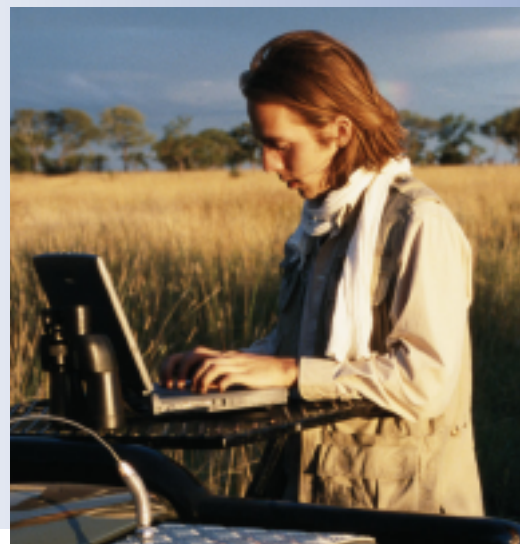


2007 Distance Education Survey Results



Tracking the Impact of e-Learning at Community Colleges



About the Instructional Technology Council

The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) provides leadership, information and resources to expand access to, and enhance learning through, the effective use of technology.

An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges, ITC represents higher education institutions in the United States and Canada that use distance learning technologies. Based in Washington, D.C., ITC was founded in 1977 as the Taskforce for the Uses of Mass Media for Learning. As instructional technology has evolved, so too has ITC which has provided national leadership for more than 30 years on an array of distance learning/e-learning issues. With nearly 500 colleges and universities, ITC continues to grow, along with higher education interest in electronically-mediated instruction. For more information visit www.itcnetwork.org.

Introduction

ITC created this annual survey in response to the growing need for national data related to distance education program creation and development, and for key issues related to faculty and students. ITC set out to develop a survey instrument that would track national data and trends longitudinally and generate specific data regarding real and relevant problems facing emerging and established e-learning programs for administrators and campus leaders.

In fall 2004, the ITC board of directors created a set of relevant questions, and devised a survey instrument and strategy for this annual national survey. They limited the number of questions so respondents could complete it within a reasonable time frame. They conducted their first survey in spring 2005. They revised and adjusted the more burdensome and time-consuming questions and submitted a new survey to ITC members in fall 2005. In fall 2006, they distributed the survey to members of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

How the Survey was Conducted

The questions are divided into four categories—general information, administration, faculty, and students. ITC sent

an e-mail invitation to all of the designated institutional representatives identified in the ITC membership and to the AACC members who had responded to the 2006 survey, who were not already ITC members, to a total of 500 institutions.

ITC used an open-source solution—PHP Surveyor—as the platform for the survey. Representatives from 154 institutions completed the 2007 survey. Statistically, the respondents represented an appropriate cross-section based on 1) the number of responding institutions, 2) the regional distribution of responding institutions, and 3) the type of responding institution (based on the categories outlined in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education—www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications).

Distribution of Results

The final results will be presented in February 2008 at ITC's annual meeting at e-Learning 2008 in St. Petersburg, Fla. Members of the ITC board of directors will present the results in a special forum at the AACC Annual Convention in April 2008 Philadelphia, Penn. (they made similar presentations in April 2006 in Long Beach, Calif. and in April 2007 in Tampa, Fla.). ITC will distribute the results to those who completed the survey, to ITC members, and to the presidents of all AACC-member institutions.

The Data

Respondents completed 154 surveys out of the initial distribution of slightly more than 500—a 30 percent response rate. The completed surveys were reviewed to ensure a representative sample of AACC—and ITC-member institutions participated, confirming an acceptable response rate (154/500) with an acceptable distribution based on size and location of institutions. The survey questions are sorted into four categories: general information, administration, faculty, and students.

The individual completing the survey on behalf of his or her institution was usually the distance education administrator.

2007 SURVEY RESULTS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Institutions Surveyed

Most of the respondents identified themselves as Associate's colleges (95.45 percent) or Associate's dominant colleges (3.25 percent). Of the 154 respondents, only two identified themselves in other Carnegie categories (based on the categories outlined in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education—www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications).

Distance Education Enrollment Growth

Respondents reported comparative enrollment trends in distance education for Fall 2005 to Fall 2006 (the most recent full year of data available for most colleges in November 2007).

Campuses reported a 15 percent increase from fall-to-fall for distance education enrollments for the 2006 survey, substantially ahead of overall campus enrollments which averaged two percent nationally. For the 2007 survey, respondents reported an increase of 18 percent increase in e-learning enrollments from Fall 2005 to Fall 2006, which reflected a recurring robust pace for enrollment growth.

Direct Report Line

Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated they reported to the vice president for academic affairs or an academic dean; this was up five percent from the previous year, and up more than 20 percent from 2005.

Non-Credit Offerings

Sixty-seven percent of campuses reported they offer non-credit distance education classes. This was up six percent from the previous year. Normally, noncredit online classes are offered as a component of either community education or business outreach divisions.

ADMINISTRATION

Moving the campus organization and administrators to the next level is often a challenge. Mindsets remain very conventional and tied to traditional scheduling models which are increasingly irrelevant.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

Learning Management System Usage

Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated they use Blackboard/WebCT (38.3 percent for Blackboard/39 percent for WebCT) for their learning management system (LMS). This is down seven percent from the 2006 survey.

Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated they were considering switching LMS platforms in the next few years (31 percent reported they were considering switching last year). Seventy-two percent indicated they restrict the number of LMS platforms the campus will support which is statistically unchanged from last year.

The most significant changes from the previous year include: a slight drop for WebCT and Blackboard, with increases for Moodle (from less than four to more than 10 percent), Angel (from five to more than nine percent) and Desire2Learn (which increased more than two percentage points). Educator increased slightly while Etudes and Sakai were down slightly.

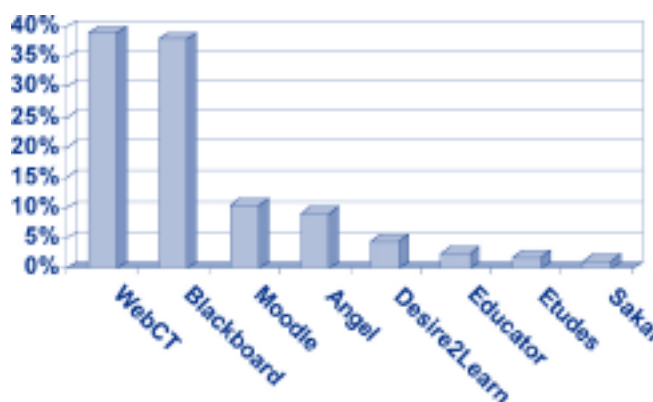


CHART 1: GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR ADMINISTRATORS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge 8 = least challenging

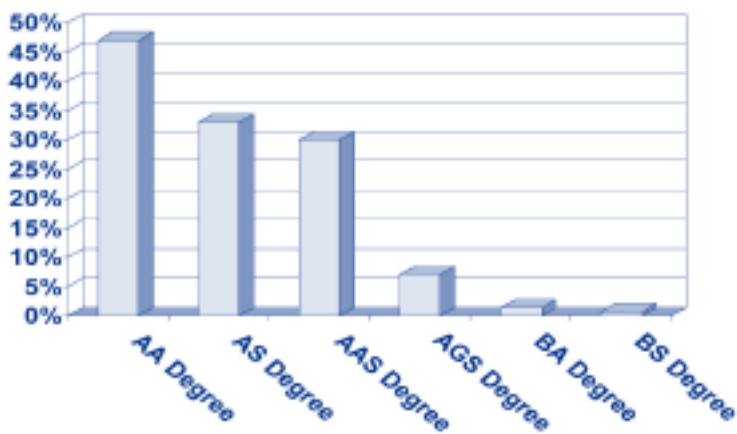
Challenge	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Support staff needed for training and technical assistance	1	1	1	1
Adequate student services for distance education students	2	3	5	2
Operating and equipment budgets	3	2	2	3
Faculty acceptance	4	5	3	4
Adequate administrative authority	5	4	4	5
Adequate space for training and technical assistance	6	6	7	7
Organizational acceptance	7	7	6	6
Student acceptance	8	8	8	8

Higher education is experiencing a dramatic shift to a demand for more flexible and accessible learning. But many campus administrators fear the change or pretend that things are NOT changing. We are in the business to serve our students, and that will require adjusting to new realities. Community colleges are best positioned to do this, but many are showing resistance.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

Online Degrees

The survey asked respondents whether their institution offers online degrees as part of their distance education program. An online degree was defined as “at least 70 percent of coursework needed to complete the degree is available online.” Sixty-four percent indicated they offer one or more degrees online, a figure that was statistically consistent with last year.



Course Evaluation

Respondents were asked to identify the types of evaluation they use for distance education classes:

- 81 percent use student evaluations
- 64 percent use some type of administrative review
- 58 percent use peer evaluation
- 60 percent use campus standards/best practices

Compared to last year's data, there is a significant increase in the use of campus standards and best practices, with an overall 10 percent increase. Peer evaluation increased by eight percent.

Course Enrollment Caps

Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated they use caps for online class enrollments, which was identical to last year's percentage. They were then asked to indicate the typical enrollment cap by class type which was also unchanged from last year:

- 26 students for introductory math
- 24 students for introductory English composition
- 29 students for introductory political science

Class Hosting

With regard to hosting their online classes, respondents indicated that:

- 55 percent own and maintain their own servers
- 32 percent outsource their server needs to a third party (ex. LMS provider, publisher, out-sourced IT provider)
- 12 percent share servers with others (ex. system, district, consortium)

Most Difficult Classes

Vocal conservative faculty members with little computer experience can stymie efforts to change when expressing a conviction that student learning outcomes can only be achieved in a face-to-face classroom - even though they have no idea what can be accomplished in a well-designed distance education course.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

Respondents identified classes that have been difficult to offer due to faculty resistance and/or pedagogical challenges. Classes listed included:

- Lab-based science
- Speech
- Clinical requirements
- Fine arts
- Nursing
- Math
- Industrial technology
- Foreign language
- Computer hardware

Services and Technology Support

Keep up with the growth. The demand for our online courses greatly exceeds the available support services. It is hard to keep up!

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

Regional accrediting agencies require colleges to offer the same student services and support to their distance education and traditional campus-based students. With growing numbers of online students, campuses recognize the need to introduce or expand additional services and support.

The 2007 survey results confirm data ITC received from previous surveys—there has been a consistent increase in efforts to offer a broad array of student services for online students. In the past year, the most dramatic increases (a 10 percent increase on average) occurred in the areas of online orientation and online tutoring assistance.

Distance Education Fees

Forty-five percent of the respondents reported they charge students an additional per-credit fee to take distance education classes, an increase of five percent over last year. The overall average of fees assessed was \$26, with \$15 being the most common.

CHART 2: STATUS REPORT: STUDENT SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Service/Technology	Currently offer	Plan to offer within one to two years
Audio/Video streaming	62%	38%
Campus testing center for distance education students	73%	27%
Dedicated Web site for distance education program	86%	14%
Distance education-specific faculty training	96%	4%
Help desk and technical support for distance education faculty	94%	6%
Help desk and technical support for distance education students	91%	9%
Online admission to institution	84%	16%
Online counseling and advising services	51%	49%
Online information and application for financial aid	86%	14%
Online library services and resources	96%	4%
Online payment of tuition and fees	86%	14%
Online plagiarism evaluation	54%	46%
Online registration for classes	89%	11%
Online student course evaluation	84%	16%
Online student organization, Web site and services	49%	51%
Online student orientation for distance education classes	75%	25%
Online textbook sales	72%	28%

FACULTY

Challenges

Our biggest challenge is getting faculty to participate in our training sessions. We understand their time is limited, but we need to be able to show them the new tools available to provide a continuous quality improvement of our courses. Of course, learning new skills always takes time.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

Administrators identified the greatest challenges they experienced with regards to faculty who teach at a distance.

Faculty Training

Seventy-one percent of the respondents indicated their college required their faculty to participate in a training program to teach at a distance (up from 67 percent in

2006 and 57 percent in 2005). Those who responded “yes” were asked to identify how many hours of training were required:

- 60 percent require more than eight hours
- 28 percent require less than eight hours
- 11 percent require exactly eight hours

Testing

A core issue for many colleges is to what extent they should require students to take proctored tests as a means to eliminate cheating. Respondents indicated there is significant flexibility:

- 93 percent allow faculty to offer online and on-campus testing (blended)
- 55 percent allow faculty to offer exclusively online testing (non-proctored)
- 40 percent require only on-campus testing (proctored)—up six percent from last year

CHART 3: GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR FACULTY TEACHING DISTANCE EDUCATION CLASSES

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge - 7 = least challenging

Challenge	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Workload issues	1	1	1	1
Training	2	2	3	4
Compensation	3	3	5	2
Buy-in to electronically-delivered instruction	4	4	4	3
Technical support	5	5	6	5
Recruitment	6	6	2	6
Intellectual property/ownership issues	7	7	7	7

Full-time/Part-time

Sixty-seven percent of distance education classes are taught by full-time faculty, and 33 percent by part-time faculty. These figures are essentially unchanged from 2006 and are consistent with the historic full-time/part-time faculty ratios seen at most community colleges.

Faculty Location

Given the virtual nature of the online classroom, campuses are beginning to explore the possibility of allowing faculty to be located off campus. Thirty-four percent say they allow full-time faculty to be located in another city/state, a figure that is essentially unchanged from last year.

- 83 percent require distance education faculty be located on campus
- Three percent have faculty located in other states
- One percent have faculty located in other countries

Limiting the Number of Classes Taught at a Distance

Thirty-one percent of respondents indicated their institution limits the number of distance education classes a full-time faculty member can teach each semester to .47 of a full teaching load. Sixty-nine percent indicated they do not impose such a limitation. This figure is consistent with last year's responses.

Maintaining course quality and helping faculty understand that professional development is necessary is a common challenge. Teaching in the online environment is dramatically different from teaching face-to-face.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

STUDENTS

Challenges

The greatest challenges are unprepared students, unrealistic expectations or lack of technical skills, solving technical problems with users, marketing effectively with a limited budget, and keeping up with emerging technologies.

- A 2007 Survey Respondent

The survey asked administrators to rank the major challenges they faced with regard to students. Interestingly, the respondents ranked getting students to evaluate their course, professors and program as their number-one challenge. In previous years administrators rated this challenge much lower—as number five or six.

Student Retention

Respondents indicated that the average retention rate for students in distance education courses was 72 percent, while it averaged 78 percent in traditional face-to-face classes.

Traditional/Non-traditional Students

Forty-eight percent of the students taking distance education classes were “traditional” (18-25 years) and 52 percent were “nontraditional” or older than 26 years.

Gender

Administrators said that sixty percent of their distance education students are female (40 percent male)

Student Demand

Seventy percent of respondents indicated their college is not offering enough distance education courses to meet the student demand, while 30 percent reported they are meeting the demand.

CHART 4: GREATEST CHALLENGES ADMINISTRATORS FACE WITH REGARD TO STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION CLASSES

Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge - 8 = least challenging

Challenge	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Completion of student evaluations	1	6	5	5
Orientation/preparation for taking distance education classes	2	1	1	1
Assessing student learning and performance in distance education classes	3	2	2	2
Computer problems and providing technical support	4	3	6	3
Providing equivalent student services virtually	5	4	3	4
Low student completion rate	6	5	4	6
Cheating	7	7	-	7
Recruitment/interest in distance education by students	8	8	8	8

OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

Although the ITC survey has not yet established a regular base of participants, the results have remained consistent from year to year and correspond with data collected by other large national surveys, such as the Sloan Foundation's annual survey, "Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning" (see www.sloan.c.org/publications/survey/pdf/online_nation.pdf) and the US Department of Education's "Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2000-2001." (see <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003017>). ITC invited its 300-400 members to complete the survey in 2004 and 2005; 1,200 AACC members in 2006; and 400 ITC members and 100 additional community college recipients in 2007.

The authors have seen a balanced, statistically-significant participation since the survey's inception and the results have documented the evolution and progress of online education at community colleges. With four years of data, ITC can confirm major trends and benchmarks in online education that should be of tremendous value to program and campus administrators.

Observations

Based on the 2007 survey results, the authors offer the following observations:

Student demand for distance education courses at community colleges continues to grow. The Sloan Foundation found in its 2007 survey of 2,500 colleges and universities referenced above that the "9.7 percent growth rate for online enrollments far exceeds the 1.5 percent growth of the overall higher education student population. Almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2006 term; a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. Nearly 20 percent of all U.S. higher education students were taking at least one online course in the fall of 2006." (see www.sloan.c.org/publications/survey/pdf/online_nation.pdf)

It is no surprise that 70 percent of respondents in this ITC survey reported that student demand exceeds current class offerings. The percentages for enrollment growth and student demand have remained consistent during the four years of survey data.

Offering students online services and technology support is a priority on most campuses—it is most likely an effort to meet accreditation expectations of "equivalency." Many campuses have already completed this transformation and the 2007 survey data confirms they have made additional progress.

It seems that the recent merger of Blackboard-WebCt in February 2006 and a substantial increase in fees may have prompted a growing number of colleges to review their learning management system (LMS) commitments. Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicated they were considering switching from their current LMS. Although licensed LMS solutions prevail, Moodle, an open-source solution, reflected a doubling of its share in one year.

Administrators have consistently identified obtaining "support staff needed for training and technical assistance" as the greatest challenge confronting their distance education program during the four years of the survey.

Administrators have consistently identified "workload" issues as their greatest challenge related to faculty.

Administrators had consistently identified "orientation/preparation for taking distance education classes" as their greatest challenge related to students during the first three years of the survey, but this year, the completion of student evaluations emerged as the new primary concern.

Administrators are not as concerned about faculty "buy-in" as they may have been in the past before this ITC survey got underway. Notably, obtaining student acceptance, recruitment, and interest in distance education have never been a concern or challenge.

Trends

Online programs are well-established at most two-year institutions and have become accepted into the existing administrative structure. Institutionalization can be a double-edged sword. In the past, distance educators have served as change agents and transformational leaders.

Online programs have grown rapidly, cross academic and administrative divisions, and have often been forced to generate greater efficiencies of scale as they have struggled with fewer resources than they would have otherwise liked - to implement state-of-the-art programs with all of the bells and whistles.

Distance education has generated a great deal of dialog and introspection among academic departments. One respondent lamented that she experiences "decreasing flexibility and responsiveness as institutionalization increases." As online programs mature, they are increasingly viewed as mainstream, have become a part of the campus bureaucracy, and are losing several of the program characteristics that made them stand out initially.

Becoming mainstream within the campus administration carries the risk of potentially diminishing the ability to effect change. On the other hand, being accepted into the administrative structure, can improve chances for increased budgets, staffing, space and priority.

ITC will continue to monitor emerging key trends, including: Online courses could represent the only area of enrollment growth for many colleges.

Millennial students are increasingly attracted to online courses given their understanding and desire to use technology.

Distance education will continue to be a change agent—since colleges will aim to improve their levels of services to serve the students and faculty who participate in their programs.

Trends indicate college administrations are accelerating the movement of distance education programs from IT operations to the academic side of the institution. Distance educators increasingly report to the vice president of academic affairs or academic dean. Colleges may have answered the question, “Where do we put distance education administratively?”

As more institutional resources are redirected toward distance education, the quality of instruction is continuously improving. Programs are focusing on quality, consistency, assessment and retention to address latent concerns. Two years ago, this survey found that most distance learning administrators felt the quality of an online course was equivalent to that of its traditional counterpart.

The Sloan Foundation reported in its 2006 survey results, “Making the Grade: Online Education in the United States, 2006,” that “by an increasing margin, most chief academic officers believe that the quality of online instruction is equal to or superior to that of face-to-face learning. In 2003, 57 percent of academic leaders rated the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face. That number is now 62 percent, a

small but noteworthy increase. The proportion who believe that online learning outcomes are superior to those for face-to-face is still relatively small but has grown by 40 percent since 2003 from 12.1 percent in 2003 to 16.9 percent.” (see www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/making_the_grade.pdf).

Conclusion

The results of this survey are intended, first and foremost, to be of value to distance education practitioners. The distance education landscape is changing rapidly, and the need for relevant data and information has never been more important. This is new ground for most college administrators. They are being asked to support new staffing, space and budget requests—often with a fixed or shrinking budget. College administrators want to make sure they are making the right decisions that will benefit their students, faculty, staff and greater community, and make the very most of limited resources.

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