

2007 Distance Education Survey

A Report on Course Structure and Educational Services in
Distance Education and Training Council Member Institutions



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The Distance Education and Training Council, a voluntary association of accredited distance education institutions, was founded in 1926 to promote sound educational standards and ethical business practices within the distance learning field. The DETC Accrediting Commission is listed by the United States Department of Education as a “nationally recognized accrediting agency.” The Accrediting Commission is also a recognized member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

Foreword

In April 2007 the Distance Education and Training Council surveyed 67 of its accredited institutions to determine current aspects of the distance study educational practice. (Military and international institutions were omitted.) The following is a collection and summary of the data received.

This *2007 Distance Education Survey* marks the 10th survey DETC has conducted since 1978 on course structure and educational practices in DETC member institutions.

As in the earlier surveys, this survey contained questions in the following areas:

- General
- Course Development
- Educational Services
- Conclusion (Future Outlook)

The DETC is eager to provide up-to-date and practical information on distance study courses and practices in the field. Hopefully, these surveys will make it easier for distance study educators to make accurate benchmark comparisons and be more practical for institutional planning.

For further information about the survey and the data in this report—or about the distance study field—please contact Rachel Scheer at Rachel@detc.org.

Michael P. Lambert
Executive Director

June 2007

Survey Method

A *2007 Distance Education Survey* form was sent to 67 DETC-accredited institutions. For the purpose of this survey, the DETC membership was divided into three categories:

1. High School
2. Postsecondary
3. Degree Granting

Data from the three DETC military institutions and the seven international institutions are not included in this survey. Otherwise, there was a 100% response rate.

For some survey questions, DETC institutions were asked to give data according to the type of courses or programs offered (i.e., high school, postsecondary, or degrees). Since some institutions offer all three types, their responses were counted more than once. The institutions are divided as follows: 10 institutions offer high school programs, 44 institutions offer postsecondary programs, and 40 institutions offer degree programs.

For ease of reporting, we have rounded off the averages. Percentages for each question were calculated by adding the totals and dividing the result by the number of responses. We've taken the survey form and filled in the percentages for each question according to the appropriate category (see pages 14-16). In addition, summaries for each of the three categories (high school, postsecondary, and degree-granting) are included. A general summary of institution communication methods covers all three categories.

Summary for High Schools

The following is a summary of the results for the high schools completing the survey. For the percentages of each category, please see pages 14-18:

- The number of new students enrolled in 2006 was 156,093;
- The average number of courses offered is 53;
- The average age of students is 23, 38% of the students are male, and 62% are female;
- 11% are employed at the time of enrollment;
- >1% have their tuition paid by their employers;
- The typical new course is developed by using published textbooks with study guides and outside authors;
- The typical course uses predominantly objective style questions on its examinations;
- The “most popular course” of each institution, on average, contains an average of 21 lessons and each lesson takes 8 hours to complete. The course has an average of 18 examinations with 52 questions per exam. The average tuition is \$535;
- The average non-start rate is 15%, the average lesson completion rate is 55%, and the average graduation rate is 34%. Forty percent of schools include some type of hardware with their lessons, 70% include audio/video tapes or other electronic media, and 90% include some type of online communication (Internet, e-mail, etc.);
- The predominant method used to deliver the course is commercial textbooks with study guides; and
- 21% of the instructors are full-time and 5% have doctoral degrees.

Summary for Postsecondary Institutions

The following is a summary of the results for the non-degree postsecondary institutions completing the survey. For the percentages of each category, please see pages 14-18:

- The number of new students enrolled in 2006 was 579,067;
- The average number of courses offered is 40;
- The average age of students is 37, 55% of the students are male, and 45% are female;
- 73% are employed at the time of enrollment;
- 93% of students have access to the Internet;
- 34% have their tuition paid by their employers;
- 94% of students have a high school diploma or GED certificate, 15% have an associate degree, 33% have a bachelor degree, and 5% have a master's degree.
- The typical new course is created by both in-house and outside authors;
- The typical course uses predominantly objective style questions on its examinations;
- The “most popular course” of each institution, on average, contains 20 lessons and each lesson takes 3 hours to complete. The course has an average of 18 examinations with 36 questions per exam. The average tuition is \$1,450;
- The average non-start rate is 15%, the average lesson completion rate is 74%, and the average graduation rate is 65%. Twenty-seven percent of schools include some type of hardware with their lessons, 27% include audio/video tapes or other electronic media, 32% include job-related tools/devices, and 66% include some type of online communication (Internet, e-mail, etc.);
- The predominant method used to deliver the course is self-contained text content with study guides; and
- 34% of the instructors are full-time and 12% have doctoral degrees.

Summary for Degree-Granting Institutions

The following is a summary of the results for the degree-granting institutions completing the survey. For the percentages of each category, please see pages 14-18:

- The number of new students enrolled in 2006 Associate degree programs was 83,284, 23,431 were enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs, 9,027 in Master's degree programs, and 1,750 in Doctoral degree programs;
- The average number of courses offered is 59;
- The average age of students is 37, 55% of the students are male and 45% are female;
- 90% are employed at the time of enrollment;
- 99% of students have access to the Internet;
- 36% have their tuition paid by their employers;
- The typical new course is created either by both in-house and outside authors or published textbooks with study guides and outside authors;
- The typical course uses predominantly objective style questions on its examinations or activities (case studies, written papers, etc.);
- The "most popular program" has an average of 31 examinations with 39 questions per exam. Tuition ranges from \$150 to \$900 per credit hour.
- The average non-start rate is 15%, the average lesson completion rate is 85%, and the average graduation rate is 66%. Thirteen percent of schools include some type of hardware with their lessons, 30% include audio/video tapes or other electronic media, and 78% include some type of online communication (Internet, e-mail, etc.).
- The predominant method used to deliver the course is Web-based; and
- 17% of the instructors are full-time, and 53% have doctoral degrees.

Summary for Communication Methods

The following is a summary of the results for the communication methods of institutions completing the survey. These results pertain to the high school, postsecondary, and degree-granting categories of schools surveyed (for most statistics, see Educational Services on pages 16-18):

- 82% of the institutions provide in-house faculty training;
- 75% of the institutions use the telephone to contact their students for motivational purposes, while 67% use the telephone to contact their students for educational purposes;
- The most used items for providing educational services to students are e-mail and toll-free numbers;
- 83% of instructors send personalized letters, while 78% of instructors write comments on students' assignments;
- 79% of institutions use e-mail to motivate their students;
- 46% of the schools provide newsletters to their students and graduates and 30% maintain an alumni association; and
- 96% of the institutions use course completion statistics and student surveys to measure student outcomes.

Summary of Comments

Pages 8-13 feature some of the unedited comments from the survey respondents on their views of the current and future prospects for distance education. Also, DETC educators candidly shared what new/expanded services they plan to develop.

It is fair to conclude, after reading the following comments, that the following are widely-held beliefs within the DETC membership:

- the outlook for the distance education market is strong, and will continue to grow for many years;
- higher education, including traditional on-site schools, will be turning to distance education as a “mainstream delivery medium;”
- public acceptance of distance education is growing;
- competition in distance education at all levels is increasing;
- new technology will play a great role in distance education;
- the Internet and online learning will continue to be heavily utilized;
- excellence in product and service are vital;
- distance educators are reaching out to more and various markets, including international students;
- regulatory interest in distance education has increased, and will continue to do so as hundreds of new “providers” create more activity and “problems” for quality oversight officials; and
- DETC institutions are optimistic about market forces broadening school transfer credit policies.

In conclusion, this is the best of times for distance educators.

Comments

High Schools

- **What plans do you have in the immediate future in terms of new courses, expanded services, marketing initiatives, etc.?**

We are expanding our current computer capabilities so students can access their records through our Web site.

We are currently in the middle of a new strategic planning process that has brought about an institutional commitment to two projects: the creation of a rejuvenated elementary program designed to appeal to the home-school market and a new enrollment management process that is built on a paperless follow-up process.

New elective courses are likely, along with more services related to a diploma track for students and broadening marketing initiatives to include students of varying backgrounds.

- **What do you think is the outlook for distance education in the next three years?**

There is a greater acceptance of distance education in the public education sector. As an example: Acceptance of our courses toward a student's public high school graduation requirements has increased tremendously and I see this trend growing as time goes by and more schools recognize distance education is an important part of their public school's retention programs. In addition, it is rare anymore that we have problems with a student's diploma being accepted by postsecondary schools.

Distance study continues to be the strongest growing branch of education at all levels. More and more institutions have jumped into offering distance education programs and there is now a push to do more statistical analysis of the effectiveness of distance education. I think the trouble with some regionally accredited institutions will make the regional accrediting agencies more aware of their limitations when it comes to evaluating distance education and nontraditional programs.

Postsecondary Institutions

- **What plans do you have in the immediate future in terms of new courses, expanded services, marketing initiatives, etc.?**

We plan to have more courses reviewed in the near future. We are also implementing motivational letters periodically throughout the course enrollment period. We have just begun graduate and employer surveys.

We constantly update our courses. We are improving office software to do a better and faster service to our students. We are currently updating our labs and online services as well.

We will develop two to three vocational courses over the next year. We plan on expanding offerings to online course delivery. Additional marketing efforts will focus on the military community.

- **What do you think is the outlook for distance education in the next three years?**

We believe that the demand for e-learning will continue to grow, and the market will become more competitive. We anticipate using new technology for more interactive studying.

Distance education is continuing to grow and grow. Any school that doesn't recognize that is missing an opportunity. There will always be a need for instructor-led, but the same can be said for distance study.

As more of the traditional colleges implement distance education programs, distance education should become more widely accepted by the public. With public acceptance and more individuals taking advantage of distance education, the public will also become more demanding for transfer of credit, thereby forcing traditional institutions to change transfer requirements. As it becomes more

difficult for state regulatory agencies to regulate distance education institutions more emphasis will be place on accreditation.

Distance education will continue to grow and be recognized as an effecting form of delivering education to the masses. With the increase in cost associated with site-based education, distance study should be able to provide educational value to prospective students. Credit acceptance from institution to institution will always be a concern. I am sure there will be a shift in broader regulations for credit transfer as the government steps in to protect the individual from losing their monetary investments on credits obtained.

I think the outlook for expansion of markets is excellent. I see an increasing amount of competition from traditional not-for-profit universities in the online area which presents a great challenge. I see credit and public acceptance increasing.

Due to the immense, ever increasing popularity and interactivity of Internet communication at large, public acceptance of distance education will no doubt increase. As advancing technology aids the further development of educational tools, schools will have more flexibility, and will be able to respond to this increasing demand.

Market forces are likely to drive change in transfer credit acceptance. As more and more students enjoy the flexibility and benefits of distance education, they will expect traditional colleges to accept credits from nationally accredited schools. As highlighted by recent events with the Higher Education Act Reauthorization, federal regulators are listening to student concerns about the negative effect discriminatory credit acceptance has on students. State regulatory bodies will continue the trend of revising statutes and regulations to encompass the evolving distance education sector. Increased use of the Internet for distance education enrollments and course delivery will require states that have tried to regulate education institutions engaged in interstate commerce to reevaluate their positions.

Downside:

The regulatory climate is more accepting, as is the public, but credit transfer is still a major concern for distance education.

Regulatory issues are a cause for concern, particularly unrealistic outcomes-assessment requirement for courses with advanced technical content such as ours.

Degree-Granting Institutions

• What plans do you have in the immediate future in terms of new courses, expanded services, marketing initiatives, etc.?

We have begun a major effort to buttress our educational services with a number of new academic, administrative, and student life services including tutoring centers and an academic program portfolio evaluation system.

We will apply to be an eligible non-participating Title IV school this year.

We plan to launch a Doctorate in Education. We are also working toward a Web portal that gives students access to information including completed courses, courses remaining in their program and unofficial transcripts.

We are working on the development of new courses addressing military needs, a new Web site and promotional materials (online and through direct mail), as well as a new team of public relations officers who will give presentations.

Courses will be changed to include more interaction between professors and students and in order to meet financial aid requirement regarding distance learning.

We are currently in the process of evolving our courses into Web-based online courses using the open source Moodle software.

We are finalizing implementation of a retention plan to encourage students at regular intervals during their course enrollment period.

• What do you think is the outlook for distance education in the next three years?

We are witnessing increased acceptance by students and employers of distance earned degrees. I believe this trend will continue. We are also witnessing a largely untapped international demand for American degrees and this will be satisfied through distance education. Competitions for students will increase as new institutions enter the market and traditional institutions continue to add distance programs to their curriculum. I believe this will result in a trend to lower tuition rates as the market adjusts.

With employers continuing to offer tuition assistance benefits, the outlook is very positive for distance learning in the next three years. Perceptions of distance learning seem to be shifting positively as businesses recognize the value they offer in terms of professional development. Consumers also seem to be more savvy about accreditation and researching it.

As commercial textbook publishers continue to compete with student enrichment materials and online components there will be more technological advances allowing electronic learning to expand. Additional regulatory issues may come into play as schools expand their outreach programs across state boundaries and accreditation will become increasingly important in that regard. Policing diploma mills may promote some of these regulatory changes.

Distance study is being accepted more and more, and rapidly becoming a major part of the education process, even for traditional schools. This trend is expected to continue. Because traditional schools are utilizing distance education more and more, I feel that credit acceptance of online learning will increase. More regulations concerning distance learning will be needed, and the requirement of meeting outcomes will continue to be stressed.

The acceptance of distance education degrees continues to improve, albeit slowly, within the education community, but has quickly gained acceptance by the public who enjoy the flexibility and easy access to education. We need to continue to make strides within the traditional educational environment to avoid segregation and unnecessary stigmas.

Downside:

The regulatory climate will be increasingly wary of new institutions entering Title IV, especially the for-profit institutions. Student loan improprieties will be looked at closely by the Department of Education and state Attorney Generals. Credit acceptance will continue to be a challenge for nationally accredited institutions, although lessening a slight degree. The HEA reauthorization may come with mandates associated with transfer of credit, transparency, and other government oversight.

We see the continuing conflict between National and Regional accreditation and the difficulty in transferring credits as the primary obstacle to growth in this market.

It may take more than three years to resolve the issues of credit acceptance and recognition of national vs. regional accreditation. Most of the bias has its foundation in academe without benefit of comparing standards and accountability.

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General	High School	Post- secondary	Degree
1. How many <i>new</i> students did you enroll in 2006?			TOTAL = 852, 652
2. How many <i>active</i> students did you have at the end of 2006?			TOTAL = 234,351
3. How many distance education courses do you offer?			
4. What is the <i>average</i> age of your students?	53	40	59
5. What percent of your students are male?	23	37	37
6. What is the estimated percent of students who are employed at the time of enrollment?	38%	55%	55%
	11%	73%	90%
7. What percent of your students have access to the Internet?			
	--	93%	99%
8. What percent of your students have their tuition paid by their employers?	>1%	34%	36%
9. What percent of your students have either a high school diploma or GED certificate?		94%	100%
What percent hold an Associate degree?			
Bachelor degree?		15%	25%
Masters degree?		33%	53%
Doctors degree?		5%	40%
10. How many individuals are employed by your institution?		>1%	2%
Student Services	10		
Marketing	4		
Clerical	8		
Supervisory	6		
Executive	4		
Sales Representatives	13		
Instructors	29		
Other	25		

Course Development

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	High School	Post- secondary	Degree
11. How is your <i>typical</i> new course developed?			
a. Created entirely by in-house staff:			
b. Created entirely by outside authors:			
c. Created by both in-house and outside authors:	11%	17%	10%
d. Published textbooks with study guides produced in-house:	0%	3%	0%
e. Published textbooks with study guides and outside authors:	15%	35%	26%
f. Online platform:	21%	9%	18%
g. Other:	32%	20%	26%
12. In your <i>typical</i> course, what is the predominant examination style?	16%	13%	16%
a. Objective (multiple choice, true and false):	5%	0%	1%
b. Subjective (essay):			
c. Activities (case studies, written papers, art- work, interviews, etc.)	39%	45%	28%
d. Other:	22%	20%	23%
13. For your most <i>popular</i> course/program (i.e., highest enrollment), please provide the following:	17%	23%	25%
a. Number of lessons/courses:	22%	13%	24%
b. Average time (in hours) to complete a lesson/ course:			
c. Average number of examinations:			
d. Average number of questions per exam:	18	20	31
e. Tuition:	8	3	64
f. Non-start rate (in %):	21	18	31
g. Lesson completion rates (in %):	52	36	39
h. Graduation rate (in %):	\$535	\$1,450	\$150-900 cr
i. Mandatory resident training:	15%	15%	15%

<i>(Most Popular course, continued)</i>	High School	Post- secondary	Degree
j. Includes hardware/kits:	55%	74%	85%
k. Includes audio/video tapes or other electronic media:	34%	65%	66%
l. Includes job-related tools/devices:	0%	5%	8%
m. Includes online communication (Internet, e-mail, etc.):	40%	27%	13%
14. What is the <i>predominant</i> method used to deliver course content?	70%	27%	30%
a. Self-contained text content with study guides:	30%	32%	18%
b. Commercial textbooks with study guides:	90%	66%	78%
c. Online Web-based:			
d. CD-ROM:	16%	41%	14%
e. Other:	47%	24%	34%
15. What percent of your instructors are full time:	32%	26%	44%
	0%	9%	7%
16. What percent of your instructors have doctorate degrees?	5%	0%	2%
	21%	34%	17%
17. Do you provide faculty training?	5%	12%	53%
18. Do you initiate telephone contact with students for motivational purposes?	All Schools Surveyed		
		82%	
19. Do you initiate telephone contact with students for educational purposes?		75%	
20. Which of the following do you use to provide educa-			

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	All Schools Surveyed
tional services for students?	67%
a. Fax exams:	
b. Toll-free telephone:	
c. E-Mail:	
d. Computer-generated personalized responses:	57%
e. Internet download capability:	82%
f. Access to grades, transcripts, via the Internet:	90%
g. Registration and enrollment via the Internet:	72%
h. Application via the Internet:	70%
i. Other:	48%
	76%
21. Which of these services do you provide?	76%
a. Instructor writes comments on assignments:	16%
b. Instructor comments online:	
c. Personalized letters from instructors:	
d. Proctored examinations:	78%
e. Online Library:	70%
f. Other:	83%
	62%
22. Do you use the following in your student motivational efforts?	50%
a. Pre-printed motivation letters:	13%
b. Personally typed motivation letters:	
c. E-Mail:	
d. Fax letters:	46%
e. Schedule for Completion:	43%
f. Motivational incentive awards (gifts, etc.):	79%
	13%
23. What percent of communication to students are in electronic (vs. delivered) form?	64%
	20%
24. Which one of the above has been the single most effective	

	All Schools Surveyed
method for increasing course completion rates?	74%
25. What student or graduate services do you provide?	e-mail
a. Newsletter/magazine:	
b. Placement service/assistance:	
c. Alumni association:	
d. Advanced/honors diploma program:	46%
e. Other:	21%
26. Which of the following do you use to measure student outcomes?	30%
a. Course completion statistics:	34%
b. Passage of licensing/certification examinations:	10%
c. Employment/Placement:	
d. Employer evaluations:	
e. Student self-evaluations:	96%
f. Professional organization recognition:	42%
g. Other:	15%
	22%
	96%
Conclusion	29%
See comments on Pages 8-13.	10%



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