course instruction—online courses are evaluated using an online survey and compressed video courses are evaluated at the end of the course using common on-campus methods. Distance education surveys request the same type of information requested of traditional, on-campus students in addition to specific questions related to unique aspects of distance delivery (instructor response time, software issues, etc.). Institutions also measure student satisfaction through the use of informal surveys, focus groups, and a review of online hotline desk comments.

Distance education faculty satisfaction is measured through the use of both formal and informal surveys in the same manner as faculty engaged in traditional delivery methods. Additionally, institutions report the use of a distance learning task force or an informal committee of distance education instructors to monitor and evaluate distance education issues. Professional development sessions are consistently conducted with faculty and staff to improve satisfaction levels.

6. What is the most significant concern(s)/issue(s) with this delivery method that your institution must address in the next 3-5 years? Concerns could include technology needs, curriculum design, course/program quality, staff needs, the distance delivery of student support services, etc.

Cost is the major concern among institutions, followed closely by faculty development and student support. Institutions are also concerned that inadequate funding will not allow them to expand and upgrade online offerings in order to compete with the online universities such as the University of Phoenix. Furthermore, they voiced concern about their ability to respond to dramatic increases in demand for online courses without negatively impacting their ability to deliver traditional instruction. Institutional comments were almost exclusively in the area of online distance delivery as opposed to video or other means of distance education. Concerns are summarized below by category.

- **Cost**

Competitive and quality online delivery demands financial support to acquire, upgrade and/or replace hardware and software every year. It also requires funding for increases in licensing fees and the addition of new technologies such as streaming video. Financial support is needed for faculty stipends to develop online courses, faculty training, and technical support staffing proportionate with demand and delivery of online instruction.

- **Course Development**
Institutions must engage in discussions regarding the percentage of total instruction that will be offered online in response to increased demand. Two-year colleges face decisions related to the expansion of the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science online offerings and developing online versions of the Associate of Applied Science. Curriculum must be redesigned to incorporate the myriad of technologies available, improve interactivity of online courses, and build in quality assurances.
- **Faculty Development**
Online faculty and support staff must become a priority. Professional development is needed on how to effectively use distance education, online pedagogy, and WebCT techniques, and how to improve course quality. The availability of trained, online faculty sufficient to meet demand is also a concern as well as policy questions regarding how distance education courses are calculated when determining teaching load.
- **Student Services**
Providing online students with the same level of support provided for traditional students is a major concern at every institution offering online instruction. Issues include helping students choose wisely between online and traditional courses; keeping students engaged and successful once they are enrolled in online courses; providing access to library and other instructional and academic support services; counseling, advising, and tutoring; providing access to financial aid services; minimizing plagiarism; and ensuring the integrity of the student's work.

It should be noted that the mission and programs of UAMS are unique in that it is committed to educating health care professionals statewide. In achieving this mission, UAMS has used various forms of distance education delivery systems for decades. The institution has faculty based in various Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) across the state with the capability of originating instruction at any location for delivery to any or all of the other locations. UAMS survey responses indicated some unique issues and concerns.

UAMS students share many of the same reasons for enrolling in distance education as other students with one additional consideration. Distance education allows students to continue the practice of health care within their local community while pursuing additional health care related education, an important point given staff shortages in rural medical facilities. Many of the UAMS distance education students are part-time because they are already practicing health professionals.

Almost all UAMS programs offer some courses online and it is estimated that approximately 70 percent of all students take some online courses. However, due to laboratory and clinical practicum course work that must be taken on-site, there are no

UAMS students who take all of their courses online, and only nuclear medicine technology, with an enrollment of 45 students, offers all lectures online.

Student satisfaction is evaluated each semester and, in many programs, includes a survey of graduates approximately one year after graduation. Graduates are surveyed to determine their satisfaction in light of their professional experiences and their employers are also surveyed to determine their level of satisfaction with the graduates' performance. All faculty members are evaluated by their respective department chairs and peers on an annual basis.

The labor intensity of converting traditional content to online format is of concern to UAMS. Additionally, due to the clinical components of programs, additional college faculty are required to travel to these sites to ensure the highest possible quality of clinical experiences for students. Also, while online instruction is much more cost effective overall for UAMS, there are still certain kinds of educational activities where interactive video remains the best, but more costly, medium. UAMS also expressed concern over the ability to provide certain student support services. For example, a student database system that allows online application or registration is not available; therefore, students are required to register on-campus in Little Rock.

WHAT PROGRAMS ARE CURRENTLY BEING DELIVERED THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION BY ARKANSAS INSTITUTIONS?

The AHECB has approved 14 programs for online, Internet-only delivery. Approved programs, approval date, and sponsoring institutions are listed in Table 5. All programs were taught using traditional delivery methods prior to being offered online.

**Table 5.
Distance Education Programs Approved by AHECB**

Date	Institution	Program
1999	UALR	Master of Arts/Graduate Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling*
2000	CCC-UA	Associate of General Studies*
	UAF	Master of Science in Health Sciences, Community Health Concentration
2001	UAFS	Associate of Arts
2003	ASU-B	Associate of Arts
	CCC-UA	Associate of Arts
	SAUT	Associate of Arts*
	PTC	Associate of Arts
2004	NWACC	Associate of Arts
	SAUM	Master of Education in Elementary or Secondary Education
	UALR	Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice
	OTC	Associate of Arts Associate of Applied Science in Criminal Justice

* Offered through the SREB *Electronic Campus*.

WHAT ARE THE ADHE CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES FOR APPROVING DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

Instruction delivered through distance technology is an approach to learning in which the majority of instruction occurs with a separation of place or time between the instructor and the students, and with interaction occurring through electronic media. Standards for academic quality, student admissions, retention and assessment must be the same in all programs regardless of the mode of delivery.

Currently, when proposing new programs delivered through distance technology, an institution must demonstrate its commitment to distance technology instruction and the adequacy of technical support for faculty and students. Degree programs offered through distance technology must be developed in accordance with the *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* endorsed by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (HLC-NCA) and SREB's *The Principles of Good Practice*. In addition, institutions must also provide ADHE staff with a description of student services available for online students; the delivery method for the program; and required resources (faculty, equipment, facilities, budget) for the program. All requests to offer existing programs through distance technology must be approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board prior to initiation.

ADHE staff is currently reviewing program proposal criteria and guidelines with a group of chief academic officers. Changes being discussed for new distance education program proposals include:

- ❑ ADHE staff will conduct an on-campus visit before making a recommendation on program approval to AHECB, if the institution is offering its first certificate or degree program via distance technology. Subsequent proposals for existing programs to be taught via distance technology will be reviewed by staff and listed in the Letters of Notification of the AHECB agenda.
- ❑ Institutions seeking approval for programs delivered via distance technology will be asked to provide additional information related to on-campus programs supporting the proposed distance education program; processes and procedures for student enrollment and student services; description of specific learning outcomes and course examination procedures; and provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction.
- ❑ ADHE staff will review programs offered through distance technology on a three-year cycle and present status reports to the AHECB.

In addition to the fulfilling AHECB requirements, institutions are currently required to submit a request for approval to the HLC-NCA for the addition of online programs. Information that must be provided to the Commission includes the reason(s) for adding online programs; how the addition of online programs will affect the institution; challenges related to the addition of online offerings; and how the institution will respond to those challenges. The request to add online programs generally results in a focus visit by an HLC-NCA team prior to HLC-NCA approval.

SUMMARY

The academic world of teaching and learning is no longer restricted to college campuses; rather, it is being brought into living rooms and offices, ship cabins, and military barracks throughout the world. The challenge for Arkansas higher education institutions, and the Coordinating Board, in the face of these changes is to create and maintain a system that allows students the opportunity to take advantage of distance education, while at the same time maintaining the level of quality and student support available through on-campus attendance.

Arkansas institutions and ADHE staff have developed processes and policies to insure that Arkansas students have access to programs delivered via distance technology that are at least equal to the instruction received on college and university campuses. ADHE staff will continue to work with the state's colleges and universities to develop quality distance education programs that will not only provide a new means of access for students, but also complement the existing higher education system in Arkansas. By considering the successes of other states and following the guidelines established by respected educational organizations, Arkansas public institutions will continue their success with distance education.

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