

DISTANCE EDUCATION SURVEY RESULTS

TRENDS IN ELEARNING: TRACKING THE IMPACT OF eLEARNING AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

MARCH 2010



IN FOCUS: THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2009

The past year has been eventful for eLearning programs—framed by significant challenges and opportunities. Highlights included:

- One of the worst economic recessions in decades—many community colleges have experienced near-record increases in student enrollments while enduring significant budget and staff reductions due to reduced state and local funding.
- Announcement of the American Graduation Initiative proposal by President Obama—which included \$500 million to create free online courses and the prospect of funding innovative initiatives and collaborations. The bill is still pending in Congress and may be lost due to efforts to reduce the deficit. Still, community colleges and distance education programs have been lauded for their efforts—and the door has been opened to eventual increased funding for community colleges and distance education programs.
- Completion of the rule-making phase for the Higher Education Opportunities Act—panels in Washington, D.C. revised definitions and provided direction for regional accreditation agencies regarding how they should enforce the provision within the Act.
- Increased concerns about financial aid fraud and abuse involving distance education students. The inspector general’s office for the U.S. Department of Education has increased monitoring and investigation in response to a few visible cases.
- Many programs celebrated their tenth anniversary offering classes and degrees via distance education technologies.



SURVEY HISTORY

The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) established the annual distance education survey in response to the growing need for national data related to distance learning program creation and development and for key issues related to faculty and students. Distance education practitioners have used data from the U.S. Department of Education and the annual series of reports by Sloan-C, but the landscape seemed to lack a reliable source of longitudinal data gathered on a regular basis. The ITC survey was designed to fill that gap in data.

In Fall 2004, members of the ITC board of directors, formed a committee to create a set of relevant questions, devise a survey instrument, and create a strategy for conducting a nationally-based annual eLearning survey. The board capped the number of questions asked, to allow respondents to complete the survey in a reasonable time frame. Their main goal was to track data and trends longitudinally to generate data regarding real and relevant problems facing emerging and established eLearning programs. They intended to relay nationally-relevant data to eLearning program administrators and campus leaders.

The ITC board tested its first survey in Spring 2005. Since many institutions do not gather or report information in the same way, the inaugural results showed some respondents had a difficult time answering some of the questions. The board adjusted the questions and distributed a revised instrument to ITC members in Fall 2005. In Fall 2006 ITC distributed the survey to members of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Subsequent surveys have included ITC and AACC members.

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

eLearning practitioners have developed and reviewed the survey questions to ensure the data and information generated is of value to eLearning administrators and faculty. The questions were divided into four categories—general information, administrative, faculty and students. ITC e-mailed the survey to its member representatives (usually the director of the distance learning program) at more than 400 institutions, and to the 1,200 members of the American Association of Community Colleges. Duplicates were eliminated. The response rate was approximately 17 percent. The completed surveys were reviewed to ensure a representative sample of ITC- and AACC-member institutions participated, confirming an acceptable response rate (226 out of 1,200) with an acceptable distribution based on size and location of institutions submitting completed surveys. For all percentages included in this report, “no answer” responses are not listed – consequently, data will not always equal 100 percent.

Typically, the distance education administrator completed the survey on behalf of his/her institution each institution. A longitudinal review established a strong continuity amongst completers – 70 percent of the annual submissions have come from the same campuses during the six years of the survey.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESULTS

- The preliminary results were presented at ITC’s annual meeting at eLearning 2010 in Ft. Worth, Texas on Feb. 20, 2010.
- ITC will distribute the report at the American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention in Seattle, Washington on April 17-20, 2010. Fred Lokken will present its findings at ITC’s sponsored forum, “Administrators and Distance Education - Dealing with 21st Century Challenges,” on April 18, 2010.
- ITC will mail a printed copy to the presidents of all community colleges.
- ITC will post an electronic version on its Web site at www.itcnetwork.org.

2009 SURVEY RESULTS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Institutions Surveyed. More than 96 percent of respondents identified themselves as Associate's Colleges (88.21 percent) or Associate's Dominant Colleges (8.21 percent).

Distance Education Enrollment Growth. Respondents were asked to report comparative enrollment trends in distance education from Fall 2007 to Fall 2008 (the most recent full year of available data). Campuses reported a 22 percent increase for distance education enrollments—substantially higher than overall national campus enrollments, which averaged less than two percent nationally. The Sloan Foundation reported a 17 percent growth in distance learning enrollments in its study, "Learning on Demand: Online Education in the United States, 2009."

The 2009 results indicate a robust growth pattern for distance education. Respondents reported several reasons for the increase in enrollments:

- 42 percent cited the downturn in the economy
- 39 percent cited typical growth for distance education classes
- 16 percent cited new enrollment initiatives
- 3 percent no response

Direct Report Line. In 2009, 74 percent of respondents indicated they reported to the vice president of academic affairs or an academic dean — an increase of six percentage points from the 2008 survey. More than six percent of respondents indicated they report directly to the president (up from four percent in 2008), and 1.56 percent indicated they report to a library administrator (down from 3.1 percent in 2008).

Non-credit Offerings. Sixty-six percent of campuses reported they offer noncredit online classes (up two percent from 2008). The slight increase may reflect the realities of the worsening national economy. These classes can be used to obtain specific job skills as the unemployed retool for new career paths. Normally, noncredit online classes are offered as a component of community education or business outreach divisions.



How to remain innovative and leading edge as (the) program grows and becomes "institutionalized".

—Comments from the 2009 Survey



BUDGET CUTS!! Since our program is a virtual one, the awareness of the college administrators and governing board needs to substantially improve to ensure the program efficacy.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONS

Challenges. Respondents ranked the challenges their distance education program faces—their scores have remained substantially unchanged since 2005. ITC added two new challenges in 2009: “adequate assessment of distance education classes” and “compliance with HEOA requirements for distance education.” Offering adequate assessment ranked third while the low ranking of Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA) compliance likely reflects that most distance education administrators are unclear as to what the accrediting agencies will expect of them.

CHART 1: Greatest Challenges for Administrators of Distance Education Programs

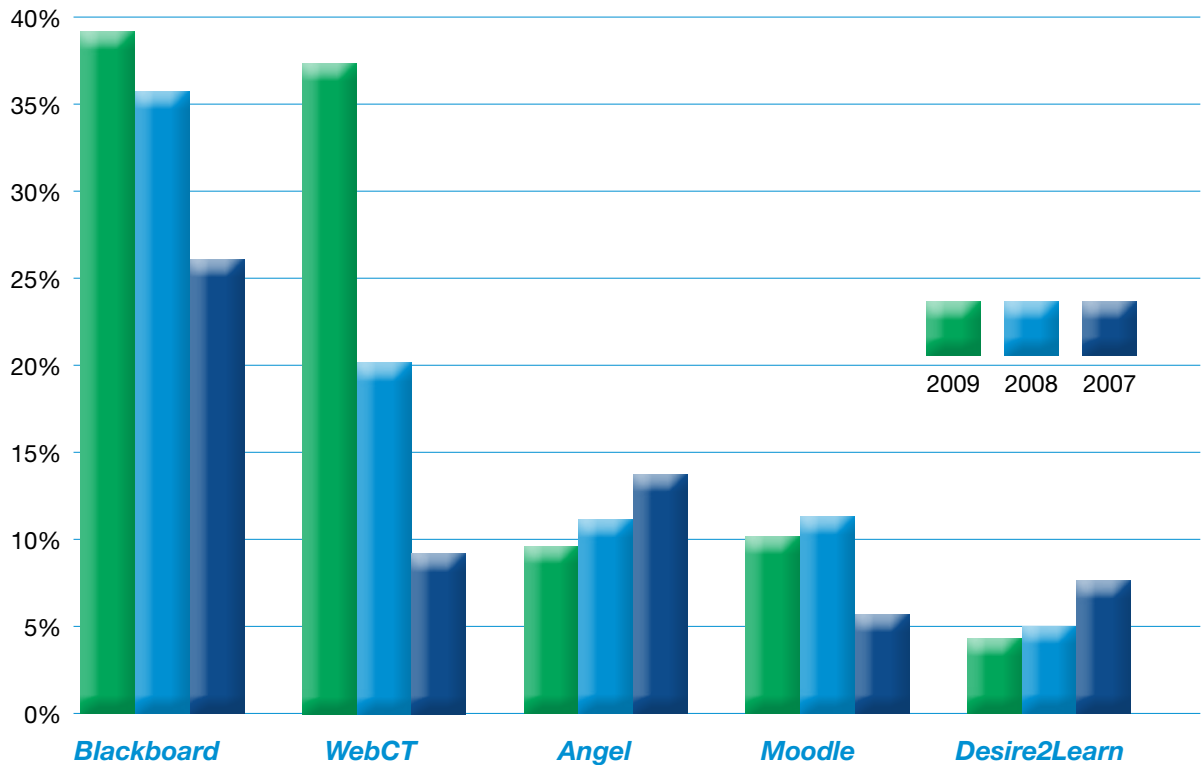
Range for responses 1 = greatest challenge 8 = least challenging

Challenge	Rank 2009	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Support staff needed for training and technical assistance	1	1	1	1	1	1
Adequate student services for distance education students	2	2	2	3	5	2
Adequate assessment of distance education classes (new question)	3					
Operating and equipment budgets	4	3	3	2	2	3
Adequate administrative authority	5	4	5	4	4	5
Faculty acceptance	6	5	4	5	3	4
Adequate space for training and technical assistance	7	6	6	6	7	7
Organizational acceptance	8	7	7	7	6	6
Compliance with HEOA requirements for distance education (new question)	9					
Student acceptance	10	8	8	8	8	8

Learning Management System Usage. In 2009, 51 percent of respondents indicated they use Blackboard/WebCt/Angel (27.4 percent for Blackboard, 9.7 percent for WebCT and 13.7 percent for Angel). This is down from 56 percent for just Blackboard/WebCT reported in 2008.

Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated they were considering switching LMS platforms in the next few years—this has been consistent for the past four years of the survey. Sixty-three percent reported they do not plan to switch LMS. Seventy-seven percent indicated they restrict the number of LMS platforms the campus will support—a number that has unchanged in the past several years. The reported LMS usage distribution is reported in Table 1. The table reflects data for the 2007, 2008 and 2009 response years. The most significant changes during this three-year period reflect Blackboard’s purchase of WebCT and Angel.

TABLE 1: LMS Usage



Accessibility Compliance. In 2008, 73 percent of respondents indicated that most or all of their online classes were in compliance. In 2009, 54 percent reported that most, or all, of their classes are in compliance —this reflects a nearly 20 percent drop from the previous year. Twenty-one percent indicated that at least some of their classes were in compliance.

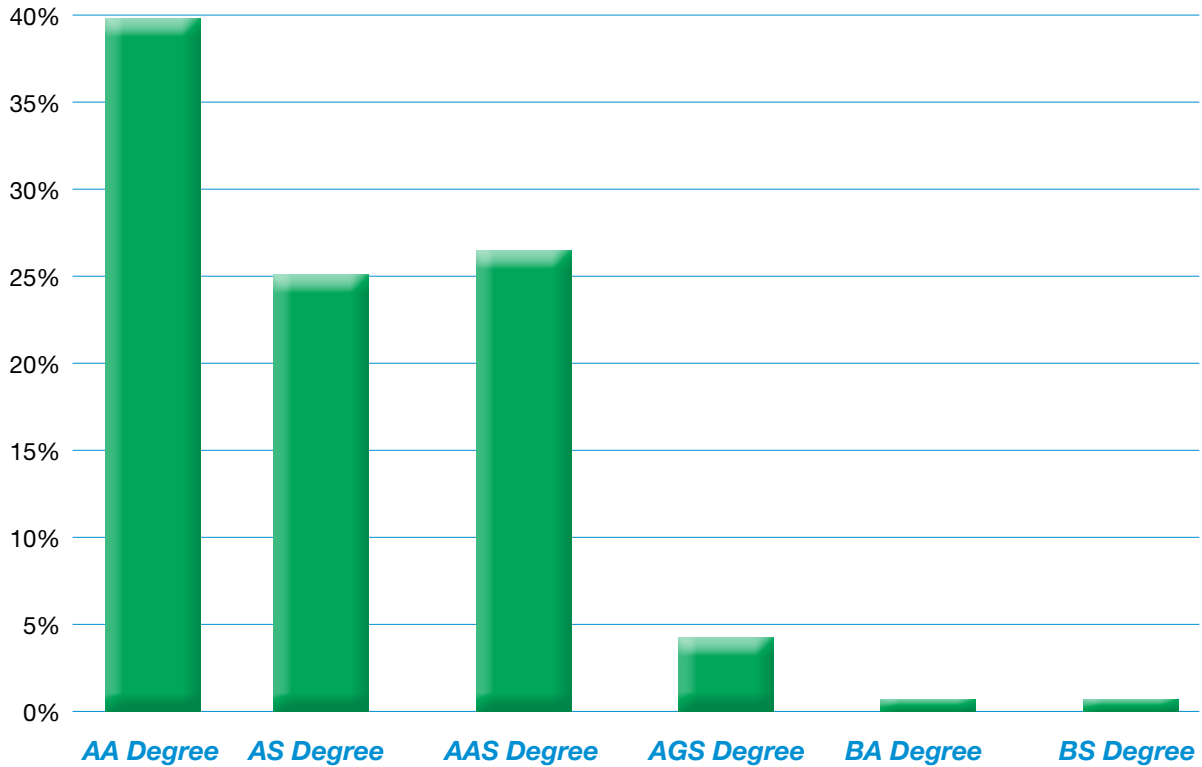
Online Degrees. Respondents indicated whether their institution offers an online degree program. The survey defined an online degree as “at least 70 percent of coursework need to complete the degree is available online.” Seventy-five percent of respondents reported they offer at least one online degree—a number that remained virtually unchanged from 2008. Table 2 offers a percentage breakdown by degree type.



We need one central faculty development center for supporting faculty in effective instructional design, use of Blackboard and other educational technologies, assessment of the quality of their online courses, help with improving online course quality and help with rapidly changing technologies. We also need more staff in the system distance education area.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

TABLE 2: Online Degrees Offered by Degree Type



Course Evaluation. Respondents indicated how their institutions evaluate distance education classes:

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

Data has been consistent for this question for the past several years. Programs face several challenges as concerns course evaluation. Many struggle to get enough students to complete online evaluations. Programs also report that online faculty tend to be evaluated less often than faculty in face-to-face classrooms.



eLearning is increasing and has a good self-supporting budget, while others at the college are getting laid off due to lack of state-supported dollars. It makes it challenging to have a dynamic and growing program within a larger environment of budget cuts and layoffs and even potential college closure.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

Course Enrollment Caps. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated they cap online class enrollments—a figure that had not changed during the previous three surveys. The typical enrollment cap by class type also remained the same.

- 27 students for an introductory math class
- 25 students for an introductory English composition class
- 30 students for an introductory political science class

Class Hosting. The survey data confirmed that more colleges outsource the hosting services (ex. servers) for their online classes compared to previous years—to a third party or as part of a consortium—perhaps reflecting budget and staffing reductions at a growing number of institutions due to the economy.

- 40 percent said they own and maintain their own servers (down from 50 percent in 2008).
- 36 percent outsourced their server needs to a third party, such as a learning management system provider, publisher or IT provider.
- 20 percent shared servers with others, such as a state system, district or consortium (up from 10 percent in 2008).

Outsourcing Selected Services. In 2008, ITC added a new question concerning the outsourcing of various student services. Surprisingly, many respondents failed to answer this question, suggesting a large number do not out-source any distance education-related services on their campuses. For those who did respond:

- 80 percent reported they were using the same number of outsourced solutions for services.
- 18 percent reported they increased their use of outsourced solutions for services.
- two percent reported they reduced their use of outsourced solutions for services.

Course Content Development. Colleges can use their own faculty, instructional designers and administrative staff to develop their own online course content, use materials offered by a textbook publisher, or purchase content from an online course content provider. Most develop their own.

- 75 percent develop their own content.
- 18 percent use publisher content.
- five percent contract or license materials from a content provider.

Most Difficult Classes. Respondents identified classes they have found to be difficult to offer online for various reasons, such as faculty resistance and/or pedagogical challenges. This list has not changed for the duration of the survey. The most difficult classes listed include:

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

Course Equivalency. Accreditation standards require that distance education courses, content, and rigor be equivalent, or better, than those offered face-to-face. Ninety-one percent of respondents indicated their online classes were equivalent or superior to their face-to-face classes (82 percent equivalent, nine percent superior). Only eight percent said their online classes needed improvement compared to their college's face-to-face traditional course offerings.



Managing growth and integrating distance education into institutional strategic planning. Getting departments to buy in on expanding the number of online sections available to students.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

In addition to offering the same academic rigor and content in their online courses, regional accrediting agencies require institutions offer distance learning students equivalent student services and support. With growing numbers of online students, campuses are recognizing the need to introduce or expand their virtual services and support. The 2009 survey results confirmed data from previous years -- colleges have consistently increased their effort to offer online students a broad array of services. However, comments from respondents affirmed that budget cuts have impacted their ability to offer some services virtually. Many reported reductions had occurred as a result. See Chart 2 below:

CHART 2: Status Report: Student Services and Technology Support

Service/Technology	Currently offer	Plan to offer in next year	Plan to offer in two or more years	No plan to offer
Audio/video streaming	74%	4%	11%	6%
Campus testing center for distance education students	76%	1%	5%	13%
Dedicated Web site for distance education program and students	90%	4%	1%	1%
Distance education-specific faculty training	90%	4%	1%	1%
HelpDesk and technical support for distance education faculty	91%	2%	2%	1%
HelpDesk and technical support for distance education students	89%	5%	1%	1%
Online admission to institution	85%	5%	5%	1%
Online counseling and advising services	57%	21%	13%	5%
Online information and application for financial aid	86%	7%	3%	1%
Online library services and resources	94%	1%	0%	1%
Online payment of tuition and fees	87%	4%	3%	3%
Online plagiarism evaluation	54%	13%	9%	20%
Online registration for classes	91%	2%	1%	1%
Online student course evaluation	87%	4%	4%	1%
Online student organization, Web site and services	44%	14%	17%	20%
Online student orientation for distance education classes	70%	17%	5%	4%
Online textbook sales	73%	9%	4%	9%
Online tutoring assistance	65%	13%	8%	10%
Campus Web portal	62%	9%	12%	13%
Audio Podcasting	63%	13%	9%	11%
Vodcasting	53%	17%	14%	11%

Distance Education Fees. Forty percent of institutions reported they charge students an additional per-credit fee to take distance education classes, similar to the 2008 data—the minimum collected was \$2, the maximum was \$80, with a median average of \$22. Some campuses are beginning to integrate related program costs into existing budgets, reducing the need for a separate fee. Other campuses shift new costs onto students to make up for budget shortfalls. The issue of whether to assess a separate student fee is tied closely to the institution’s culture and the number of fees already assessed to students.

COURSE FORMATS IN TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED INSTRUCTION

In 2008, the ITC survey introduced several questions concerning blended/hybrid and Web-facilitated courses. The survey defined a blended or hybrid course as one that blends online with face-to-face delivery—30 to 79 percent of content is delivered online, with online discussions and some face-to-face meetings. A Web-facilitated course (also known as an Web-enhanced or Web-assisted course) is a face-to-face course that uses the Web to facilitate activities—one to 29 percent of content is delivered online. Instructors often use a course management system or Web page to post the syllabus and assignments.

Type of Course Formats Offered. Respondents identified the types of technology-delivered credit courses offered by their institution by specific format. The percentages were essentially unchanged from 2008 (note that respondents could identify more than one format).

- 75 percent offer completely online classes
- 15 percent offer blended/hybrid courses
- one percent offer cable/telecourse courses
- 1.4 percent offer other forms of telecourse classes
- three percent offer interactive video (IAV) courses
- more than one percent offer audio courses

Blended/Hybrid Courses

- 53 percent continue to increase the number of blended/hybrid courses each term
- 20 percent offer about the same number of these courses each term
- eight percent are beginning to offer these classes for the first time
- one percent are reducing the number of these courses each term
- three percent do not offer blended/hybrid courses



Managing an appropriate mix of delivery types so student needs are met, faculty talent is best-utilized, and instructional costs remains under control.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey



Faculty say they do not have time for training. There are few incentives for them to get training. Collective bargaining agreements make training requirements/evaluation difficult.

Lack of faculty understanding of online teaching pedagogy and best practices.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

Web-assisted/Web-enhanced/Web-facilitated Courses

- 77 percent report they continue to increase the number of these classes each term
- seven percent offer about the same number of these classes each term
- two percent do not offer these classes
- 14 percent did not respond to this question

Interactive Video (IAV) Courses. Given the growth of and focus on online courses and degrees, many surveys have overlooked more established technologies such as interactive video classrooms. Respondents described their use of IAV.

- 40 percent have deactivated their IAV network or have never offered IAV courses
- five percent are offering the same number of IAV courses each term
- 25 percent are reducing the number of IAV courses each term
- 26 percent are continuing to increase the number of IAV courses each term

FACULTY QUESTIONS

Challenges. Administrators ranked the greatest challenges they face as related to faculty. During the past six years, addressing faculty workload issues has remained their major challenge. In 2009, recruiting faculty moved up to the number three spot. Comments from respondents confirmed their growing difficulty finding and training qualified faculty. There is remarkable consistency in all of the rankings—with some shifting in the middle range. See Chart 3.

CHART 3: Greatest Challenges Administrators Face Regarding Distance Learning Faculty

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

Challenge	Rank 2009	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Workload issues	1	1	1	1	1	1
Training	2	2	2	2	3	4
Compensation	5	3	3	3	5	2
Technical support	6	4	5	5	6	5
Buy-in to online instruction	4	5	4	4	4	3
Recruitment	3	6	6	6	2	6
Intellectual property/ownership issues	7	7	7	7	7	7



There is a limited pool of qualified adjunct instructors in this area of the state.
 Recruiting faculty for distance education classes when enrollment growth is so great.
 Finding enough faculty to teach online.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

Faculty Training. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated faculty participation in training programs for distance education was mandatory—a figure consistent with data collected during the past three surveys. Those who responded “yes,” were asked to identify how many hours of training were required—a number that continues to increase.

- 70 percent require more than eight hours of training
- 20 percent require less than eight hours of training
- 10 percent require exactly eight hours of training

Teaching Ratios for Online Instruction.

Respondents reported that full-time faculty teach 64 percent of distance education classes—part-time faculty teach 35 percent. This ratio has remained essentially unchanged for the past three surveys and aligns with the historic full-time/part-time faculty percentages seen for traditional face-to-face classes at most community colleges. Respondents found creating hiring pools of qualified part-time faculty increasingly difficult and indicated they had reached a saturation point for recruiting full-time faculty (ex. those who want to teach online).



Our faculty have recently come together in a collective bargaining unit. They have decided that faculty should have control when and how a course should be delivered. This struggle is just now coming to a head.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey



Faculty Location. Survey data has consistently established that campuses are willing to look beyond their current teaching talent to recruit faculty to teach online. Initial work-related barriers (ex. worker's comp coverage) have been addressed by many states. Since administrators can no longer recruit full-time, traditional, face-to-face faculty who already teach on their campuses to teach online, many look to recruit faculty statewide, regionally, or nationally. There, they are more likely to find faculty who have already been trained to teach virtually and have a proven track record.

Limiting the Number of Classes Taught. Only 28 percent of the respondents limit the number of online class sections a full-time faculty member can teach each term. Sixty-six percent allow for flexibility. An emerging challenge for administrators in this regard relates to increased faculty union interest in online teaching/teaching loads.

STUDENT QUESTIONS

Nearly all of the respondents reported a seemingly endless supply of students interested in taking classes online. They see a need to increase the number of course offerings—and to streamline and appropriately support course development, design, assessment and overall quality—to respond to increasing demand. In 2009, orienting and preparing students to take classes at a distance was once again the number one challenge. Assessment issues and technical support round out the top three.

CHART 4: Greatest Challenges for Students Enrolled in Distance Education Classes

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

Challenge	Rank 2009	Rank 2008	Rank 2007	Rank 2006	Rank 2005	Rank 2004
Orientation/preparation for taking distance education classes	1	2	2	1	1	1
Assessing student learning and performance in distance education classes	2	1	3	2	2	2
Computer problems/technical support	3	3	4	3	6	3
Low student completion rate	6	4	6	5	4	6
Providing equivalent student services virtually	4	5	5	4	3	4
Completion of student evaluations	5	6	1	6	5	5
Cheating	7	7	7	7	-	7
Recruitment/student interest in distance education	8	8	8	8	8	8



Making sure that all students understand the rigor of online courses and the time commitment required to be successful.

Making sure students are prepared to take online classes.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey

Completion Rates. Since the inception of online instruction, administrators have dealt with the issue of lower student retention or completion rates than traditional face-to-face instruction. During the early years, retention/completion could easily fall below 50 percent. However, colleges have progressed in addressing this challenge—in 2009 administrators reported that the average retention or completion rate for online classes was 72 percent, compared to 76 percent for traditional face-to-face courses. Based on six years of data, the trend in online retention has continued to improve.

Traditional/Non-Traditional Students. Many expect the millennial generation to dominate online classes given their reputation for being tech-savvy and technology-obsessed. However, the survey confirmed that older students are nearly as likely to take an online class as the millennial students.

- 52 percent Traditional (18-25)
- 47 percent Non-traditional (26+)

Gender. Survey data has consistently confirmed that more females than males take online classes. If anything, the gap seems to be widening. The gender breakdown for student enrollments for distance education classes is:

- 63 percent Female
- 36 percent Male

Student Demand. The 2009 survey participants reported on their success meeting anticipated student demand for distance education classes – the percentages are consistent with those seen in 2008.

- 67 percent reported demand is exceeding their distance education class offerings
- 28 percent reported demand is being met

Student Authentication. When it passed the Higher Education Opportunities Act in August 2008, Congress required colleges to create “processes that establish that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit.” In its corresponding regulations, the Department of Education required accreditors to ensure colleges authenticate students using “a secure login and pass code,” “proctored examinations,” or “any new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.” Survey respondents reported a high level of compliance with this requirement:

- 91 percent currently require authentication
- 3 percent do not currently require authentication



Getting students to read information about distance education classes and understanding there is a basic knowledge of computer skills needed to be successful.

—Comments from the 2009 Survey



OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

The ITC survey is in its sixth year. Continuity in a number of response areas emerges and the survey confirms that many distance education programs face similar challenges.

Observations

Demand for distance education by community college students continues to grow-at an accelerated rate. The growth rate for distance education has been double-digit for some time. The 22 percent enrollment increase, reported for the 2008-09 academic year in this 2009 survey, represents a significant increase over 2007-08 (which had experienced an 11 percent increase over the previous 2006-07 year). This growth far outpaces that for traditional student enrollments (which averages less than two percent-from Sloan-C: Learning on Demand: Online Education in the United States, 2009). Most programs continue to deal with double-digit increases in enrollment and struggle to recruit faculty and offer additional sections to meet the ever-increasing student demand. Older, non-traditional students are attracted to online classes and degree programs since they fit into their busy schedules to offer a solution for career advancement and/or change.

As online instruction continues to mature, distance education administrators see the continuing need to address course quality and design, faculty training and preparation, the need for course assessment, and improving student readiness and retention. However, some programs report a “push-back” from their senior administrators, faculty, or faculty representatives. Programs are challenged by a lack the staff and resources to be successful.

Growth in the use of blended/hybrid and Web-assisted/Web-enhanced/Web-facilitated classes continues. Respondents report a robust increase in the use of both blended/hybrid and Web-assisted/Web-enhanced/Web-facilitated formats. A variety of reasons are cited, but it is anticipated that increased usage will continue.

The gap between distance learning and face-to-face student completion rates has significantly narrowed. Completion rates have jumped to a reported 72 percent, just below the 76 rate for face-to-face classes. This marks a significant improvement from the 50 percent reported in the early years of distance education.

Virtual student services and technology support services remain a priority on most campuses. Progress continues to be made. The 2009 survey confirmed colleges are continuing to increase the array of virtual services they offer online students. Not only do students see these services as more convenient, but colleges often find they are more cost-effective than traditional campus-based services.

The learning management system (LMS) market remains volatile. The mergers of Blackboard-WebCt and Blackboard-Angel have fostered some uncertainty. The ITC survey has repeatedly confirmed that approximately one-third of eLearning programs are considering switching their LMS. Data also suggests that the interest in open-source solutions continues to be flat.

Trends

During the past ten years, online programs have been characterized by rapid growth, cross-divisional, “doing-it-different” types of programs, greater program efficiency by doing more-with-less, “leading-edge” professional development for faculty in the use of instructional technology, and adapting to millennial generation learning styles and thinking about dialog and introspection in academic departments.

As online programs mature and become increasingly viewed as “mainstream” programs within the campus bureaucracy, they risk of losing several of these program characteristics that made them stand out. On the other hand, being accepted into the administrative structure can improve chances for increased budgets, staffing, space and priority.

A number of key trends (supported by 2008 survey responses) include:

- Online classes may represent the only growth in student enrollment at most institutions.
- Online classes will increasingly attract millennial students due to their technology base.
- Online classes will continue to be the change agent for campuses, allowing for updating and improving levels of services for students and faculty.
- Distance education programs have seen an accelerating move away from IT operations to the academic side of the institution (vice president of academic affairs or academic dean).
- Creating a seamless relationship on campus remains a significant challenge as traditional administrative units continue to feel threatened by the rapid growth of the online program on their campus. Control issues have emerged, with an increasing number of debates over whether the distance education should be organized in a centralized vs. decentralized fashion on campus.
- Distance education course quality is continuously improving as more institutional resources are redirected there. Programs focus on quality, consistency, assessment and retention.
- Many colleges have increased their use of blended/hybrid and Web-assisted/Web-enhanced/Web-facilitated courses.
- Most administrators already authenticate distance learning student access to online courses.

IS YOUR ONLINE PROGRAM TYPICAL?

Online course administrators always wonder how their program compares to those at other institutions. Is it typical or consistent with national trends? Six years of survey data allows us to provide a generalized composite. Note that individual programs that do not reflect these generalized characteristics can be highly successful – it often depends on the culture of the institution and how well they are able to “work their magic” to serve their students.

The typical online program:

1. Is the primary source for enrollment growth for its institution.
2. Does not offer enough classes to meet student demand.
3. Increases access to higher education.
4. Is attracting an increasing number of non-traditional (younger) students.
5. Reports to the academic side of the institution (dean or above).
6. Is under-staffed, working in cramped conditions, and has an inadequate budget.
7. Offers approximately 160 online classes/class sections each semester.
8. Has become a significant change-agent, prompting increased faculty training and professional development, rethinking how we teach, and providing a catalyst for integrating technology into instruction,
9. Often leads the institution in dealing with issues of assessment, design, rigor, course quality and learning.
10. Struggles to obtain understanding, acceptance and support from campus leaders, who often lack direct experience with this method of teaching and learning (sometimes a generational disconnect).



CONCLUSION

The ITC board of directors intends this survey to be of value to distance education practitioners. We strive to identify relevant data and to ensure its timely tabulation and distribution. 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 senior college administrators—they are being asked to support new staffing, space, and budget requests—often with a fixed or shrinking budget. Often they have little, if any, direct experience managing distance education programs. College administrators want to ensure they are making the right decisions that will benefit their students, faculty, staff and greater community, and make the most of limited resources.

We hope the ITC survey has emerged as a valued and trusted source of relevant information. Each year ITC engages in an aggressive campaign to get the survey into the hands of key administrators and distance education practitioners. This report is distributed to ITC members, community college presidents, attendees at the AACC annual convention, and is the subject of articles in relevant publications. We will continue to do our best to empower decision makers with information they need. To that end, ITC offers this report in support of its members and the national online education community.

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About the Instructional Technology Council (ITC)

The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) is celebrating 30 years of providing exceptional leadership and professional development to its network of eLearning experts by advocating, collaborating, researching, and sharing exemplary, innovative practices and potential in learning technologies. An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges since 1977, ITC represents higher education institutions in the United States and Canada that use distance learning technologies.

ITC members receive a subscription to the ITC list serv with information on what's happening in distance education, discounts to participate in ITC's professional development Webinar series, distance learning grants information, updates on distance learning legislation, discounts to attend the annual eLearning Conference, and free access to ITC publications and research. Visit the ITC Web site at www.itcnetwork.org.



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