

DISTANCE education

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Report

Breaking Down Resistance to Distance Education

By Judy Dahl

All stakeholders involved in distance education (DE) — learners, administrators, scholars, politicians, businesses — have their own points of view and agendas, some of which are irreconcilably different. So says Dr. Lawrence Ita, assistant to the director of distance education at the Community College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. And although resistance to DE has eroded considerably in recent years, Ita contends that these differing agendas still prevent full acceptance of DE as a viable alternative to face-to-face education.

DE has gained some acceptance

Acceptance of DE has grown, says Ita, as original objections to the delivery mode have proved unfounded. Educators and others feared online learning would be unworkable because students would get bored reading online text and without hearing an instructor's voice, and because they couldn't work collaboratively. However, technology now offers many alternatives to straight text, including audio

options, while file sharing, chat rooms, instant messaging, and other options facilitate collaborative learning.

Indeed, according to Ita, "the lines of demarcation between DE and face-to-face learning are getting fainter and fainter." Instructors are incorporating online elements into traditional courses and DE courses may include face-to-face seminars or meetings.

Ita cites several factors blurring the lines between DE and traditional education. Across all forms of educational delivery he sees:

- a greater emphasis on technology to create learning
- educational design centering on student needs rather than on how instructors want to teach
- a new generation of students who grew up with and embrace technology
- improved, more user-friendly technology.

Face-to-face considered the primary educational delivery mode

"These factors have softened resis-

tance," says Ita, "but philosophical and ideological concerns persist."

"Traditional education is the standard of excellence against which DE is compared," says Ita. This insistence on viewing face-to-face education as the preferred mode, with DE striving to emulate its features, is a primary factor preventing full acceptance.

"It's difficult to compare the delivery modes in a meaningful way," says Ita, "especially since social and natural scientists continue to reassess the learning process and the role of education in society." Numerous studies have found "no significant differences" between education delivered through traditional and DE modes. "Even assuming the comparison is valid," says Ita, "full acceptance of DE may not be reasonable if it's considered — at its best — only as good as the traditional method." To combat this perception, DE would need to prove its unequivocal superiority in some universally accepted educational aspects, such as access.

Ita would prefer to see an end to the comparisons. "We should just be looking at best educational practices instead

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Does Student Temperament Affect Satisfaction With Online Learning?

A survey of students enrolled in undergraduate courses that included web-based modules shows that student satisfaction is not associated with any single temperament, defined as “an individual’s pattern of personality interaction with the environment to satisfy needs.”

The study titled “Satisfaction of College Students with the Digital Learning Environment: Do Learners’ Temperaments Make a Difference?” questioned whether students’ temperaments were related to satisfaction in a digital learning environment. Based on a voluntary survey, students were classified by the following temperaments as defined by the Keirseay Temperament Sorter II: artisan, guardian, idealist, and rational.

Two-thirds of the students expressed high satisfaction with web-based courses, and the majority expressed satisfaction regardless of age,

grade point average, university classifications, major, and experience with web-based learning.

Based on the results, the study’s author, Suzanne P. Stokes, concludes: “[C]ollege students with diverse temperaments are suitable candidates for learning in the digital instructional environment, and the recommendation that students considering enrolling in courses that incorporate digital learning, but who may be reluctant to register because of perceived mismatches between personal traits and the digital environment, should be reassured that the environment is not restrictive in terms of learner temperament.”

Reference: Stokes, S.P., (2001).

“Satisfaction of college students with the digital learning environment: Do learners’ temperaments make a difference?” *Internet and Higher Education* 4(1), 31-44. ●

Eleven Ways the University Can Help Faculty Deliver Online Courses

1. Provide more and varied training sessions to faculty (i.e., Authorware, on-line course development, instructional design)
2. Provide detailed, understandable instructional materials to faculty
3. Provide ongoing time for learning courseware after initial training
4. Provide ongoing tech support as needed by the instructor and students
5. Give faculty release time to design and deliver on-line classes
6. Provide more incentives for on-line instructors (i.e., laptops, student assistants, merit pay)
7. Upgrade courseware
8. Fix courseware problems in a timely manner
9. Limit the enrollments in on-line courses
10. Provide mentors in each department or college who can answer questions that come up for less experienced instructors
11. Do not force faculty to teach on-line courses who do not wish to do so

Source: McKenzie, Barbara K.; Mims, Nancy; Bennett, Elizabeth; Waugh, Michael. (2000) “Needs, Concerns and Practices of Online Instructors.” *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, (3) 3 <http://www.ericit.org/fulltext/IR543046.pdf> ●

Accessibility

Percent of degree-granting institutions that use web sites in their courses, and the percentage of those institutions whose web sites follow accessibility guidelines or recommendations for users with disabilities (by institutional type and size): 2002

		Extent to which web sites follow established accessibility guidelines or recommendations for users with disabilities				
Institutional type and size	Use websites for distance education courses	Not at all	Minor extent	Moderate extent	Major extent	Don't know
All institutions	95	3	18	28	18	33
Institutional type						
Public 2-year	96	4	18	30	20	28
Public 4-year	93	2	18	35	22	23
Private 4-year	94	4	21	23	11	42
Size of institution						
Less than 3,000	93	3	19	22	12	43
3,000 to 9,999	97	4	19	32	19	26
10,000 or more	98	1	14	37	30	19

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, "Survey on Distance Education at Higher Education Institutions, 2000–2001," 2002.

Resistance...from page 1

of seeing one form as superior to the other; we should try to improve both methods," he says.

Less instructor control

At DE's inception, instructors controlled course development and access to materials, just as they traditionally have with face-to-face education. However, the development of technology has threatened this role. In fact, today many DE-related decisions are made at the administrative level. For example, budget policies usually dictate that administrators approve — or even select — the learning management system (LMS) that defines the teaching platform. Software vendors may also influence decisions as they advocate particular systems, and online courses are often developed by instructional designers rather than by instructors. These

factors limit instructors' control over course content and delivery, sparking resistance to DE.

Teacher and classroom less central to educational delivery

The teacher's role is the cornerstone of face-to-face education, according to Ita. He notes that DE's structure — student-controlled access to classroom and materials any time, from any computer — makes the teacher's role less central. Ita calls the microcomputer's role in DE analogous to that of the teacher in traditional education — the microcomputer is rapidly becoming DE's central component. Teachers, perceiving this as a threat, often stress the need to place all technology under their control.

"The most serious threat to teachers' interests is the suggestion of wholesale replacement, not only of physical classrooms, but of teachers themselves," says

Ita. Some organizations already offer online, self-paced courses — such as certification courses — that require no human intervention.

As computer technology advances, all aspects of teaching could conceivably happen without human interaction. "If this possibility becomes imminent, the fight for control of technology in teaching will reach new heights," Ita says.

The specter of teacher and classroom obsolescence threatens many interests. Administrators, professors, other school system employees, and education students are among the groups whose livelihood depends on the existence of schools. "It's not surprising that the idea of DE operating outside teachers' control evokes sharp resentment; the very thought threatens to drive scholastic objectivity down the path of self-preservation," says Ita.

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Understanding Adult Learners: Key to Successful Programs

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Lee Bash, dean of the division of Lifelong Learning at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, tells a story that illustrates how invisible adult students can become at a university. One of the offices on his campus claimed to have “sent a letter to the parents of [all of] our students” — a statement that excluded the adult students who might be studying on campus or at a distance.

Bash has written *Adult Learners in the Academy* (Anker, 2003) to help universities recognize the increasing importance of their adult learners. The book discusses the impact that adult learners are having on the university, and the rising impact that this population of students will have in the future. It is an important book for all faculty and administrators who hope to more effectively tap this growing population of college students. It is particularly relevant for those who work with distance education, a choice growing in popularity for many adult students.

A Natural Match

Distance education may be a natural match for adult learners because of their unique outlook on education, says Bash. Instead of passively receiving information from an instructor and relishing opportunities to leave class early, adult learners tend to be much more autonomous and self-directed in their learning. Adult learners “take responsibility for learning on themselves,” Bash says, and they are comfortable with what he calls “learning at three in the morning with someone in their underwear.”

In addition to their self-directed nature, adult students typically exhibit a number of other characteristics that Bash details in his book. These students have accumulated a wealth of life experiences that they wish to connect with their learning. They are goal-oriented, seeking programs with clearly defined

steps that help them realize their aspirations. Adult learners seek relevancy in their studies, having little patience for assignments or courses that they don’t feel relate to their life or their goal. They are also practical, assertive, and demand to be shown respect.

Understanding and serving the adult population takes on a particular urgency when one considers the facts, figures, and demographic trends that describe these students. Currently, nearly half of all college students are age 25 or older, with numbers expected

Dealing with adult students may present a challenge for faculty who chose their career based on a positive experience they had with their own instructors when they were 18 and 22.

to continue to increase. About 70 percent of adult students are seeking a degree; an almost equal number are part time as opposed to full time. The addition of college coursework to their schedules makes for significant time demands — nearly 80 percent of adult learners are employed, and about two-thirds are married.

Other statistics point to opportunities for distance education programs to target the adult learner. Most adult learners are pursuing professional programs such as business, health care, or education, tying in with the adult learner’s need for relevancy. Trends in the job market — such as downsizing

or technological changes — can also be the impetus for an adult to return to school with a specific goal in mind.

Approximately one in five adults over the age of 25 holds a bachelor’s or higher degree, pointing to a large potential population of adult students who may wish to start or complete a degree. Perhaps most important to distance education is the fact that about 90 percent of adult students have access to a computer either at home or at work.

The Senior Student

Within the general population of adult students is the special population of learners over age 65. Older adults may not be driven by the same motivations to achieve a degree or credential for job change or advancement. Instead, they tend to pursue learning for its own sake, and the wealth of life experience they bring to their studies can enrich any traditional or distance classroom.

To gauge the importance of learning to the senior population, one need only look at the Elderhostel program, a learning opportunity in which seniors travel to a college campus or other site to enroll in an intensive course typically lasting a week or two. In 2001, some 250,000 students enrolled in Elderhostel courses, and the number of sites has grown impressively from five at the program’s inception in 1975 to over 10,000 currently.

For distance education to reach out to the senior population, it is important to help them overcome the barriers that may prevent their enrollment in classes. “Older people have been a little bit phobic about technology,” Bash said. By offering courses that help seniors learn about computers, such as a class aimed at helping seniors learn to use email, the university can increase comfort level and the chance that seniors will enroll in an

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Rubric Clearly Describes Exemplary Online Instruction

In May 2002 a committee of faculty, staff, administrators, and students at California State University-Chico began meeting to develop a rubric for determining the quality of online instruction.

The committee met once a month in all-day sessions, had some lively discussions, and produced the “Rubric for Online Instruction,” which was approved by a committee of deans involved in online education and the faculty senate.

The rubric is not a checklist. “The committee didn’t want a checklist. They didn’t want something simple. They wanted a rubric that clearly describes what would make exemplary online instruction based on the criteria we came up with for [six] categories,” Sederberg says.

These categories include:

1. learner support and resources
2. online organization and design
3. instructional design and delivery
4. assessment and evaluation of student learning
5. innovative teaching with technology
6. faculty use of student feedback.

The rubric provides baseline, effective, and exemplary practices for each category. For example, in the category of Innovative Teaching with Technology, one of the criteria is as follows:

- Baseline: “Course uses Internet access and engages students in the learning process.”
- Effective: “Course optimizes Internet access and effectively engages students in the learning process.”
- Exemplary: “Course optimizes Internet access and effectively engages students in the learning process in a variety of ways throughout the course.”

Rubric uses

The Rubric for Online Instruction is used in three ways at CSU-Chico:

- evaluating online courses for

Exemplary Online Instruction Awards

- self-evaluation
- course development.

CSU-Chico’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) publicly recognizes outstanding instructors and advisers at its annual awards luncheon. This year CELT added a category for exemplary online instruction. The idea is to recognize high-quality instruction rather than encourage competition.

Partially online, blended, or totally online courses can be nominated for the awards. A committee looks at each course from both a designer’s and student’s perspective. The evaluation (using the Rubric) is done category by category rather than as a whole because all the categories may not apply to all courses.

While Sederberg is not sure how these awards will affect faculty rewards, the awards are signed and presented by the provost. “That carries weight, so we’re hoping that that will have a positive impact in each department — but we’re not sure yet.

“We’re hoping that it will now be something that will be worthy of affecting tenure, retention, and promotion. Those were issues for faculty on our campus because those that moved ahead with online education — the early adopters — weren’t necessarily supported and recognized. So we wanted to be sure there was a built-in recognition for the work they do,” Sederberg says.

For each award recipient, CELT produces a poster of screen shots to visibly display the exemplary work being done, with the hope that others can learn from these examples.

Other ways to use the rubric

Another use for the rubric is as a course design tool. Although Sederberg has not yet developed a workshop on using the rubric this way, one instructional technology staff member is using the rubric as she develops fully online

courses. Sederberg says the rubric has been helpful for this person because it provides concrete statements about what is exemplary.

Effects of the rubric

Use of the rubric has provided faculty from across campus with opportunities to share their online instruction ideas. The awards luncheon and the posters that illustrate exemplary online instruction will soon be supplemented by a website that provides screen shots of exemplary instruction in each of the six rubric categories. “I talk to a lot of faculty about the impact this has had on them and it’s kind of amazing because those who see what other folks have done say, ‘Gosh, it’s so nice to see how they did that. I can apply that to my course.

“So I have faculty coming into our lab starting the redesign process of their own courses based on what they’ve seen from others and from looking at the rubric.”

Sederberg is seeking to expand the rubric’s use. She received a grant from the Consortium for Academic Technology Staff to implement the rubric across the CSU system. “[The rubric] is scalable. It is sharable. It crosses platforms. [CSU-Chico] uses WebCT. Humboldt State uses Blackboard, and we’re evaluating some courses done in Blackboard with the same rubric, and there’s no problem with that.”

To view CSU-Chico’s Rubric for Online Instruction and examples of exemplary online instruction, visit www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi.

Contact Laura Sederberg at lsederberg@csuchico.edu. ●

Resistance...from page 3

Political pressures impede dialogue, increase polarization

Internal and external political pressures also exert influence over DE's acceptance. Rising demand and easier accessibility are fueling university enrollment increases, and legislators require increased accountability from schools under operational and budgetary constraints. These pressures lead administrators to increased involvement in educational decisions, particularly those involving technology. Many teachers raise concerns about the resulting innovations' effect on educational quality and academic freedom. According to Ita, this conflict polarizes attitudes around DE versus traditional education, causing consensus-building discussions to break down.

Lack of comfort with technology affects the politics surrounding DE as well. Politicians or administrators unfamiliar with today's technology may advocate policies limiting DE. Teachers, perhaps unconvinced that technology leads to quality education, perhaps unwilling to use an administratively selected teaching platform, may resist involvement in DE programs.

Time, economy, dialogue, increase acceptance

Ita believes the primary obstacles to full acceptance are ideological and political. "DE proponents need to appreciate that resolving its operational and technological problems alone won't lead to full acceptance," he says.

The best hope for full acceptance, according to Ita, is the passage of time, economic forces, and continued dialogue. With time, overly cautious decision makers will be replaced by a generation comfortable with having technology at the center of the educational environment. Since DE improves productivity, making education more accessible and enabling enrollment

increases without additional infrastructure, economic forces will encourage DE growth. And stakeholders evaluating educational best practices will continue to identify instances where DE is the optimal delivery mode.

Combating resistance

Ita names several ways stakeholders can help DE gain acceptance:

- implement DE effectively, with excellent course design, proper administration, and with students' interests paramount
- increase DE's availability
- expose DE to those not currently using the technology and make them aware of its advantages.

"When people understand DE, and today's better designed, user-friendly technology, they can make a conscious choice about when it makes sense to use it," says Ita. ●

Factors preventing full acceptance of DE

Ideological

- face-to-face education considered the standard of excellence
- reduced instructor control over content
- greater administrative role in educational decision making
- fears that DE will make classrooms and teachers obsolete

Political

- rising enrollment, legislative pressures require administrator involvement in technology decisions
- teacher concerns about educational quality and academic freedom
- fear of technology leads to policies limiting DE
- insufficient consideration of legal accessibility requirements in DE design

Adult Learners...from page 4

online course. Computer familiarity may be the major barrier to senior enrollment in distance courses.

Retraining the Faculty

"I'm in the faculty development business," said Bash, explaining that it is critical to the success of adult learning to have faculty that understand and support the needs of these learners. However, Bash says that dealing with adult students may present a challenge for many faculty who chose their career based on a positive experience they had with their own instructors when they were between the ages of 18 and 22. It is difficult for these faculty members to not see themselves in the same sort of relationship with their students and to be uncomfortable with the sort of engaged interaction that adults demand.

This lack of interest from faculty members can be the death knell for a distance education program, which requires the engagement and support of faculty along with a technological infrastructure in order to succeed. However, as Bash points out, the lines are beginning to blur. Some colleges, like Fairleigh Dickinson in Teaneck, NJ, now require all students to take at least one distance education course as a condition of graduation, meaning that distance education courses will no longer be populated mainly by those over 25. Additionally, the definition of "adult" is starting to change; as students of all ages are increasingly balancing course loads with full time work and/or family responsibilities, it is becoming difficult to argue that an "adult" is purely defined by age.

Adult Learners in the Academy shines a light on a large, but largely ignored, population of students — the adult learners. It's an important study for all who seek to better understand the students in their traditional and non-traditional programs. ●

Student Retention in Online, Open and Distance Learning

By Ormond Simpson
Paperback: 168 pages, \$36.95
(Kogan Page Ltd., 2003)
ISBN: 0749439998

Agrowing concern for all those involved in recruiting and teaching in distance education programs is keeping students. Retention rates for online courses are often worse than for conventional learning -- one recent study has suggested that the dropout rate from distance courses may be as high as 70 percent. And there is growing recognition that student retention is not "out of the hands" of the institutions running the courses. Institutions need to retain greater numbers of students without compromising academic standards.

Author Ormond Simpson provides an accessible analysis of strategies for increasing retention and provides case studies and examples to illustrate how these strategies can change institutional policy and practice. The key issues are covered -- not only recruitment and retention, but "retrieval" and "reclamation."

Ormond Simpson is director of the United Kingdom's Open University's Centre for Educational Guidance and Student Support, and has over 25 years' experience of developing, researching and practicing student support.

Student Retention in Online, Open and Distance Learning may be ordered at <http://styluspub.com/firm-srch.cfm?keyword=Kogan+Page&Submit=Go>

Developing Faculty to Use Technology: Programs and Strategies to Enhance Teaching

David G. Brown, editor
Hardcover, \$39.95
(Anker Publishing Co., 2003)
ISBN: 1882982622

This book chronicles how a wide range of universities implemented successful faculty development programs to help faculty better use technology in their teaching.

Readers are offered detailed descriptions of successful faculty development programs, assessment of the programs' effectiveness, and lessons learned.

Chapters on individual programs are divided into seven parts: philosophy, communication, staffing and support strategies, teaching environments, model programs, assessment of student programs, and assessing the effect of technology on learning.

Focuses include:

- the ethics of teaching in an online environment
- communicating effectively with faculty
- supporting faculty in the use of technology
- creating a faculty instructional technology support facility
- using assessment to improve teacher education
- measuring the impact of technology-based teaching on learning

Author David G. Brown is vice president and dean of the International Center for Computer-Enhanced Learning at Wake Forest University.

Developing Faculty to Use Technology may be ordered at www.ankerpub.com/books/brown-dev-fac.html.

Higher Education in the Digital Age: Technology Issues and Strategies for American Colleges and Universities

By James J. Duderstadt, Daniel E. Atkins, & Douglas Van Houweling
Hardcover, 304 pp., \$39.95
(Oryx Press; 2003)
ISBN 1573565202

With technology impacting teaching, and academic management and administrative processes relying heavily on technology, many university leaders are still hesitant to prioritize technology. This book is designed to address this issue from a perspective appropriate to leaders. *Higher Education in the Digital Age* maintains that the new advances in information technology are driving a significant restructuring of institutions, with the potential to provide access to education formerly restricted to the privileged.

The authors of this book believe that "[i]t is our collective challenge as scholars, educators, and academic leaders to develop a strategic framework capable of understanding and shaping the impact that this extraordinary technology will have on our institutions."

The authors cite relevant examples and projects implemented at the University of Michigan during their tenure. In the final part of this book, the authors turn to recommendations and strategies. These last four chapters, are especially valuable for the current senior administrator.

Higher Education in the Digital Age may be ordered at www.oryxpress.com/books/BookDetail.asp?dept_id=1&sku=OXHEF&imprintID= ●

Book Review

Electronic Learning Communities: Current Issues and Best Practices

Sorel Reisman, senior editor

565 pg., \$39.95

(Information Age Publishing, 2003)

by Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

There is no shortage of books available that treat the theory and practice of distance education, but finding a volume that is equally useful for both the novice and the seasoned practitioner is still rare. It is this niche that *Electronic Learning Communities: Current Issues and Best Practices*, a publication from the United States Distance Learning Association, fills. Organized around fourteen chapters that each address a specific facet of computer-enabled education, these case studies walk the reader through specific situations to discover what works, what doesn't, and what issues are involved.

Take, for example, the chapter on hybrid courses written by Penelope Walters Swenson and Mark Evans, both of California State University, Bakersfield. A hybrid course is an increasingly common model in which students meet in a face-to-face, traditional classroom for part of their coursework while studying independently, typically online, for other segments of the course. This exceptionally well-organized chapter makes use of several vignettes that illustrate the problems, experiences, and lessons faced by students in the online class component, including technical difficulties, issues of anonymity, and changes in the way that people communicate. These examples are used as jumping-off points for discussions of the issues involved. For example, the story of a student who feels that his communication skills have improved as a result of having his words "hang there" before him in a threaded discussion is used to illustrate online study's perhaps surprising ability to foster social growth.

Another valuable contribution comes from Sharon Edge of the University of Louisville, who writes about faculty-librarian collaboration in online courses. This informative chapter presents a little-addressed aspect of online education, the role that the library can play in making resources available and accessible to students in a variety of locations. For example, Edge discusses the concept of eReserve, "a system for creating collections of electronic readings lists...that link to the full-text of journal articles considered as required reading for a course." While a distance education professor could

These case studies walk the reader through specific situations to discover what works, what doesn't, and what issues are involved.

opt to create a standard, physical reserve at the library that students would have to access in person or order by fax or regular mail, a system like eReserve allows students at a distance to access these materials at their convenience online.

Still another debate that arises in distance education surrounds the ability to teach students critical thinking skills, as opposed to simple rote memorization. William Peirce of Prince George's Community College, Maryland, gives this topic a thorough treatment. His chapter, well buttressed by research, presents fifteen strategies for fostering critical thinking skills in the online classroom. Examples include posing well-designed questions for the stu-

dents to address in asynchronous discussions, such as those that ask the students to question statistics, find assumptions, and dissect reasoning. Another strategy, particularly suited to the online classroom, encourages instructors to understand their students' individual levels of self-directedness.

Other chapters address even more common debates and issues in distance education. One chapter discusses the complexities associated with assessing student learning outcomes, using introductory economics courses as the example, and suggests that this may become an even more critical matter as increasing numbers of students enroll in online courses. Another highlights how one institution developed an effective online orientation course for its students. Still another reflects on the impact of distance education internationally, using the experience of an institution in Portugal as a case study. Finally, two of the most contentious issues in all of higher education — intellectual property rights, and ways to secure grant funding — are each given a chapter that discusses the issues in depth and offers guidance for those facing these problems.

The strength of this book lies in the diversity of opinion presented and the breadth of appeal of the contents. Diversity is inherent in the format, bringing fourteen best practices to the table in anthology form and allowing ample room to discuss them in depth. But it is the breadth of appeal that is most impressive. *Electronic Learning Communities* would be a fine choice as a graduate level text to introduce novices to the issues that they will face in their professional practice. But it would be equally at home on the shelf of a seasoned distance education administrator, who could turn to it when thorny problems arise, to learn how colleagues have addressed the same issues. ●