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Looking to the future ... Distance Education Issues in Nebraska

NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team

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Looking to the future ...

Distance Education Issues in Nebraska

A Summary of White Papers commissioned by the

NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team

Contents

Introduction

About NN21

About the *Distance Education Learning Conference: Communities of Learning*

NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team Members

White Papers:

Philosophy and Purpose of Distance Education, Dr. Janet Poley

Distance Education in Nebraska: Access and Strategies, Ms. Sarah Cunningham

Research and Evaluation Priorities for Distance Education in Nebraska: A Delphi Study, Dr. Kay Rockwell

Student Services in Distant Learning Environments, Dr. Roger Wess

The Policy Perspective in Distance Education: A Futures Landscape/Panorama, Dr. James King

Introduction

The Nebraska Network 21 (NN21) Action Team on Distance Education/Outreach has studied a variety of issues related to distance education in order to better serve the people of Nebraska. Distance education has grown rapidly in Nebraska, but is clearly in its infancy. Many important issues still are being identified and are far from understood.

The possibilities of distance education are yet to be fully realized. But in a state with a small, spread-out population such as ours -- perhaps in any state -- it would seem that distance education holds great promise for making many forms of education accessible to all.

To further our understanding of the field of distance learning, the Action Team commissioned a series of White Papers on topics significant to distance education in Nebraska. These papers were first presented at a conference in September 1998.

Summaries of the papers in this publication are intended to inform policymakers and anyone else interested in distance education about what the study of these topics yielded. These summaries are also designed to stimulate discussion.

If we have piqued your interest, the full papers are available on the NN21 Web site: http://www.unl.edu/nn21/wpaper.

In a state with a small, spread-out population such as ours -- perhaps in any state -- it would seem that distance education holds great promise for making many forms of education accessible to all.

About NN21

Nebraska Network 21 (NN21) is a group of people working together to creatively meet the learning needs of Nebraskans in the 21st century.NN21 wants to help education in Nebraska not only survive, but *thrive* in the changes the years ahead will bring.

Its goal is to bring together education, business, and communities to find creative ways to make education affordable and accessible for all Nebraskans. Funding is from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which offered grants to stimulate proactive, long-term planning, innovative thinking and new partnerships among education, communities, and business.

NN21 formed several Action Teams to accomplish this goal. The Distance Education/Outreach Action Team is one of these.

For additional information, contact the NN21 office at 402-472-6621, or visit the NN21 Web site: http://www.unl.edu/NN21.

NN21 wants to help education in Nebraska not only survive, but ***thrive*** *in the changes the years ahead will bring.*

About the ***Distance Learning Conference:***

Communities of Learning

These White Papers were commissioned by the NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team for delivery at the September 1998 conference *Distance Learning Conference: Communities of Learning.*More than 175 participants attended from institutions and organizations such as the Nebraska Department of Education, Educational Service Units, universities, colleges, community colleges, secondary schools, elementary schools, and NETV.

In addition to the White Paper presentations, the conference offered demonstrations and panels, and hands-on experience for those interested in learning effective techniques for distance teaching.

Workshops included teaching on TV; teaching with interactive distance technologies; and using various forms of electronic communication, development tools, and multimedia techniques for the Web.

Keynote speaker was Michael Dolence, a strategic management and education consultant and author.

The conference was held at the Clifford Hardin Nebraska Center for Continuing Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. It was sponsored by the NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team, NEB*SAT (a satellite and fiber optic network system), NETCHE (Nebraska Educational Television Council for Higher Education), and the Nebraska Department of Education.

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Philosophy and Purposes of Distance Education

By Janet K. Poley

Erik France

ADEC Distance Education Consortium

Goal of this White Paper

This paper presents five propositions with supporting facts and observations about distance education. Interviews with Nebraskans also were done.

Five propositions*Purposes for offering distance education in Nebraska*Nebraskans want more educational programs than they have, and distance education can provide those opportunities. It is the University of Nebraska's responsibility as the land-grant institution, in collaboration with other institutions, to extend the university to the people. It is the responsibility of citizens to support lifelong educational programs.

New technology does not respect borders or boundaries, and those first into a territory are more likely to take the lead, although large amounts of money are unlikely to be made.

Systems are needed to import educational programs that increase quality and diversity, and reduce costs. This can be accomplished by carefully studying options from other institutions, organizations, and even other countries and cultures.

Philosophy/Models for distance education

The Philosophy/Models most appropriate to Nebraska in distance education include:

• • Orchestrating Congruence

• • Creative collaborations and partnerships

• • Identifying appropriate imports and exports in a growing knowledge marketplace.

Because the need for lifelong learning continually increases, distance education has often grown haphazardly. Outside forces continue to push public educational institutions to think about teaching and learning as a *knowledge marketplace* rather than an ivory tower.

The author suggests that the Orchestrating Congruence Model is most appropriate to education. It combines what we have learned about visioning the future, about strategy, and about organization development. It requires people to be committed members of the

community, buying in to the vision and mission of education; and it brings together structures, people, money, and technologies to accomplish the task.

At the heart of such collaboration is a desire or need to solve a problem, to create, or discover something within a set of constraints: expertise, time, money, competition, and conventional wisdom.

Orchestrating Congruence requires Nebraskans to invest heavily in appropriate technology and to create new patterns of relationships and interactions that cross traditional barriers of history, geography, language, and culture.

We are likely to see large, multi-institutional centers of activity--probably built upon communities of interest-in which land-grant universities contribute, but keep their own identities. "Boutique" providers will fill highly specialized needs.

Institutions that establish people-friendly systems, well supported with technology, are most likely to succeed. Those that are realistic about their strengths and that provide support to collaborating faculty and staff will prosper.

Relationship of on-campus and off-campus learning

People don't care where their information comes from, as long as it is relevant to their needs. Educational lines will blur from kindergarten through higher education, and are already blurring between on- and off-campus education. More learners will choose combinations that meet their needs.

Emerging patterns include:

• • Multi-use modules that can be used alone, face-to-face, on or off campus, in the workplace, and elsewhere

• • Unit exchanges where instructors work together and share the resulting materials

• • Large courses taught by teaching assistants replaced with technology-based programs

• • Content becoming more important than when or where learning occurs.

Credit and non-credit offerings

Nebraska's future depends on the ability of our institutions, organizations, agencies, and educators to grasp the potential in lifelong learning. There is no place for "protecting," "maintaining," and "winning." All must work together to make knowledge the currency for the next century.

The current credit system may evolve into a "learning bank account" opened for every child at birth. An individual owns his/her own learning history. This is a rich area for

study and experimentation, but may need to be worked through nationally, or internationally, rather than locally.

The knowledge gap may increase as individuals who already know a lot learn more, while those who know little, don't know where to go for more. Because of this gap, support systems are essential. A state such as Nebraska with a small population must clearly set education priorities.

Summary and conclusion

To become competitive, we need to combine Nebraska values, such as straight talk, hard work, appreciation for education, and fiscal conservatism, with a large dose of vision. We need more sharing and openness on all policies, procedures, and money flows. We need compatible technologies. We need to build on strengths and eliminate well-recognized weaknesses in our current fragmented approaches-all without dampening creativity and entrepreneurship.

The author calls for a statewide year-long activity--focused on goals and policies for education--to obtain input from citizens. A well thought-out evaluation and research process should be developed with the NN21 Distance Education/Outreach Action Team as a leading force.

Distance Education in Nebraska: Access and Strategies

By Sarah Cunningham, Central Community College

S. Kay Rockwell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

David W. Brooks, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Goal of this White Paper

Nebraska faces unique challenges as the 15th largest state geographically, but with the 10th smallest population. This paper reviews the expectations of Nebraskans for lifelong learning opportunities and the strategies needed to support the delivery of that education and training. Also discussed are the effectiveness of the state's telecommunications systems in meeting the needs of Nebraskans, and support from Nebraska employers. The findings are compared with national data.

Methods

The Bureau of Sociological Research conducted surveys as a joint project with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Sociology Department, the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and a variety of public agencies. Representative samples of Nebraska residents were interviewed by telephone.

Findings

These seven discussion areas were reviewed:

1. **Importance of lifelong learning to Nebraska residents.** Eighty percent of Nebraskans surveyed feel getting a college education is more important today than it was 10 years ago. Yet, only 43 percent of working Nebraskans said they had pursued education or training during the past three years. That compares to 80 percent in a national survey.

2. **Support for education and training by employers.** Fifty-two percent of those surveyed said employers required a minimum education for full-time employees. That dropped to 37 percent for part-time workers.

3. **Methods used to obtain education and training.** Seminars and conferences were the most frequent method, with 56.1 percent favoring seminars and 43.9 percent conferences. Video tapes were used by 39.3 percent, while 22.3 percent favored the Internet and 14.6 percent used TV.

4. **Barriers to the public.** Time and cost were the top two reasons for not getting education and training. Females said they were more likely to experience barriers than males.

Minorities saw more barriers than Caucasians, with availability and admissions requirements the top two reasons.

5. **Distance strategies and teaching methods.** New delivery systems enable new approaches to instruction. There are two categories: synchronous (one time and one place) and asynchronous (different places at different times.) Early television approaches were synchronous. Correspondence courses are asynchronous. The advent of the World Wide Web has brought massive changes to the latter, encouraging an extremely wide range of multimedia formats and opportunities for connections among class members. Dropout rates can rise markedly, however, as students find asynchronous courses easiest to cut when they are short on time.

6. **The public's view of Nebraska educational institutions.** Nebraskans think highly of the state's K-postsecondary educational institutions. Most Nebraskans (55 percent) would choose a community college as their preferred place to take a college course for credit. Thirty-one percent would choose a four-year institution.

7. **Telecommunications infrastructure of Nebraska.** Since Nebraska invested $6.5 million to lease a satellite transponder in 1989, the NEB*SAT satellite and fiber optic system has grown to include five networks used by a variety of educational institutions to deliver services to K-postsecondary outlets. Capabilities include various combinations of one-way and two-way audio and video. Several institutions collaborate in joint offerings, such as offering an associate degree and sharing instructors via satellite. In each case, the student decides where to enroll.

Key areas of interest

• • Most Nebraskans have the tools to use alternative delivery methods for education (computers, Cable TV, VCRs), but higher education has been slow to adopt new methods.

• • Nebraskans don't care who delivers the connections for distance education, they just want the connections.

• • The majority of Nebraskans would choose an in-state institution for additional education and training, despite the availability of the Web and other outside sources.

• • Although most employers financially support education and training, most respondents don't take advantage of this perk.

• • Ways faculty can learn about new teaching strategies and issues related to Web-based instruction are scattered, at best.

• • Web-based components to conventional instruction are becoming important to the heart of college-level teaching despite outmoded territorial issues.

• • Ownership of Web-delivered courses is unclear.

• • Issues of student rights are yet to be determined, but will likely need to be addressed by the institution providing the courses.

Research and Evaluation Priorities for Distance Education in Nebraska: A Delphi Study

By S. Kay Rockwell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

David B. Marx, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Leroy V. Rockwell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Jack W. Furgason, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Goals of this White Paper

This White Paper identifies research and evaluation priorities for distance education in Nebraska, focusing on research that will help with planning and structuring decisions as distance education develops. It also focuses on evaluations for assessing and documenting the implementation process.

Key points/background

The author surveyed distance educators across Nebraska to identify and rank the research and evaluation needs and issues distance education will face in the future. A modified Delphi process was used, in which a steering committee of local, national, and international distance educators identified topics and issues for a survey instrument. A 43-person panel of distance educators from Nebraska and surrounding states twice ranked 98 research and evaluation issues. After discussion at a statewide conference, 14 participants again ranked the items to establish priorities

Areas of research priority

Distance educators' concerns were grouped into five areas of research priority:

• • Planning

• • Structuring

• • Implementation

• • Outcome needs

• • General education

Planning

Major interests were:

• • Promoting better cooperation among institutions so both technology and programming can be more effective

• • Identifying the impact on learners as coordination and cooperation improve.

Structuring

Major interests were:

• • Effective strategies for successful distance learning experiences

• • The support needed from the educational institution

• • Training needs for distance education teachers.

Implementation

Major interests were:

• • Learner issues

• • Instructional delivery

• • Administration

• • Quality control.

Outcome needs

Major interests were:

• • Assessing outcomes of formal higher education courses and K-12 courses.

• • Documenting participation and completion rates

• • Identifying effective and fair teacher evaluation processes.

General education

Major interests were:

• • How to include training on adult education theory and practice so distance education instructors become more action-oriented

• • Whether distance education changes the learning process

• • How the changes are managed by students

• • How distance education can enable lifelong learning

• • Creating a long-term vision about educational systems

• • Integrating distance education into institutions' strategic plans.

Student Services in Distant Learning Environments

By Roger Wess, Chadron State College

Nancy Aden, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ward Sybouts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Goal of this White Paper

Quality learning experiences for students and quality student support services are two things institutions need for success in distance learning. This white paper explores successful strategies for providing three support services that contribute to successful distance learning:

• • Timely student feedback

• • On-site support

• • Access to library materials.

Introduction

With rapid changes in our society, more people become lifelong learners than ever before. However, as people get older, formal, location-based learning is not always possible. Distance education students have most of the same social and physical needs as traditional campus students, and their needs should be met in equal quality. They should not feel like second class students.

Student services are a major factor in the success or failure of an institution's distance-student learning and retention, just as they are in campus programs.

Nebraska postsecondary and K-12 institutions that provide distance learning must very carefully develop institutional support systems. They also must cooperate and form partnerships for support services with other learning entities in distant communities. Taking into account the varying policies, procedures, and negotiations required to serve distance students, this is a formidable undertaking.

Existing support services available

• • Learning Centers, such as the college centers in Grand Island and Alliance, Educational Service Units, and Cooperative Extension facilities

• • Internet, voice telephone,

• • U.S. Mail

Support Services Needed

• • More student-support centers in Nebraska communities

• • State-wide coordination of distant learning services and technology

• • Partnerships with K-12 schools, libraries, and similar institutions for meeting rooms and support staff. As a result, local schools may become more important to taxpayers who don't have children attending these institutions.

• • A sophisticated Inter/Intranet service may be needed to list all courses, programs, certificates and admissions, enrollment and other academic procedures for all participating institutions.

What types of support services are necessary?

• • **Assessment**--Institutions need to know what support services learners need, where they are needed and to what extent, before acting. Assessment also gives students and instructors information that can be used to increase success rates of distant students.

• • **Recruitment**--All citizens should have access to all postsecondary education offerings, even those offered out of state. Recruiters need to promote distance experiences just as they do campus programs. Academically talented students should be recruited for distance services just as actively as for campus enrollment.

• • **Admissions, Registration, Orientation**--Orientation programs will help students make good choices among educational opportunities and help them obtain a good overview of preparation needed for the learning environment. These programs could be in person, on campus, or through multimedia or the Internet.

• • **Student Center**--Social contact may be just as important for distance students. Possibilities include providing listservs, e-mail address exchanges, and video conferencing.

• • **Advisement and Referral**--K-12 students have traditional support available. Postsecondary students in distance settings, however, need an advisor, just as they would in a campus setting. Referral lists of resources for physical, emotional, and cognitive needs may need to be maintained.

• • **Bookstore**--College and university bookstores may need to establish electronic catalog services. Teachers may wish to see that required materials can be ordered online through other sources.

• • **Library and Media Support**--Students need ready access to quality current library resources. Cooperation among libraries is essential, as is after-hours access to support. Specialty publishers or information provided on CD-ROM are possibilities.

• • **Technology Support--**Support is needed as technology inevitably breaks down. Delivery systems must be oriented to the needs of the user.

• • **Financial Aid**--Postsecondary financial aid guidelines are strongly influenced by federal guidelines. Financial and scholarship information should be readily available to students. Scholarship providers should be contacted to ensure distance learners have the same access to aid as campus learners.

• • **Tutoring Services**--A combination of tutoring support systems needs to be established, for example, using a technology-based student discussion group or tutoring system available by phone, fax, network, or Internet, to help students with temporary barriers to learning. In most cases, the most effective tutoring service will be the instructor setting aside specific times to talk with students by phone, timely e-mail, or in electronic discussion formats.

• • **Transfer of Credit**--Distance students don't know or care about campus turf issues. Postsecondary institutions need to develop transfer agreements among all levels of schools.

• • **Career Planning and Placement**--Placement services may need to be more extensive for distant students. Web-based databases may be needed and activities may need to be scheduled in more than one location. Institutional cooperation can make students aware of opportunities.

• • **Alumni Services**--Since students may take courses from several institutions while obtaining degrees and certificates, all institutions may contact students with alumni information. Nebraska postsecondary institutions may want to develop a common database of alumni activities for all or most institutions to efficiently deal with school/student alumni contacts.

Summary

The legislature, administrations, faculties, and support staffs must all change their concept of a campus as a physical location. Instead, they need to adapt to the concept of a statewide campus that encompasses various K-12 districts, colleges, universities, and corporate universities that all provide instructional services. Although this change has a steep learning curve and a number of new problems, it is an inevitable development. It is a question of "when," not "if," this change will occur.

The Policy Perspective in Distance Education: A Futures Landscape/Panorama

By James W. King, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Dara Lacy, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Keith Bartels, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

John McMillian

Goal of this White Paper

The topic for this paper is postsecondary distance education policy for Nebraska institutions. It offers a series of tools useful for forming policy.

Methods

A survey was mailed to Nebraska postsecondary institutions, except professional and trade schools, seeking written policies related to distance education. Returned surveys were analyzed under nine policy development areas: academic, fiscal, geographic, governance, labor-management, legal, student support services, technical, and cultural. Themes and commonalities were outlined.

Findings

1. Program and course development occur when there is faculty and administrator interest in distance education. In institutions in which there is no interest, there is no distance education.

2. When an institution has postsecondary distance education, policies are developed that are pragmatic and need-based.

3. Gaps exist at all levels in all institutions because no policy covers all nine areas of the analysis framework.

4. Two models of distance education based on existing academic processes were found: the *continuing education model* and the *graduate school model*.

5. When an institution has a systematic distance education policy, there is usually a program of study, or a series of activities, versus a single course or offering.

6. Major gaps in distance education policy include:

• • **Intellectual property**--Who owns created distance education materials? Faculty or the institution?

• • **Rural considerations**--What is the role of postsecondary institutions to provide access to segments of the population unconnected by Internet and/or computer?

• **Pre-K to 12 linkages**--How will differing levels of commitment and discipline required from the student be handled among the various schools?

• • **School schedule/course calendar**--Should distance education courses follow traditional school calendars? How should institutional differences affect completion schedules?

• • **Costs**--Do different cost issues apply to distance education than to campus education?

Key lessons that emerged

• • Collaboration among Nebraska postsecondary institutions sets up win-win situations.

• • Distance education policies must be developed to build collaborative relationships.

Policies are needed in the areas of:

• • Courses

• • Degrees

• • Intellectual property

• • Fiscal issues

• • Faculty and students.

These can be developed in three ways:

1. Distance education fights for its own turf and power base and develops its own policies.

2. Distance education policy fits into existing structures and practices.

3. Distance education policy develops and becomes independent of general university policies.

The authors argue for the "fits into" strategy (2), which allows for win-win strategies of cooperation and collaboration. It will take time, energy, and staying power, but the authors believe it is the path postsecondary institutions need in order to reach the vision of "communities of learning" in Nebraska.