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Special Report

Distance Learning Administration and Policy: Strategies for Achieving Excellence

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Report

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Distance Learning Administration and Policy: Strategies for Achieving Excellence

When building an online program, there are certain big questions that need to be answered. Among them are: What kind of program you want it to be – high tech or low tech? Professor intensive or adjunct driven? Blended learning or fully online? What kind of technology will be used to deliver course content? What about opportunities for collaboration?

Indeed, even though distance learning is no longer in its infancy, and there are a whole discipline-full of best practices learned by those who blazed the trail before you, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the questions and the possibilities of what you want your program to look like today and five years from now.

We created this special report to suggest some responses to the big questions about distance education: About pedagogy, technology, philosophy and administration of distance learning programs. In this report, you will find concise, informative articles on distance education administration and policy that have appeared in *Distance Education Report*. Titles include:

- Seeing Where the Distance Education Opportunities Lie
- Dumb is Smart: Learning from Our Worst Practices
- Building a Distance Education Program: Key Questions to Answer
- Eight Steps to On-Campus/Online Parity
- Creating a Business Continuity Plan for Your Distance Education Program
- Integrating Distance Education Programs into the Institution
- Solving the Problems of Faculty Ownership with Online Courses

The mass of program and policy issues confronting distance education administrators grows every day. We hope this special report will help you conceptualize, manage and grow the distance education program at your school.

Christopher Hill
Editor
Distance Education Report

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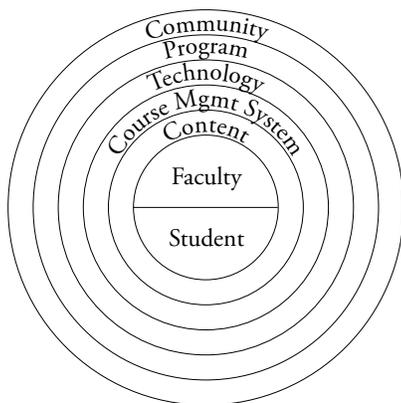
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The Concentric Support Model: How Administrators Can Plan and Support Effective Distance Learning Programs

By Christopher Hill

What is necessary to support a quality distance education program? Many institutions initiate a program without having a clear, systematic idea of what is involved. Dr. Elizabeth Osika, Instructional Technologist in the Office of Distance Learning at Chicago State University, has done a comprehensive review of the literature and developed a clear, easy-to-understand model of the layers of support necessary to undergird the central interaction between teacher and student. She has laid it out in a pattern of concentric circles of support, radiating outwards from the teacher/student interaction all the way to the support of the community



The Five Concentric Circles that Support Distance Learning

beyond the institution, making clear how each layer serves its necessary

function in support of the critical center. It is a tool institutions can use in the planning and evaluation of their distance learning programs.

Born of experience, research

Osika's plan developed out of her work at Purdue University-Calumet where she was brought in 1998 with a mandate to develop a distance learning program. "Over the years it became obvious that there were certain key elements you needed to be successful," she says. "So I said let's do some research and see from the administrative side of the house what's necessary to really support a quality distance learning program."

"Basically it was a real thorough lit[erature] review," Osika says. "I really condensed all that down, and since I'm a visual person I put it into a way that you can think about it visually." The concentric support model, she explains, is like a rock thrown in a pond, with ripples expanding out from it. At the center, the core, is the faculty member and the student — that is what the entire system is there to support and nurture. The system must provide what the teacher and student need to be successful. Within that inner circle, the model describes the behaviors and the attitudes that faculty need to have, the equipment they need to have

access to, the training and support they need. On the student's side, technical skills and access to technology are specified.

The center — the faculty member and the student coming together in the classroom — is surrounded in the first circle by course content. "Once you get beyond that one-on-one contact at the center, with the faculty member and the student, now you need to start engaging those students with each other and the content and with the class as a whole," says Osika. The course content specified in the second circle enables interaction between the students with applications such as discussion boards. Learning objects are found in this ring, encouraging active learner engagement. On this second circle Osika also places ADA compliance — it is at this point that the university needs to begin thinking about how to make things universally accessible.

The second circle out, after the pedagogical core and the course content, is the course management system. "You don't have to have Blackboard, you don't have to have WebCT, you don't have to have a commercial course management system," says Osika. But there does have to be a consistent system through which courses are provided. "You can't have every faculty members designing their own web pages and expect to be successful," Osika says. "Student need continuity between courses and they need to know what to expect."

After the CMS circle the model moves outward to the third circle or technical issues, what the whole institution needs to do to support the online enterprise. Osika cites her own experience: "Back in 98 when we started at Purdue- Calumet It was like, 'Oh, sure you want to do an online course, go ahead and do it' Then all of a sudden we've got 150, 200 online

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classes, our bandwidth is being taxed and our servers are being pushed.” What Osika’s model says is that the university needs to make sure that they understand the technical requirements, the “nuts and bolts, bits and bytes.” And along with the hardware and software comes the human side of technical support — when the server goes down, or when an instructor needs help with one of a dozen things, there has to be someone there to give that help.

The fourth circle: Instructional design

The fourth circle — one of the most important according to Osika — contains “programmatic” issues. She breaks this circle down into four components.

The first is instructional support. “Teaching online is very different from teaching in a classroom. You can’t wrap your standard lectures and PowerPoint’s, throw ‘em online and say you have a course. The whole pedagogy’s a little different.” This is the circle for instructional designers that faculty can look to for counsel about how they are supposed to teach online — what is online education supposed to look like, and how is it assessed?

The second aspect of the programmatic circle is student support, the place for 24-hour help desks. “This goes beyond standard help desk assistance like ‘Here’s your e-mail password,’” Osika says. If students run into a server issue late at night, and can’t submit a homework assignment, who do they call? Osika points out that help desk people today must have some knowledge and understanding about what online classes are, and what students are trying to do within those classes. This aspect of the “program” circle includes online advising, distance learning ori-

entation, and access to the library.

The third aspect of these programmatic issues is policies and procedures. Does the institution have a clear copyright and intellectual property policy? Do they have somewhere faculty members can go to find out if their proposed use of certain materials will be legal?

A final, critical aspect in this circle is what teaching online means for promotion and tenure. Osika

“Teaching online is very different from teaching in a classroom. You can’t wrap your standard lectures and PowerPoint’s, throw ‘em online and say you have a course. The whole pedagogy’s a little different.”

maintains that if a university really wants to see their online programs grow and develop they need to factor online instruction into their promotion and tenure evaluation process.

On the fifth circle are “executive issues.” Is there a clear commitment from the leadership at the university that online learning is important? Is there a common vision across the institution? “The academic side might be all behind it but then you get to the student support side and they don’t want to let student pay online or register online or do the things that are necessary for a student to be successful,” Osika says. One thing Osika emphasizes in this circle is that distance education should be incor-

porated into the university’s strategic plan. This means (ideally) that the university, in making its decisions, will take into account the effect of those decisions on the distance education program.

The last ripple around the pond contains what Osika calls “community issues” – functions performed by entities outside the university. Accreditation agencies figure in here — can you get your program accredited? So does the market. Can you get graduates into jobs? “I think that industry was a little bit cautious about distance education degrees, although I think they’re opening up their arms to it a little more,” Osika says. Finally there’s the general public. “You know, if you don’t have an online degree program, are they going to be happy about it or not? It’s something that the university has to consider in the big picture.”

The advantage of a visual model

Osika thinks that the biggest advantage in her model is that administration hasn’t generally looked at support in such a systematic way. “Everybody agrees that the reason universities are here is so that students are successful in their classes,” Osika says. “And once you get them to agree that that center’s important, which is usually very easy, then it’s easy to use this to build and say, ‘OK, if we want to establish the core then we have to have these other areas also.’” ●

Mentoring: The Administrator's Responsibility and Reward

By Christopher Hill

As a distance education administrator, one of your most important responsibilities is to mentor the promising folks on your staff. This is important not just for succession planning—a topic on its own—but also to make sure that the profession itself continues to move forward with the right kind of leaders. Chances are that if you are in a high-level administrative position in higher education, you have the right (and still relatively rare) combination of skills, attitudes, and values to be a good distance education leader; these need to be passed on to others. Having a formal, or even an informal, mentoring relationship can ensure that this happens. And it can be good for you, too—as many have learned, there is much to be gained by giving.

The prospect of being a mentor will not necessarily be a comfortable idea for all administrators. Some administrators don't even conduct performance reviews yet, finding it too difficult to confront the behavioral and related issues that often arise. Among other things, giving honest feedback to someone can be very uncomfortable. To be a good mentor, you do need to be willing to, at least occasionally, have difficult conversations—but always in the best interests of your mentee (a word we prefer to “protégé”). You also need to know how to offer criticism in a constructive and helpful way. These skills, which are necessary to learn if you don't already have them, will

You might think of yourself as a friendly person, supportive of your staff, and just generally agreeable in most situations. That's good—but not enough for a real mentoring relationship. To be a true mentor, you need to provide your mentee with overall direction, specific guidance in specific situations, and an empathetic landing place when she or he fails.

prove beneficial in any number of ways, but they will be especially helpful to you as someone's mentor.

What mentoring is

You might think of yourself as a friendly person, supportive of your staff, and just generally agreeable in most situations. That's good—but not enough for a real mentoring relationship. To be a true mentor, you need to provide your mentee with overall direction, specific guidance in specific situations, and an empathetic landing place when she or he fails. You also need to be a bridge to other

high-level leaders at the institution as well as interesting career opportunities.

Mentoring is the passing on of not only skills—the person to be mentored probably has a lot of technical skills already anyway—but also attitudes and values. It is about communicating what it takes to be a successful leader in this field, and then supporting and enabling the gradual development of those characteristics in another person. It is about helping someone who already shows aptitude and capability to develop judgment and balance.

Whom to mentor

The natural place to look for a mentee is among your staff. There is generally a lot of raw material to be found there—folks with great technology smarts and experience but who may need a more effective people-handling approach, or someone who is a good manager of technical staff but who hasn't had enough experience yet with other institutional leaders to have developed a sense of how to work with them well and how to nurture those very important relationships. Or there could be a staff member who is very eager and enthusiastic and does a generally great job but who doesn't yet communicate well with others in writing.

You need to look for three things before you select a mentee (or agree to be a mentor to someone who has asked you): promise, potential, and permission. Promise shows itself in general ways. A person who has promise will shine brightly even in routine situations in a noticeable way. He or she will come to your attention as much by demeanor as by words and actions; a mentee will be someone you feel drawn to admire and respect. Potential is more specific

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than promise. It is all about the future and the leader that the person is eventually capable of becoming. Clues as to a person's potential will be seen in the handling of difficult situations. Not that the person will do it all perfectly, of course (then why have a mentor?), but he or she will behave in such a way so that you can see the spark of a successful future. Permission, of course, is the person's willingness—better yet, his or her eagerness—to be mentored.

Since this is a special kind of relationship, the chemistry and trust between you and your mentee will also be a factor. That's important in most boss-subordinate relationships, but much more so between mentor and mentee.

How to mentor

If you have been fortunate enough to have had a mentor yourself at some time in your career, you will have a wealth of good experience to draw upon. Applying this experience as a mentee can help you be a more empathetic and skilled mentor. If the relationship is new to you, you may want to look to similar roles for inspiration: teacher, advisor, counselor—not identical roles, to be sure, but good enough to offer a lot of useful clues.

To begin with, it will be useful to identify the qualities that have made you a success. Without being arrogant or self-serving, you should do an honest appraisal of what it is precisely that has helped you attain your current position and what it is that contributes to your ongoing effectiveness. These are the characteristics you will want to nurture in your mentee. You may also spot in another some of your own weaknesses, and sometimes, if done in the right way, dealing with these can be just as useful as nurturing strengths. It's not

that you will want to harp on your mentee's weaknesses; you certainly want to capitalize on his or her strengths, but addressing both sides with your mentee can lead to a better outcome.

You should talk it all out at the beginning so that you and your mentee have a common set of expectations. You don't necessarily need to have a formal plan, with specific timelines and objectives (although it's OK if you do), but you do need to have a clear understanding of what you're doing and why. You also both need to know when you're done!

You do need to be careful—the relationship can become smothering (too parental, too hovering) or, even worse, can cross an often invisible line into harassment (you need to be especially careful about a male mentor-female mentee relationship). You need to be aware at all times of the inherent imbalance of power in the relationship and handle this very gently and carefully. Throughout it all, you must be both professional and as objective as possible. And standing back and letting your mentee do something dumb once in a while can be a good thing too, as long as it turns out to be a learning experience.

Of course, it can be a challenge to be both a boss and a mentor to the same person. As a boss, you will need occasionally to order and dictate; sometimes you will need to withhold important information or make very difficult decisions in order to serve the overall best interests of the organization. You almost always need to be taking the long-range view of situations rather than responding to short-term issues. This all may, at times, come into conflict with mentoring, when you may want, for example, to share information with a mentee in a way that's different from sharing with a subordinate. You will also need to be cautious that the staff

in general does not see you as playing favorites. There are no hard-and-fast rules here; you will need to find the right balance in each situation, but knowing that this conflict can arise may arm you better to deal with it.

Above all, it is important for a mentor to be humble—remember that you can make dumb mistakes and exhibit bad judgment sometimes too. Although the wonderful quality of wisdom is what most people think of when they think of mentoring, no one is wise all the time. So don't let being a role model and guide go to your head.

The rewards

Mentoring isn't all one-way; for all that you give in the mentoring relationship, you will get much in return. The best teachers are the ones who learn from their students; it's the same with mentoring.

In addition to the wonderful relationship that mentoring can be for you, you are also likely to develop a better staff overall. You will improve your own interpersonal skills (and who couldn't use that?), you will become a better leader, and best of all, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have made a really important contribution to the profession. To watch a mentee eventually take his or her place as leader can be incredibly gratifying. ●

Dumb is Smart: Learning from Our Worst Practices

By Christopher Hill

Myk Garn, Senior Advisor for Academic Affairs for the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, says the idea came to him a couple of years ago at a distance education conference. He recalls being impressed by the best practices being recommended by the presenters, by how smoothly and efficiently all their projects seemed to have gone. It led him to wonder if he were the only one that ever had everything go wrong with an initiative, ever had trouble seeing the solutions to a problem, ever had to stumble through a project all the way to the conclusion. That's when it hit him. These impressive presentations weren't telling the whole story. They had deleted the mistakes—the all-important mistakes that made the final success of their projects possible.

“I realized that people are going back through and rearranging things and making it all make sense in the end. My epiphany,” says Garn, “was that yeah I learn a lot from the things that go right, but I learn more when things go wrong. And I said you know, I should be doing a presentation on what went wrong, what were my worst practices. What are the worst things I do and what did I learn from them. And I thought, well, there may be other people out there who feel the same way.”

Garn talked over his insight with

an associate, Ed Klonoski, Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. Klonoski says, “What resonated with me is that I actually think that mistakes are a way to learn things. With entrepreneurial or new kinds of activities, the enemy is perfection. We need to be comfortable with mistakes and we really need to be good at fixing them. That's what you do with an entrepreneurial organization.”

Admitting to your mistakes

The two colleagues decided it would make a worthwhile presentation. They would ask people for their dumbest mistakes. The confessional nature of the session suggested a 12-Step program to them, and so they structured their presentation as a version of the 12-Step process. They called it “the 12 Steps from Dumb to Smart.”

Garn describes a session: “People would stand up and say, ‘Hello, my name is — whatever their name was — and I did something dumb.’ What I think is interesting is when this starts, everybody comes in there and they want to contribute. They've got a dumb thing they want to bring up.”

Klonoski says, “What was interesting at the session was that once people realized it was OK to go ahead and ‘fess up,’ we got some pretty interesting stories where people talked about some significant misjudgments and mistakes and, more interestingly,

what they learned from those misjudgments and mistakes.”

“They've been listening to all these other presentations that are so neatly wrapped up and it makes the people look so great and smart,” Garn says. Garn and Klonoski's process, on the other hand, allows people to do something different. “It lets you wrestle with where you are in a process that doesn't have that clear nice end in sight, and isn't all wrapped up.”

A few hands go up when Garn and Klonoski ask for dumb mistakes, and then more, until “people just can't get it in fast enough,” as Garn says. “People get stimulated by the other person's error,” Klonoski says. One by one, people stand up and admit they've made a dumb mistake. Description and discussion of the mistake ensues. The respondent is then required to say what they learned from their mistake. Then Klonoski types in a brief capsule description of the mistake on the Power Point and a description of the lesson learned from the mistake. Klonoski and Garn try to go from the specifics of the mistake to a generic description of the lesson learned.

“We take notes so that there will be something up there as people tell their stories. It's nice to give people a sense that you're saying back to them what they've said to you and we want to validate the sharing that was going on in the room.” Klonoski and Garn go first in the process to get things rolling and “to put our pain on the line,” as Garn says.

The meaning of mistakes

Klonoski believes that the success of their sessions has implications for higher education. According to him, higher education today is risk averse. “If we don't find the folks who are willing to take risks and help

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them understand the learning that arises from errors in judgment,” he says, “we can’t help higher ed much; and I think those of us who see learning as kind of a disruptive innovation have a responsibility to teach higher ed how to change.”

Klonoski says there’s a “metacognitive” element to their session — that is, it gets people to think about how they think. “People don’t reflect on what they’re doing and why they’re doing it,” he says. “They may accumulate best practices but they don’t always accumulate wisdom. All Myk and I are trying to say is its ok to think

hard about your screw-ups and in fact that’s probably where the most learning is occurring. For those of us in distance learning right now I would probably say that’s exactly where the learning is.”

Klonoski goes on: “Distance learning is going through changes that are more rapid and more significant than our big brothers in traditional higher ed. We’re building from small to large, we’re going through a rapid product improvement process, we’re growing our product out to new marketplaces. To do all that you’ve got to be real comfortable with trial and error

learning.”

Garn says that the critical element in this process isn’t so much the particular anecdotes as it is giving the attendees permission to tell their stories -- to confess that they learned something because they made a mistake or a misjudgment. “What was unique about this,” Garn says, “was that people began to feel empowered to tell stories about their own mistakes.”

“I think,” Garn reflects, “we hit a nerve someplace.” ●

Building a Distance Education Program: Key Questions to Answer

By Christopher Hill

When building, or running, an online program, there are certain big questions that need to be answered. Chief among them is what kind of program you want it to be. High tech or low tech? Professor intensive or adjunct-driven? What media will deliver the teaching? Will the students ever meet with their instructor, or each other?

Richard Magjuka is Chair of the Kelley Direct Online MBA Program at Indiana University. Indiana’s Kelley School of Business, now in its 86th year, is rated among America’s top 20 business schools. When Kelley decided to offer an online MBA program, called Kelley Direct, Magjuka had to answer those questions, and continues to ask some of them. For administrators who are contemplating an online program, he says, it’s vital to know the design and administrative issues you’ll

be confronted with.

Distance Education Report spoke with Magjuka in 2006 about how to bring those issues and decisions into focus.

DER: What are the design issues that need to be addressed in an online program?

Magjuka: In terms of pedagogy the single most important issue is what is going to be the center point or overall philosophy of your program. I’m not saying that it’s going to be an either/or trade but for some programs faculty interaction is the center point of pedagogy. And then for others it’s really the technology.

DER: Can you expand on that?

Magjuka: There seem to be two general strategies in terms of pedagogy. And one is, is it technology-

based or is it faculty involvement-based? You can have a comparatively low-tech program that is high in faculty interaction. If you have more of a technological model you might or might not decided to go the route of full-time faculty. Most programs decide not to.

I think that’s a really important difference — it’s part philosophy, part business model. I think it winds up creating very significant differences in how a program is designed and delivered.

DER: Can you give me some practical examples?

Magjuka: In Kelley Direct, every single course has faculty assigned to it as part of their normal teaching load. We don’t have a strategy where you

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have a single faculty and their efforts are leveraged where its like a master teacher with a lot of facilitators, instead it is one faculty to one section of students — 30 to 40 students — and the faculty is responsible for delivering within that course the amount of learning that he is comfortable with to give our school's imprint and say that's three credits of graduate education.

DER: How did you decide on a particular mode for Kelley Direct?

Magjuka: So much of how a program evolves is based in the particular circumstances in which it was created. And in my case, in Kelley Direct, we're a business school; the faculty are heavily involved in teaching case [studies] so it's not a surprise. What we have really emphasized is how to teach business cases in an online environment. So that's a big difference. Some of our best classes are remarkably text-based. The reason for that is because just like in a class, where people learn most is in the give and take with the instructor.

On the other hand, it's very common in engineering distance ed to have a model where a videotape is made of an in-class lecture, and then the videotape is quickly sent out to the students as a DVD, and then the method is watching the interaction captured on film.

That's fine but that is a very big difference in how we teach.

DER: What implications does that have for program administrators?

Magjuka: What flows from that is how you have to think about the administrative support for your instruction, depending on what the underlying philosophy is and where the bulk of your teaching effort will be. If it's taping in-class instruction, quickly editing it and sending it out,

well not surprisingly I can guarantee you they have a larger multimedia group than I do. We have one and half people total broadly construed as multimedia but we have a number of people involved in online course design with our faculty. It's a difference that sort of radiates in lots of other places.

DER: Are there other related decisions?

Magjuka: In terms of administrative issues, I think one that is very much related to this teaching issue is whether or not you're going to have opportunities for synchronous learning experiences. Are you going to decide to allow, as an example, students to have a blended option? It's tied very closely with your philosophy. I don't think you'd find too often that a place that is sending out CD's is really trying to create a broad set of curricular options that say you can attend a class or participate online or view it as a CD depending on where you are that day.

The University of Warwick [U.K.] is an example. They are really pushing administratively for a model of blended learning which says that at any point in time you can participate in the same class period on this topic in marketing in several different venues, depending on your availability and where you are geographically.

I think that this is an administrative issue and a pedagogical issue and I think it's an underlying philosophical issue. Is your program going to be pushing toward the establishment of some sort of standardized delivery across distribution channels, which would allow for this notion of a blended program, or are you really going to be exclusively distance?

I think programs really differ in the extent to which they have a mobile set of floating residential experiences or do they have multiple locations that they could run this from.

In the purely distance model, especially if its going the high tech route, it is way more likely that you can run that without a very large contribution from tenure track faculty. So to me that's more of a leverage strategy. How to get more teaching out of your faculty.

Blending is more of a strategy about the next level of evolution in how we're going to teach in this world. Which, by the way, might mean that you have more faculty involved as you grow, rather than just getting more subsidiary outcomes from what you are currently doing. So its sort of like an attitude, it's sort of like a philosophy, it's also a business model. A business model for the blended says, "Five years from now, this is how we'll be teaching." The leverage model is like saying, "Look we only have x amount of time and resources. This is a very efficient way of leveraging what we already do."

The lower tech model uses the web, but first and foremost is interaction between student and faculty member. Power Point, Podcast, video streams are all secondary. The bulk of the instruction is carried by the interaction between faculty and student. Whereas the high tech model truly relies on putting a much greater percentage of the learning on the screen.

DER: What other questions do administrators need to answer?

Magjuka: If I were starting a program now I'd really be asking the question of whether or not it's necessary to make a significant investment in developing my own support capabilities. The old "make-or-buy" question.

If I were asked to go to a university and create an MBA program launch, one possibility is that you could really do it with a minimal amount of

overhead. Just purchase [the infrastructure] through some kind of licensing agreement — the LMS support, the orientation materials, the call center support, the faculty development — you can buy that now. Unlike when I started in 1999, it's not like you have to create everything on your own. That's a key design issue now.

DER: What considerations are administrators likely to overlook?

Magjuka: I think in online education, administrators have underappreciated the potential impact of the

blended option. If you think about five years from today and think about the trends in student preferences for their education, the question is how much face-to-face instruction will be expected. If your answer is, as it is in graduate professional education, "I'd love to meet once a month, and let's get the rest of it done online, if that," then what is it going to look like five years from now? If that's the case, the last design issue I would really like to ask people to consider today is what am I designing a program for, what is the future that I'm envisioning here?

Because it'll take you two years to

get ramped up with your program, and if you say to yourself that five years from now I see in my market a great convergence between programs, be it residential or weekend or online, then as a design issue, from an administrative point of view, from a strategic point of view, you should really just start thinking with that future in mind, and start designing. And, institutionally, start working on creating the kind of program that you think you're going to wind up having five years from now anyway. ●

Seeing Where the Distance Education Opportunities Lie

By Christopher Hill

The decision to launch a new online program is a daunting one. But it can be made easier by asking the right questions and getting the necessary answers. Gloria Pickar, Ed.D., president of Compass Knowledge Group, has helped numerous institutions consider the pro's and con's of creating a new program. Compass Knowledge Group partners with non-profit institutions to determine if the market and the institution are both ready for the successful launch of a new program.

Distance Education Report spoke with her about the basics that an institution should know as it goes into the decision-making process. Make sure audience and institution are ready, she says. Start by considering the three major areas to look at when contemplating a new program: marketplace, curriculum and instruction,

and infrastructure.

Marketplace

The evaluation of your audience is by far the most important step in the assessment process. You should begin by developing an audience profile. This includes the size of your prospective audience; how it is likely to grow or not grow in the near future; and what is their median income.

One of Pickar's key concepts is what she calls the input and output occupations. By this she means the profession and job level at which your prospective students will enter the program (input); and the professional and job level for which the program will prepare them (output). For instance, the input occupations may be in police or corrections at the entry level. The output may still be

police or corrections generally, but specifically probation or parole work at the management level.

Another example: If you are considering offering a bachelor's degree in clinical lab work compare the input position — lab assistant, for instance — and what salary that position pays, with the potential output position — for instance a medical technician — and the salary that your prospective student can anticipate.

The differential between input and output will begin to show the viability of your proposed program. While you are considering the input and output, also consider whether or not the industry growth rate is higher than the national average.

Next, look at what Pickar calls demand drivers. What will drive

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people to your program? What is the current industry demand for the profession and degree you will be offering? What are the individual drivers? What will “pull you into that degree?” as Pickar says. Some factors might be the need for licensure or certification. Or a big difference between input and output salaries. The desire for professional parity may be a driver, for example there may be new documentation or certification required in a certain field that practitioners will need to remain competitive.

Audience accessibility

The next part of studying your prospective market is to gauge their accessibility. Can you locate them and get your marketing message through to them? Is the audience homogenous — easy to speak to as one group? The more homogenous, the easier your job will be. Will direct marketing and print media reach them? Look at the internet for key word searches that will bring up your program. Are there portals that you can be linked to?

Of course you need to consider your competition. Typically the major competition will be for-profit schools. Build a “competitive set” of other regionally accredited institutions. Look at the comparisons between their programs and yours. Look at the competitive advantages of your program.

Decide how you’re going to set tuition. Pickar recommends that your tuition neither be the highest or the lowest among your competitive set. Decide if you are going to have a residency requirement.

Curriculum and instruction

Curriculum and instruction are the next major elements to consider as you make your decision.

Can the curriculum be delivered in a scalable model? Do you need to offer every course every term? It can be a real advantage if you don’t have to have faculty time absorbed by teaching every course every term. Do you have enough faculty to teach all the students that you expect? Can you find enough?

The evaluation of your audience is by far the most important step in the assessment process. You should begin by developing an audience profile. This includes the size of your prospective audience; how it is likely to grow or not grow in the near future; and what is their median income.

Is the program structured so that the students can complete it in a reasonable amount of time? If your online program is targeted toward working, professional adults, are your admission requirements flexible enough to accommodate them?

Infrastructure

The third set of items to be evaluated has to do with the infrastructure of the program. Will you be able to provide online student services? Are you set up to do enrollment tracking? Will you be able to provide tech support for faculty? Can you run a 24/7 help desk? Who will train and support your faculty?

How will your bookstore work

online? Are you set up to conduct e-commerce? Will students be able to make purchases online?

As you start your recruitment efforts, will you be able to respond to an enquiry in 24 hours?

Can you create an online orientation? Will the students know how to participate? Do they have all the pieces? Are your students comfortable with technology? Consider building students into small learning communities of 15 to 25.

Think about assigning a retention specialist to support your students. Someone to advocate for the students. Someone who, if the textbooks haven’t arrived by the time the class starts, or any other snafu occurs, they can advocate for the students and be responsible for resolving the problem.

Pickar suggests the assessment process can be done in four to six weeks. The next step is to put a marketing plan in place. She recommends allowing six months for marketing before you open the e-doors. ●

Do Administrative Practices Determine Enrollment Success?

By Mary Lou Santovec

Many of the studies conducted on distance education programs, over the years, have focused on the correlation between faculty and/or course quality and program success. There have been few that looked at the relationship between the quality of program administration and success as measured in increased enrollment. And what organizational structure best contributes to that success? How does the quality of administrators' communication impact success, if at all?

These are the questions that Zachary Tippetts, the former webmaster/online training specialist for the Substitute Teacher's Institute at Utah State University and now a doctoral student there, and his colleague Byron Burnham, looked at. The duo conducted a study analyzing the quality of administrative practices, specifically communication quality, and the practices' contribution to increased enrollment. They also compared organizational structures to determine if any one was better than another in facilitating success.

Relating Practices to Outcomes

The Sloan Foundation lists administrative issues as one of its five pillars of success. Both fiscal concerns and communication fall under this pillar. Administrators who manage costs, increase enrollment and control expenses understand how practice and outcomes are related.

Applying research from the business world that shows relationships

between communication and success, Tippetts and Burnham looked for any correlation between good communication practices among administrators and rising online enrollment numbers.

Surveying key individuals

For the communications practices portion of the study, the duo selected institutional members of the University Continuing Education Association. They surveyed key individuals in online and continuing education at association schools.

The two-part survey was sent to two distinct groups. The first part, a paper-based survey developed specifically for this study, went to all UCEA institutional contacts.

Questions concerning growth, organizational structure, faculty involvement and other demographic information about the school were included in the instrument.

Those individuals were also asked to participate in the second part of the survey, an online version of Down's and Hazen's Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). This questionnaire, which includes sections on superior/subordinate relationships, can be used to measure communication quality and has the advantage of relating to productivity or success.

The campus contacts were then asked to distribute instructions for the same online survey to individuals holding one of five specific titles at their institutions. Those receiving the instructions included the provost, chief information officer, director of

continuing education, the leading library personnel responsible for online learning support and director of faculty training.

A dean or department head responsible for administering one part of the distance education program also received the instructions. "With the exception of deans and department heads, there is typically only one such position per institution," the duo noted. "It was up to the institutions to choose the representative from among the deans and department heads."

The original CSQ focuses on both hierarchical and overall communication satisfaction. Questions were added that focused on the practice of communication between administrative peers.

Despite good intentions, the paper survey's response rate didn't meet the duo's expectations of 30 percent. Only 78 of 375 targeted institutions responded for a response rate of 20 percent. "Of these, 19 schools (24 percent) reported no significant online activity associated with continuing education at their institutions," Tippetts and Burnham noted. Conclusions were drawn from the remaining 15.7 percent.

Carnegie I institutions responded in far greater numbers than represented in the initial population, with 40 percent of the continuing education contacts completing the surveys. Those with the fewest responses (zero), were baccalaureate/associate's colleges. Schools with between 10,000 and 19,000 students had the greatest number of responses at 23.

Statistics for enrollment increases over the past year showed an average growth across institutions of 35 percent. But the real surprise came when the duo looked at five-year growth. Overall growth across institutions came in at a whopping 437 percent over five years with the largest growth, 879 percent, occurring in schools with 10,000 to 19,000

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students.

The response rate for the CSQ was even lower than for the paper-based survey. Only 112 online questionnaires were filled out, representing 60 institutions. Of those filling out the survey, the director of continuing education and the director of faculty training had the highest response rates.

After analyzing the responses, Tippetts and Burnham discovered a statistically significant correlation of .327 between communication quality and enrollment growth. “Its effect size was slightly over 10 percent meaning that communication quality is an area where administrators can look for indicators of the growth or lack thereof for their programs,” noted the duo.

Interestingly, in the comment section of the CSQ, more than 40 percent of respondents voiced concern about top-down communication from top administrators. Other respondents

requested more and better communication overall from their bosses.

Also as part of the same study, the duo looked at Mintzberg’s organizational structures: simple structure, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisionalized form and adhocracy for any correlation between a particular structure and success.

“Among the target institutions there were no significant benefits derived from one structure over another,” said Tippetts. “However, in the last six years, structures have changed at 20 percent of the institutions. Considering how little change is said to have occurred in the last 100 years, this seems to be an important finding.”

They also compared the different structures with the age of a program. “One relatively newer institution (it had been in place only 14 years), was the only institution using an adhocracy,” said Tippetts. “Adhocracies are contractor-based programs. In this case it was likely

that faculty were contracted to teach the classes, and not full-time faculty.”

In terms of separateness or autonomy of online units, only 14 percent of online programs hire their own faculty and only 16 percent define their faculty roles and responsibilities. “In other words, for the most part, traditional institutions and their power structures are in place,” he added.

There also doesn’t seem to be a ‘best’ institutional structure. “There are only better practices within institutions,” said Tippetts. “Among the items recommended are communication of strategic direction and more effective management communication.”

While the study did not show a direct cause and effect of better communication equals increased enrollment, Tippetts’s and Burnham’s work shows that good communication can positively influence enrollment growth. ●

Eight Steps to On-Campus/Online Parity

By Christopher Hill

How can you assure parity between a distance program and its face-to-face counterpart? Is it possible to guarantee identical outcomes with two such different means of delivery? In some programs, some educators may settle for a rough equivalence. But what about when parity of outcomes is absolutely essential? What about a discipline like pharmacy, where the presence or absence of certain competencies can be life and death matters? Creighton University offers an online pharmacy degree. The accrediting body, the American Council on Pharmacy

Education, visited Creighton five times within the first two years of the implementation of the program. Each time, they asked, How are you going to establish parity? The program needed to produce the same set of competencies that their traditional program did.

Naser Alsharif, associate professor on the pharmacy faculty at Creighton University, studied the relative parity of the online and face-to-face versions of the same course—The Chemical Basis of Drug Action—in Creighton’s Pharm.D. program. His finding? Parity is possible, but it needs a major institutional commitment to ensure the

equality of outcomes that his program demanded. Here are Creighton’s steps toward parity.

1. Admissions: Parity begins with the admissions process. You need to look at admission criteria—what type of students will do best in an online program? What requirements do you have of your online students? Consider basics like computer proficiency. Consider where they graduated. Have they taken courses online before, what is their academic maturity level, Do

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they possess time management skills?

“Certainly we look at the admission criteria as a guide in terms of what type of student we enter into our on-campus and our web programs. But the criteria are different and the mode of delivery and the learning is different. And the students are different. The average age of the students in our web pathway is 33 compared to 21 or 22 in our on-campus program.”

2. Planning: You have to be thinking about this from day one—how you’re going to enhance and optimize parity for two student cohorts. The academic affairs office and the office of student affairs are critical in organizing the new program.

3. Training: Online instructors need special training to achieve parity with their on-campus counterparts. Creighton’s pharmacy program takes advantage of the school’s office of faculty development and assessment. Training is given to both on-campus and online teachers in pedagogy, technology, the scholarship of teaching and assessment, and how to do all this online. There are also fellowships offered to the faculty that can lead to certification as online teachers.

Creighton has an office of information technology and their role is critical. They acquire the best technology that is available, but more important, they train the faculty to use it.

Online students must have adequate training as well. Students in the Creighton distance Pharm.D. program have an on-campus week of training and orientation at the start of the program. They are trained on any software that the faculty may utilize, including but not limited to Excel, PowerPoint, FrontPage, discussion folders, Outlook and iLink.

4. The website: In achieving parity, standardization of the course website and how students access course content is particularly important. Are the course websites standardized in a way where students both on campus and online use the same website and get the same information?

5. Ability-based outcomes: The Creighton Pharm.D program is abilities-based. “We need our students to be able to do certain things by the time they finish each course,” as Alsharif says. The pharmacy faculty agreed that for parity between the two student cohorts, course objectives in terms of learned abilities had to be the same—that by the time the students finished the course both cohorts have to meet the same abilities-based outcomes. “So if we say my course will promote critical thinking, or my course will promote communications skills, or my course will teach pharmaceutical decision-making, it has to do that for both cohorts. You cannot have an ability-based outcome for the web students that’s different from the campus students.”

6. An activity grid: To compare campus-based and online programs, the Creighton pharmacy department created what they call an activity grid. The activity grid lists all the activities that the on-campus students will engage in and asks how they will create the equivalent learning opportunity for the web students.

For example: In the first year of the program, on-campus students do a case study and accompanying Power Point presentation. There was an empty space on the activity grid for its online equivalent. The campus group prepares for it for about three weeks, presents it for about 20 minutes in front of the class, and then fields questions. For the web equivalent, the online students also did the case study, but they were asked to develop discussions surrounding that case

including different scenarios. They needed to publish that case online on the due date and then facilitate discussion online.

7. Grade distribution: You will need to look at quizzes and exam averages and at letter-grade distribution to see if there are significant differences between the on-campus and online cohorts.

The Creighton researchers believe that measured in terms of class performance the results are quite close. An average of test and quiz scores in the spring of 2006 showed class performance at 80.3 percent on campus to 82.9 online. Results, by the researcher’s standards, that can be called consistent.

Alsharif admits that in terms of the letter grade distribution, there is a difference between Creighton’s on-campus and online programs. The Creighton researchers are working on reconciling the differences, factor by factor.

If research does show significant differences, you need to go through piece by piece reviewing components of the course—from the delivery method, to handouts, quizzes, labs, lectures, learning experiences, etc. The course has to be analyzed for ways to bring students in the underperforming program up to the level of the other. Should you do more videos, should you do more tutorials, should you do more capturing of certain content? Can the online students see and visualize everything that the on-campus students can?

8. Student perceptions: The other thing that researchers can look at is student perception based on course and instructor evaluations. You can even, as Creighton did, hold focus groups with the students. In this context, one thing that is a great help is having several years of evaluations

so that you can observe trends. Looking at course evaluations, see if any general themes emerge that are common to both the online and the on-campus cohorts. This might be seen in different types of student responses: They may say that the

courses (in both programs) are well-organized, the notes are well-written, and the courses are highly interactive. If themes like that come up for both groups, that is “proof of parity” Alsharif says. “If those themes are the same from both student cohorts that’s fantastic, that is evidence you’re doing a good job.”

The bottom line is that it’s impossible to guarantee 100 percent performance and learning parity. But you can always seek to optimize and enhance it by applying some of these insights from Creighton. ●

Creating a Business Continuity Plan for Your Distance Education Program

By Christopher Hill

We all saw what Hurricane Katrina did to education in Louisiana. Do you know what you would do when disaster strikes your distance education program? Disaster can take many forms, and an event that can shut you down doesn’t have to be nearly as dramatic as a hurricane. A relatively minor hardware malfunction can put you out of business. And you have a student body who is just a click away from going with another provider if you can’t fix the problem fast enough.

When *Distance Education Report* spoke with John Orlando, instructional resource manager at the Norwich University School of Graduate Studies, he discussed why it’s crucial for you to have a business continuity plan for your program. And why putting an effective plan in place might be a bigger job than you think.

Distance Education Report: Does every distance education program need a continuity plan, or just those

in high risk areas?

John Orlando: I really think they all need continuity plans because all organizations are in recognized risk groups. There are risks that affect any organization. Granted, the ones that we hear about are hurricanes, fire, et cetera. But the major risks are not the flashy things you read about in the newspaper. The major risks out there, numerically in terms of what brings down businesses, are not terrorism or hurricanes. They’re the common everyday events.

DER: Such as?

ORLANDO: The number one event that affects business continuity is hardware failure. Number two is weather-related incidents, including storms that kill power. Any business has to worry about hardware failure. Any business needs to worry about fire or losing power.

The major events, the ones that are threats to any organization, are common events that really are universal. So I would say for that reason that any distance organization

should have a continuity plan just as any organization should. It’s particularly important for distance education programs to have a continuity plan in place, more so than for residential programs for a number of reasons.

DER: What are some of those reasons?

ORLANDO: One is, in a residential program, if the campus shuts down or loses power for a few days, the students probably aren’t going to go elsewhere. Our distance students are out there in the world and we have as many competitors as there are other distance programs. Our competitors are only a mouse click away. To go to a competitor, they don’t have to move, they don’t have to go through all the effort of relocating. They can just get fed up and say “Forget it, I’m going to the University of Phoenix.” Distance students are much easier to lose.

They’re more demanding of services, especially adult students.

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Adult students very much want value for their education. And certainly we've found even when we have relatively small connectivity issues, the servers go down for three hours, you hear about it. If it happens a couple of times, people start saying "I'm not happy about the reliability here" and they start to look elsewhere. Even something like that, where you think well, that's a minor inconvenience, for some reason people are bothered by those minor inconveniences. When you discover that the e-mail at work is down for three hours, you think you might as well go home. It bothers our students. It's much easier for a distance program to lose its students.

Also, I think distance education in a traditional university setting is not thought of as important as residential education, and for that reason a distance program might be easier to cut. If it does have a problem because of poor service, they have low enrollment, they maybe lose money for one or two years, the university's more likely to say, we're going to get out of the market, we were never really confident to begin with.

DER: What's the first step?

ORLANDO: The business impact analysis is the initial stage of a planning process. It's part of what prepares the planner to know what needs to be done in response to various scenarios. The idea is, you take a look at what could happen to you and what would be the outcome of those things happening to you. So for instance, if there's a fire at your building what would happen? You think to yourself, OK a fire, we may be out of that building for two to three weeks, what would be the impact of that. That would be a

major impact — it would be very disruptive. Because of it, having some response mechanism or a second place that we can go may be the number one priority—the first area to be addressed in the plan, the first place to put our resources.

Going further down might be something like what would happen if we lost our student records. That might be a little less disruptive because student records are needed for transcript requests which can generally be put on hold for a few weeks. That's less important than the impact of fire on a building that causes you to lose your building. The business impact analysis takes a look at the impact of various events on your business and ranks them from most to zero. It guides you in determining where priorities should be in preparing for different events. Ideally a full-fledged business impact analysis goes so far as to put a monetary value on each event.

A hypothetical case: Amazon.com does all their selling through their website. Let's imagine they had one server. And that server could go down. They may decide it'll take five days to replace the server. And it actually does take a while to replace a server, more than people think. They may say, we do five million dollars worth of business a day; if the server takes five days to replace, that event could cost of \$25 million dollars. And then they ask, how likely is that event? Let's imagine they say there's about a 20 percent chance of that happening every year. So hypothetically we would expect it to happen about once every five years. With that, they would say, "This is a \$25 million event, we would expect it to happen once every five years, so we can expect to lose, on average, \$5 million a year from this event. Which means that we can justify, from a business standpoint,

spending up to \$5 million a year to prevent it."

That's in principle how a business analysis goes; it reduces everything to dollars and cents. I personally think that's hard to do. Some of the necessary information is simply not out there. People just don't know what the likelihood is of the air conditioner dying in the server room is. Going that far is very hard to do. So what you really have to do is say what's really serious. Losing our classroom is really serious. That's how we deliver our education. Losing our classroom for more than one or two days is going to make a lot of people go bye-bye — we're going to lose a lot of students. So it's really important to institute a process so that we won't lose our classroom. That would be more of a real example, from a distance education unit's standpoint.

DER: What's the biggest difficulty in instituting a continuity plan?

ORLANDO: The biggest issue is one that private organizations run into as well. The biggest issue is really getting buy-in from the organization itself. On a couple of different levels. One on the individual level — it's hard to get people to see the importance of doing things like doing data backup on their computer, reading the business continuity plan, doing fire drill practices, doing all those preparation things you need to do when in fact, from their position,, you're preparing them for an event that may never happen. And they think of it as a nuisance, something that takes away from their productivity. So getting buy-in from the people within the distance education unity is one.

And then especially, you need buy-in from the other units around it. A

distance education business continuity plan will require the cooperation of the other units in the university. First and foremost would be the IT unit. Because that's probably the weakest link, the spot where it's going to break — as I've said, hardware failure is the number one issue. Distance education units deliver their education through IT so IT is the most important area. So you're going to need to work with IT to find out what are our backup systems if the servers go down? How will we notify students when the servers go down? So getting cooperation from IT is important.

DER: What if your entire facility is unusable?

ORLANDO: As far as physical threats like fire, et cetera, you need to work out collaborations or prior agreements with your facilities people. For instance, at Norwich University, if there's a fire or anything that would cause us to have to evacuate the building that our distance education unit is in, we have a prior agreement that we will move to a computer lab in the library, and we will start working from there. We've gone through and tested the computers and we know that they have to be reconfigured in a certain way to fit our needs. And essentially we can kick the students off them. But we needed that agreement ahead of time. We can't wait until the event happens to go over to the library and say, "We're here!" So you need prior agreements from other units around the distance education unit to provide the support services. That can be a little problematic because you're preparing for an event that may never happen. Units may simply not want to extend themselves for other units. There's kind of a silo effect in education. If I'm a library

and I feel my responsibility is to serve the students, I may be reluctant to say I'm willing to kick all the students out. Getting those agreements from the other divisions is also a big issue.

A lot of it is simply the planning part — it's really not about buying stuff. There are certain things you have to spend money on in order to physically protect yourself. You may have to put in security measures in the building to prevent theft, obviously fire suppression. But most of a business continuity plan doesn't involve spending money. It involves spending time — to get agreements, to get people to understand what to do in certain situations. I don't think we've spent more than a couple of hundred dollars on our plan. I think we had to fix a few broken locks. It's basically getting the collaboration and cooperation of others and convincing them that it's important.

DER: Does being part of a bigger institution like a university give you any continuity advantages?

ORLANDO: One benefit that a distance education unit has over a private company is that it can draw off the wider institution's resources. In the example I just gave, if something happened to our unit downtown, we would move to the library. If it's a long-term disruption and we have to be out of our building for weeks or months, we have an agreement with facilities that there are two specific classrooms that they will essentially convert to offices for us. They're already wired for Internet connectivity, they're wired for telephone connectivity, they know where the office equipment would be, and we have a list of the office equipment that would get moved in. For a private company, when it develops a business continuity plan, let's imagine it has 100 employees in one building, they have to worry

about where they would go if the building burnt down or became unusable. They usually have to spend more money. They have to get an agreement with another industry, if they have space available that they may have to rent on an ongoing basis. They have what are called 'hot sites' for IT equipment which are sites where you literally have servers and computers waiting for you. They can just flick the switch. And all that costs a lot of money. So the good thing about a distance education unit is that it can use the university's wider resources. And because of that you do not need to spend much money on it

DER: Where do you find out how to implement a plan?

ORLANDO: The first step would be just to get education on what is needed. There are a few websites where you can get information on planning. What a business continuity plan looks like, examples of plans, things like that. The first thing you have to do is assign somebody the responsibility of pushing this through. That person has to know about continuity planning if they're not already a continuity consultant. Most universities don't have these people just lying around. Somebody's going to have to get educated on this. So you're probably going to have to assign somebody the responsibility of pushing it forward, then allow them the time to get the information and the education they need. Then the administrator has to make it known to whoever the plan affects that he or she is behind the plan and that there's an expectation that they'll cooperate. So if the administrator's the dean of a distance education unit, the administrator has to stand behind the planning process to his or her own people. Call a meeting and say,

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“This is what we’re going to do.” And at the same time that administrator is going to have to at least help to make the connections with the other units around the university. The vice president of operations who’s probably in charge of facilities; the IT unit; security. Help build those connections at a high enough level that the individual who’s actually charged with writing that plan can get the cooperation he or she needs. And then basically it’s letting them loose and allowing them to go up through the planning process and standing behind things like this and the exercises that also need to be done as part of the planning.

DER: *Can you outsource the creation of a plan? Are there consultants who will do it for you?*

ORLANDO: There are a variety of private organizations that do continuity planning. There are companies that do this consulting work and they usually divide their services up in a couple of different ways. One service is that they can come in and do a complete plan for you. And the second service is that they can do certain parts of the plan. And some of these companies can actually provide the support for IT backup themselves. An example is SunGard — they will not only help you develop a continuity plan, but you can sign a contract with them and they will have their own servers to create a hot site for you. Now that’s going to cost money, and the consultants are quite expensive.

DER: *How can you plan for all the different circumstances that may affect your operation?*

ORLANDO: If you try to look at everything that may happen to you, there’s so many of them that you’ll probably have a hard time getting a

handle on each of them. There could be a fire at your office. There could be a malicious attack at your office. There could be water damage. There could be a lightning strike. If you go through all the possibilities, you can just keep rolling, until you realize, we’re not even going to think of all the possibilities. In fact, the things that often shut people down are the things you never would have imagined. So what you do is you get away from thinking of the causes that could shut us down, and rather think terms of outcomes. So a fire or a lightning strike or a loss of power at our offices would all have the same effect, they would all shut down our offices, and cause us to have to go somewhere else.

So in the planning process, you don’t delineate events by saying what do we do if there’s a fire or a lightning strike or a malicious attack. What you do say is, ‘what do we do if the office is a loss?’ for whatever reason. And once you start thinking in those terms, it radically limits the number of possible scenarios you have to cover.

So in our own business continuity plan, I think we have about 10 scenarios. And that’s far less than the hundred that you could think of. It’s like, what happens if our office is lost? What happens if our email is lost? What happens if the IT system is lost? What happens if our office is lost and whatever happens to make our office lost also makes the campus lost, like in New Orleans with Katrina?

DER: *Once you have your plan, how do you implement it?*

ORLANDO: Implementation involves a couple things. It goes back to this issue of buy-in. It’s helpful to involve more people in the planning process because then you get natural buy-in. If people were actually part of the process of creating the plan,

they’re more likely to stand behind it. They’re more likely to do the procedures. So my advice is that each business area — admissions, marketing, et cetera — have a representative that’s assigned to sit on the committee that develops the plan. The benefit it has is that once this plan is created those people can help go out to their own division and help discuss the need for the policy and procedures. And watch to make sure they’re doing it.

Business continuity plans can very easily become shelfware. You create a plan, you send it to everybody, they shelve it and then forget about it. You really need to test the processes, actually go through a sample fire drill, or a drill for other events that could happen, Go through the process of testing. We took five or six people and we called IT and said we’re going to see what happens if we go and use the library computers. So we went down there, started them up and started testing which of the functions we could get into. IT said we’ll make a script of how to get into the various sites you have to get into. A lot of times you develop a plan and you don’t do the testing. After presenting the policies and procedures you really have to test them. And then you have to go back to it once a year to see what’s changed—especially distance education units, they change quickly, new technology comes along. So the plan has to be revised probably on a yearly basis. ●

Integrating Distance Education Programs into the Institution

By Christopher Hill

Do you ever feel that your distance education program sits at the margins of your institution? Feel like a bit of an afterthought? Well, you're not alone, says Maggie Murdock, Associate Vice President and Dean of the Outreach School at the University of Wyoming. The folks who run distance education programs often feel that they're an add-on to their institutions, not quite part of the central mission of the school.

"I can think of times in my experience, in my university when we were seen as necessary but as a nuisance," Murdock says. Distance educators have a different kind of student, who is sometimes not easily absorbed into the institution's system of registration and record-keeping. When an institution starts to get into distance education, it finds new and strange demands made regarding things like registration and financial aid.

"I think if I were to look at it proportionately, more [outreach units] do consider themselves at the fringe. Just listening to people talk, they often talk in terms of us and them," Murdock says. "Sometimes we joke that we used to be a hobby. But now, and people in other distance education programs would tell you the same, this is where growth in the university is. So when you've got the headcount, and you're bringing in money, you become much more to the university."

Any way it's approached, the relationship between an outreach unit and

the central institution is going to be complicated, in terms of financing, technology sharing, student services and so on. But there are ways around that, Murdock says.

The three stages of integration

Murdock believes there are three basic kinds of relationship between a distance education unit and the institution to which it belongs. One is isolation. Though the main institution may not make it explicit, the distance unit is essentially seen as a separate entity, added on to the school's main mission of educating students on campus.

Another possibility is integration — where the distance program is considered as an equal and legitimate partner to the other departments in the institution, and central to the university's mission.

In between those two is the least satisfactory condition, one that Murdock calls hybridization — where the distance education unit is only partly integrated into the institution, where responsibilities are fuzzily delineated and initiatives are duplicated between the distance unit and the university. In her words, "Duplication is produced by an unorganized combination of the efforts of individual outreach players and the emergence of an institutional outreach system."

Murdock thinks of her three options not as separate, distinct conditions but as points on a continuum.

The benefits of being isolated

She points out that isolation can have its compensations. "Even though I don't believe isolation is a good place to be, it can be pretty fun. Because small groups are really very creative, and the exposure to the institution is really pretty minimal." She uses her own outreach unit as an example: "Twenty-five years ago, nobody gave us any money. We had to be clever and we also had to be quite collegial. So even though I wouldn't say those were the good old days, there was a different kind of feeling we had when I was in the outreach center which was about 150 miles away from the main campus. They let people go off on their own and be creative."

The hybrid stage is where you encounter the dangers of redundancy. "The most costly and the least fun part of the continuum is the hybrid stage," Murdock warns. "Because you've got lots of people running around doing the same thing and sort of falling over one another and they're spending the university's resources in kind of a redundant way. Many people are buying equipment or duplicate equipment. Registrations aren't centralized. So for me that's the least desirable place to be. It's costly and it's really less fun because you don't know who is doing what."

In the hybrid stage institutions may give an implicit OK to departments to start up outreach projects on their own, not coordinated with the outreach unit, creating competing outreach efforts in the same institution. "The university will say, 'Yeah, why don't you go out on your own?' and sometimes people will say we're going to do this outreach stuff because we see this as a way to make money."

One of the particular areas of redundancy is in the purchase of technology.

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“Everybody’s going out and buying [equipment] and they’re spending a lot of resources — ‘Hey this video conference stuff is pretty cool, why don’t we get our own?’ Everyone then goes out on their own and buys a different system, and none of the equipment talks to one another, so instead of having one big system you have a bunch of little systems.”

Financial integration: Pros and cons

One of the critical questions about integration is whether or not to have your finances integrated with the university’s. Murdock’s position seems paradoxical at first — she believes overall integration is better served by having your financing remain separate from the institution. “In my own view, it’s really helpful to generate your own funds. Because if you’re just getting regular funding like any other part of the university then you have X amount of dollars and that’s all you have. It takes away that entrepreneurial spirit which I think makes these kinds of units very successful.”

Integrating revenue streams also takes away a “big carrot” or bargaining chip in one’s dealing with other university departments. “We can say to the departments we can transfer some money over to you. We used to say we’ll give you X amount of money and you’ll give us X amount of classes. What we’d like to get to is to be able to say, ‘Well, we’re generating some money, here’s a chunk of money, use it to support outreach.’ I think it really does help you to have flexible funding

— we see it as investment capital and it sure gets people interested.”

When integrated, outreach units can serve as the technical experts of the university. On the other hand,

when they’re not integrated technical redundancies and foul-ups can occur. “When you get those ‘experts’ saying, ‘Oh we could do this, it’s pretty easy,’ you can have problems,” Murdock says. An example she gives is when a college went out and bought a lot of audio equipment that was the exciting technology at the time. “But they bought it all from Radio Shack,” she says. “In some of the outreach areas they were saying we can’t hear anything,” Murdock recalls. “So we were secretly loaning [the other department] the use of our equipment.”

The engineers and technicians in Murdock’s outreach unit do a lot of research and they know what to buy that will work. “That investment in research and technology is one of the best investments we make,” Murdock states. “When money comes along, a grant or something, we know exactly what we want to buy and exactly where we’re going to put it. That doesn’t happen when your main focus is academic. You don’t get the knowledge of the technicians when you’re an academic college.”

Moving toward integration

So how do you move from isolation, or hybridization, to integration? One way is to “pretend” you belong, as Murdock puts it. “Some of that has to do with how the upper parts of the university, the administration, will characterize the unit. Your own attitude can affect that. So if in fact the director of the unit is included in decision-making groups like the dean’s council, that will be quite helpful,” she says. Another way is to keep making compacts and partnerships within the institution, generally making yourself indispensable. If your equipment always works, if people know they can count on you for technical assistance, you will gradually become more a part the

inner circles of planning.

As changes come to the institution, opportunities can arise. “For example,” Murdock says, “we’ve gone through a change from one student information system to a new one. The old one had the outreach institution as a tack-on. When we planned this new student system, everything in outreach was integrated. We’re not totally integrated yet, we still do a few things differently, but saying, ‘Yeah, why don’t you get us in on the ground floor instead of tacking us on later?’ really helps. Being in command of data helps, too, being able to say, this is how many students are being brought into the university through your programs. I think it’s very good to become a data driven unit in the early stages.

Murdock ends on a note of caution: “I can tell you that unless the university’s administration believes in this, it’s pretty tough. I’d say almost impossible.”

How do you know, then, if you’ve been successful in integrating your program into the institution? “It can be pretty hard to measure,” Murdock admits. “But when I sit in a dean’s meeting or I sit in an executive council meeting with the vice president, and I’m not the one bringing up outreach, that it’s the dean of a college or another vice president, saying, ‘Oh we need to be doing this,’ then you know you’ve been successful. Because you aren’t carrying all the water, you’ve got some other people to carry the water for you. If you can get partners who believe in you, then you can put pressure on an administration who may not be as interested as you are.”



The Distance Learning Tipping Point: The Moment that Transforms an Institution

By Christopher Hill

The “tipping point” is the point where individual occurrences “spread by small changes that reproduce themselves and expand in geometric progression, grow bigger until they reach a critical mass.” You can see the tipping point effect at work in a wide variety of settings, from large demographic changes to kids buying iPods. What does this have to do with distance education? The idea of the tipping point applies to the long-term acceptance of distance education within an institution, making it a permanent or even dominant part of the institution.

If you want your school to be identified with distance education there’s a lot to be learned by studying the idea of a tipping point. And there’s some things to be learned even if you don’t. In either case, your path up to the tipping point should be a conscious one, says Claudine SchWeber, Chair of the Doctor of Management Program at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), or you may find yourself with more distance education than you can handle.

SchWeber has been making a science out of predicting the moment that an institution has tipped into being a primarily online institution. This is what she’s come up with:

Small changes replicate > Critical Mass(CrM) $rM + 1 =$ alteration of equilibrium > tips the system --38-40% x (online enrollments) tips the system

into an epidemic (overwhelming force for change).

Tipping too fast

In other words, individual instances of the phenomenon i.e., students enrolling in online courses, grows until a critical mass is reached, at which point you only need the smallest additional weight—symbolized here by the number one—to tip the system. This will happen when about 38 to 40 percent of the enrollees are online.

“I’m not a statistician,” SchWeber says, “but people ask me ‘how do you know when you’ve gotten to it?’ I was trying to figure out if you could do that.”

There are risks in the tipping process—you have to watch how you build to your critical mass. SchWeber suggests you watch three indicators at your institution—enrollments, faculty involvement and infrastructure. If the tipping point is your goal, you need to have all three moving upwards together at something like the same rate, supporting each other.

“Student enrollment in online classes are the easiest data to track and to quantify,” SchWeber says. “When that hits 38-40 percent, I’m arguing that that institution has tipped. And that means the other two parts have to be in sync.” For instance, if your enrollments are booming but you don’t have enough faculty, or you don’t have very good technical

support, (your system’s always crashing, people can’t get the online library resources, etc.) you’re going to have a serious problem. Similarly, if you have an infrastructure that’s very elaborate, but you haven’t trained the faculty or the faculty are not interested, or you don’t have very many enrollments, you have a very expensive problem.

“What you don’t want,” SchWeber says, “is for it to tip over.”

The point, SchWeber says, is that if you want to bring your institution fully online, and do it successfully, you should pay attention to the three indicators. “This should not be about ‘Let’s get on the latest craze and see if we can bring in some money.’ There’s commitment, there’s a reward a structure for faculty who want to engage in this, there’s money for the technical support, for training, for libraries. It’s conscious.”

To successfully transform an institution requires the highest levels of the administration to be on board. The president and the provost have to want to move the project forward. And SchWeber suggests that those administrators may have to announce that there are consequences if faculty don’t participate. But, she says, it’s not so much about individual leadership. “It’s not just having the right person in a leadership position,” she says. “It’s about making a conscious commitment and reward structure and support network to do this.”

Deciding what you want

Of course, your institution might want to do something short of tipping. A healthy 26 percent online may be exactly what your long term strategy calls for. “Institutions that are getting into online learning need to pay attention to the paths that they’re on,” SchWeber says. No matter what path you’re on, even if limited online

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growth is all you're looking for, SchWeber's same three factors—enrollments, faculty and infrastructure—still apply. “What if you have 25 or 30 percent online enrollments and let's say 30 percent of the faculty. And you're not able to get on to the library except from nine to five. That's not going to work. The three balls have to be in the air together.”

Faculty resistance

Of the three key elements that have to be in place for transformation, faculty is by far the most problematic. SchWeber notes several ways to deal with faculty resistance. Your first move should be to recruit the early adopters, younger faculty used to using technology, who want to try online teaching. They become your supporters and champions. Then you pick carefully

which programs you want to move online—you don't do all at once. You also want to reward and recognize people for working online. SchWeber cites Georgetown University for faculty support. Georgetown funds faculty research in online learning, they recognize online teaching as part of the tenure process, and they have an annual ceremony, attended by the president, to honor the best courses or research. “If you do that you'll get the people who are inclined but scared because of the consequences for tenure,” SchWeber says. Another faculty-related issue is unionization. Faculty unions have various kinds of arrangements with their institutions—some of which have to do with intellectual property, others with workload and quality issues.

Sometimes external factors can affect when and how a school reaches the tipping point. Hurricane Katrina

brought a number of schools in New Orleans online, and pushed some all the way over the tipping point. “Sometimes there's an incident, and the institution realizes, “Oh my God, if we had this we could keep going. Online learning makes an institution more resilient,” SchWeber says. In fact, for SchWeber, the notion of resilience has a lot to do with the decision to transform an institution. The resilience of online learning gives an institution the flexibility to follow where their enrollments are going. “Figure out who you want in your student population, where they're coming from, whether some of this would serve them. And be careful about it. Don't do it to be doing the latest thing, but think about it--what does it cost, what do we want to do, what stages will we go through, how do we support faculty and students? Think it through.” ●

Solving the Problems of Faculty Ownership with Online Courses

By Christopher Hill

In the distance education world, the battle lines between faculty and administration have become complex and fraught. Once traditional understandings regarding intellectual production and property have been eroded by digital technology. Everyone is trying to make their own way and find their own solutions to the problems posed by putting courses online. In this scenario, however, there are options for happy solutions. Distance Education Report decided to talk to an authority to get a sense of the possible choices in this

world of new rules. Our authority is Dr. Kim Kelley, Associate Provost and Executive Director of the Center for Intellectual Property at the University of Maryland University College.

DER: What are the basic issues in the struggle for control over online courses?

Kelley: The issues for the institution and the faculty member are similar but slightly different. And that is, as you go online it becomes something more than faculty notes that are being used to teach. Further,

what's becoming much more of the norm is the concept of a group of individuals, not just a faculty member, putting the course together—a person with programming skills, somebody who can do simulations and games, an instructional designer for converting the content into a delivery mechanism that is appealing and durable in an online environment. The faculty member isn't the only place where there's development taking place. So when you get into

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these situations from an institutional administrator's standpoint the question becomes at what point does the institution have a vested interest in the material? And then the second question is at what point would the institution want to have ownership of that content?

And from the faculty perspective, it's always been the case that the faculty owned their course materials. This is just an extension in their minds of the current delivery that they do in the classroom. And depending on how independent the faculty member is at developing, he or she may think that this intellectual content is theirs.

DER: What are some approaches to resolving these claims?

Kelley: What institutions do varies widely. So a lot of the big institutions—MIT, Cornell—have said to the faculty, you know what, you can have your content. And if we want to use the content, we'll either license it from them or we'll get their permission. Or in the case of MIT they freely made it available. So there's no exchange, monetarily.

There are other models. What they initially did in some cases was they had the faculty member say that his or her work was a work for hire. Which would automatically, once they signed the agreement, give the institution ownership. And then the faculty member would be paid a sum above their current salary in order to make it an equitable outcome for both parties.

In many cases the administration was interested in trying to encourage innovation, to get faculty involved in creating materials for online delivery. So if you want to encourage innovation, you sweeten the opportunity. And you give faculty some ownership of the work. The problem for the

faculty member is that they developed the content and the content is constantly changing. But he or she may not get back to it again because it's not primarily what that person is delivering. That content

The problem is when your policy says it belongs to the faculty member. That's all well and good, but if it came down to a situation where there was a dispute legally, there are some equally good arguments that the faculty member was working in the capacity of work made for hire. And if that's the case the content would legitimately go to the institution.

may get out of date and it needs to be revised. So who does that? The person who originally developed it? Who they gave ownership to? Or the institution? And at the point that the institution goes to revise it, who owns it at that point? The original faculty member or the person who comes next, who does the revision?

DER: How do you deal with those questions?

Kelley: One thing that the institution does is that they buy the course. And then the course belongs to the institution, so who revises it is their decision. Another way they handle it

is they work in groups and they have a faculty member work on the content. They can either use the same faculty member to revise a course, or they can hire another person.

The other model is if the faculty member actually has ownership, not only does the faculty member develop the course but the faculty member becomes responsible for delivering the course. Just like they would with a face-to-face course. And then they're responsible for the continuing development and delivery of the course.

DER: That sounds reasonable. Are there problems with that?

Kelley: The problem is when your policy says it belongs to the faculty member. That's all well and good, but if it came down to a situation where there was a dispute legally, there are some equally good arguments that the faculty member was working in the capacity of work made for hire. And if that's the case the content would legitimately go to the institution. So that's where there's a lot of problems. The faculty says that if I develop a course, I have ownership of that course. Then I have a greater incentive to create the course, deliver the course, plus it's a part of my teaching portfolio. That's how I demonstrate my ability to be good at this so that institution Y wants to hire me.

DER: Is there a point where the two sets of interests can compromise?

Kelley: From the institution's standpoint, they can license some of the rights. So, for example, when I was involved in revising the policy for the University System of Maryland, the faculty member is the copyright holder. But the institution

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has certain rights to use that content in perpetuity. For example, they have the right to deliver that course as it was developed, for as long as they want to. And in some cases, if the faculty member leaves the institution, he or she may not use that content at their new institution for a period of say two years.

The other way you can do it is to make an arrangement with the faculty member like a Creative Commons situation, where you have certain rights. The institution has the right to use the content, has a right to revise the content. And some of those rights are in perpetuity. In another instance, I know of arrangements where it's only for three years and then the content reverts to the faculty member.

The implication there is, most content is out of date relatively quickly, and so we only want ownership for a period of time so we share those rights. You can either have the conversation again, or we can do another course, or we can do something else. I have done that, where I had faculty develop a course, and we had an agreement where I had ownership of the content for three years. And then at the end of that three-year period it reverted to the faculty member. And again, at that time, I would go to the faculty member and say do you want to be the person responsible for revising the content, do you want to permit us to continue to use the content? And he or she would say yes or no and then we would do a contract for revision and delivery for another three years.

DER: *So it depends on what model you're using to approach this.*

Kelley: Yes. There are two ways you can basically think of this. One would be like a patent. In the case of

a patent we have always believed and it's always been a policy at most institutions that faculty members do not own their patents. Instead there's a royalty. Faculty members let the institution pay all the money it takes to get a patent; the institution has a vested interest in the outcome. If the

What they want is for the content to be owned mutually between the institution and the faculty member, so if there were commercial exploitation there could be some arrangement made so the institution doesn't find itself purchasing its own materials.

faculty gets any moneys for his department for any value that comes from the patent and the institution owns the patent, that's a good mutual arrangement.

An alternative has been for example, the textbook. Think of course design and development like a textbook. If the faculty member develops a textbook, the faculty member gets a relationship with a publisher and then the publisher pays royalties—this is a model that institutions don't want to replicate with their online courses. They don't want to buy it back, the way they get squeezed in purchasing library materials or journals. What they want is for the content to be owned mutually between the institution and

the faculty member, so if there were commercial exploitation there could be some arrangement made so the institution doesn't find itself purchasing its own materials.

DER: *What if the university has a commitment to the open content idea?*

Kelley: If faculty own the courses and are resistant to putting it out there in the open content domain, but the institutions feels it is part of their mission to educate and to further scholarly endeavor, institutions may have an issue with their faculty. In a situation like that the institution has to come to an agreement with the faculty in terms of how can they participate? And preferably, it would be ideal in my view if they could use a Creative Commons license model, come to an arrangement in terms of how content is shared, and then have those rights worked out in a standard way across the board. So that we could have an understanding which is similar to patents. But we don't have that level of comfort with courseware.

DER: *Is there one important guiding principle in all this?*

Kelley: I think it's just important that whatever model is selected it has to have the agreement of everyone involved. So it's more about how you come to a decision than what the final outcome is. And that institutions sometimes make the mistake of not dealing with this in policy. ●



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