This study examined distance education at Tennessee Board of Regents institutions of higher education. Both four-year and two-year institutions were surveyed via electronic mail. Thirty-five percent of the surveys were returned. The results indicated that all responding institutions were involved in distance education, specifically to reach potential students who had limited access to their campuses. The top five concerns of the institutions in regard to distance education were providing course materials for students, training faculty, ease of system operation, range of services, and cost effectiveness. The most frequently available mediums for offering classes were teleconferencing, cable television, and compressed video. While 80 percent of the universities surveyed had distance education policies, only 40 percent of those policies included provisions for on-line courses. The major issues cited regarding the future of distance education included the need for adequate funding and continued faculty support. (MDM)
Distance Education Goes On-Line in the 21st Century

Connie A. Jones
Associate Professor
Middle Tennessee State University

and

Diane S. Gower
Assistant Professor
Middle Tennessee State University

Paper presented at the 1997
Mid-South Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting

November 12, 1997
Distance Education Goes On-Line in the 21st Century  
Connie A. Jones and Diane Gower

Introduction

Colleges and universities across the nation are finding themselves in uniquely challenging situations. Poised to enter a new century, universities find the needs of their constituents dramatically changing. Many universities are experiencing phenomenal growth while others are facing a significant decline in student enrollment. Issues related to students and their instructional needs will influence higher education well into the next century.

The uniqueness of today’s student populations may require new curricula, different methods of instruction, and different delivery systems for offering university courses. Universities regularly develop new curricula and seek more effective methods of instruction. The current challenge, however, is to find alternative instructional delivery systems that match the lifestyles of the new student bodies. Distance education may provide the alternative delivery systems that are needed.

Distance education is defined as “... an event or a process that involves direct two-way communication between people...” (Filipczak, 1995). Universities that use distance education to offer undergraduate and graduate courses have multiplied since the 1980s. “Current estimates predict that 50% of all students in college by the year 2000 will take courses via some form of distance education” (Hoyle, 1997).

An evaluation of 13 classes offered through compressed video at the University of Northern Iowa took place in August of 1995. The overall evaluation by students was favorable, with 87% of the students having positive attitudes (Bozik, 1996). Courses
offered on-line or via the internet appear to have the most flexibility for students while allowing the instructor to regulate the information presented and allowing the university to control access.

**Procedures**

The intent of this study was to investigate distance education at Tennessee Board of Regents institutions. The survey administered was developed by the researchers. The instrument consisted of ten short answer questions. The survey sought to identify the types of distance education alternatives used on each campus, to acquire information on the policies that each institution had designed to govern distance education on their campuses, to identify the major issues of concern on each campus, and to identify their future plans for distance education.

A list of Tennessee Board of Regents institutions with their e-mail addresses was obtained. A survey was sent to both the four-year institutions and the two-year institutions in the system. E-mail technology was used to send and receive survey results. Three weeks after the initial mailing a second survey was sent to the institutions who had not responded.

**Collection and Interpretation of Data**

A quasi-experimental design was used in this study. It was a one-group, post-test design. The survey responses were tabulated and summarized. The following results were obtained. Thirty-five percent of the surveys were returned. All respondents indicated that their institutions are involved in distance education specifically to reach potential students who have limited access to their campuses. In addition each institutions indicated
that they currently provide assistance to faculty members in designing courses to fit the technology available on their campuses.

The top five concerns of the institutions are shown in Table I. They include: providing a range of services in compressed video classrooms, providing necessary course materials for students, training faculty, ease of operation, and the cost effectiveness of distance education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Ranking of Distance Education Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing course materials for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of system operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1 indicates the highest level of concern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most frequently available mediums for offering classes were: teleconferencing, cable television, and compressed video. Eighty to one hundred percent of the institutions responding offered graduate and/or undergraduate classes using these mediums. While 80% of the universities currently have distance education policies, only 40% of the policies include provisions for on-line courses. Most universities plan to expand their distance education programs. The major issues regarding the future of distance education on the campuses were: obtaining adequate funding (50%) and maintaining continued faculty support (50%).

Conclusion

The results indicate that distance education is actively being pursued at Tennessee State Board of Regents institutions. The variety of types of services available with at least
60% usage suggests an active level of interest and involvement. The need to reach potential students was also a strong indicator that the institutions have made efforts to provide distance education as an alternative means of delivering instruction.

Universities must take a proactive position by establishing advisory committees to monitor academic concerns of their faculties external and internal policy issues. Cost-effectiveness must be monitored as well since it was also identified as a concern for all institutions.

Universities must be attuned to faculty concerns. They should continue to provide assistance to faculty in designing their courses for effective presentation through distance education technology. The concept of student and faculty assessment will take on new meanings as the various types of distance education are employed.

Issues that were not addressed but may be concerns for the future include: alternative methods of computing faculty workloads, controlling access to class material, and making student services available through alternative technical means. According to the Director of the National University Continuing Education Association, "The reality is that most public institutions will probably need to develop a mix of on-campus and distance education courses in order to remain affordable" (Kohl, 1996). Distance education is the wave of the future for reaching all students in the 21st century.
Bibliography


Hoyle, Glenn. 199. “Distance Learning on the Net”.
   http://homepage.interaccess.com/~ghoyle/college.html

Kohl, Kay, J. “Distance Learning on the Net”.
   http://homepage.interaccess.com/~ghoyle/college.html
I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Distance Education Goes On-Line in the 21st Century

Author(s): Connie A. Jones and Diane S. Gower

Corporate Source: Middle Tennessee State University

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

Check here
For Level 1 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

Check here
For Level 2 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but not in paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: Connie A. Jones, Diane Gower

Printed Name/Position/Title: Connie A. Jones, Assistant Professor

Organization/Address: MTSU, 1301 East Main Street, Box 69

Date: 11-12-97

E-Mail Address: Gower@MTSU.EDU

FAX: (615) 898-5309

Telephone: (615) 898-2480

Printed Name/Position/Title: Diane S. Gower, Assistant Professor

Organization/Address: MTSU, 1301 East Main Street, Box 69

Date: 11-12-97

E-Mail Address: Gower@MTSU.EDU

FAX: (615) 898-5309

Telephone: (615) 898-2480
III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher/Distributor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
210 O'Boyle Hall
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC 20064

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2d Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com