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Section 8: Distance Education

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources' (IANR) 1995 Strategic Plan identifies "implementation of distance education" as one of its three overarching objectives as the university moves into the 21st century. In addition, the Nebraska Network 21 vision statement recognizes distance education as an integral part of Nebraska's future as we develop educational strategies to address learners' needs, both formally in the classroom, as well as informally in the community or the workplace.

The citizens the University of Nebraska serves are requesting that postsecondary education be more responsive to their lifelong learning needs at a price they can afford — in both time and money. Advances in technology have eliminated access issues, making it possible for learners to participate in education without leaving town, workplace or even home. This situation positions the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (AgLEC) for a broader role in the education of both traditional campus-based students and place-bound adults. In this new role, we can address the needs of learners for the application of theory in the workplace, as well as their demands for practical training in various areas.

Training and retraining will be critical to economic development in light of projections that people can be expected to make eight career changes in their professional lifetimes. The American Society of Training and Development predicts these career changes will result in the need for retraining 75 percent of the workforce by the year 2000. We no longer speak of a national workforce, but a global workforce, one that is affected economically and socially by changes around the world. Learners of all age groups, income levels, and backgrounds are coping with economic and social changes through a greater commitment to their roles as lifelong learners.

PROGRAM GOALS AND RATIONALE

AgLEC seeks to provide academic leadership in distance and outreach education theory and research and to use distance education methods to deliver instruction by collaborating with IANR units, statewide information networks, and other institutions. This mission provides guiding principles for the departmental Distance Education Committee that was established in August 1995.

Rapidly changing demographics and developments in information technology and communications, both on and off campus, converge to make distance and outreach education a viable strategy in addressing lifelong learning needs. Furthermore, AgLEC's changing emphasis

at the graduate level from agricultural education to leadership education positions the department to take an active role in developing leaders who use distance and outreach education methods, as well as in teaching others how to effectively develop and use educational strategies. Consequently, we are able to develop a research and education emphasis on distance and outreach education that will have an impact within the state as well as beyond its borders. This distance and outreach emphasis will be built on the following goals.

Goal 1. *Assess specific opportunities for integrating distance education theory and methods into AgLEC by:*

- identifying target audiences that would benefit from distance and outreach opportunities, and
- reviewing AgLEC's undergraduate, graduate and extension programs to identify how distance methods can enhance the offerings.

Rationale. A major thrust in IANR is delivering education through distance learning strategies. Distance education also will serve as a means of increasing participation in AgLEC academic and outreach activities. These efforts will be supported by targeting learners for distance education courses, degree programs, certificate programs, and seminars.

Goal 2. *Help AgLEC faculty use distance education methods in the curriculum.*

Rationale. Professional development opportunities in distance education are needed to strengthen the capacity of faculty in AgLEC to integrate distance education methods into educational offerings. As faculty implement distance and outreach strategies, they will need support from other departments or organizations such as Communications & Information Technology (CIT), University Educational Telecommunications (ETV) and/or A*DEC (a distance education consortium).

Goal 3. *Implement distance education into curriculum offerings by*

- developing and delivering appropriate courses, degree programs, seminars, and/or workshops for clients in cooperation with other institutions or learning centers, when appropriate, and
- using courses (or other programs) developed at other sites.

Rationale. Training and retraining needs, new and accessible technologies, the pervasive adult lifelong learner attitude, and rapidly changing career paths are demanding that colleges and universities enter into cooperative ventures to meet student needs. One course (ALEC 826, Program Evaluation in Adult Education and Training) has been developed into a continuous distance course offered every spring semester. Two courses (ALEC 102, Interpersonal Skills for Leadership, and ALEC 805, Advanced Teaching Methods) are being offered for the first time over distance technology in fall 1996. These courses represent first moves toward integration of distance education into AgLEC's curriculum, allowing place-bound students throughout the state to participate in the department's offerings. Where appropriate, distance and outreach courses

offered by other institutions will be considered by the departmental Graduate Committee for inclusion in graduate programs so students can obtain degrees that meet their needs.

Goal 4. *Establish an academic home for distance education in IANR to:*

1) create a group of graduate courses for a specialization in the Master's program that focuses on distance and outreach education and is offered through distance methods, and
2) conduct research and evaluation on distance education processes and activities.

Rationale. A curriculum that addresses student and faculty needs about distance and outreach education is needed to support food systems education throughout Nebraska. Goals for three new courses have been identified to support a distance and outreach emphasis. Two current courses have been targeted that could include components relevant to distance and outreach educational strategies. These courses will complement programs being developed in Teachers College, so it will be appropriate to cross list the courses in several departments.

A sound research and evaluation program is needed to expand the knowledge base to continuously improve distance and outreach educational efforts and to evaluate the effectiveness of the distance and outreach strategies and identify their impact on lifelong learning.

Goal 5. *Collaborate with business, industry, government, and other UNL departments, programs or colleges to offer programs via distance for formal academic credit and to meet informal educational needs in the workplace.*

Rationale. There is a dramatic need in business and industry to retrain people and update their skills to work in new or existing jobs. Many people will require training in new technologies and theories required for companies to perform effectively and competitively. In-service offerings will also be important, but they must be relevant and workplace-accessible, so people can easily participate.

Faculty Responsibilities and Interrelationships with Other Units

As of July 1, 1996, two new faculty members (Kay Rockwell, 25% research, 8% teaching, 60% extension; Jim King, 25% research, 75% teaching) joined the department. They will devote their time to distance education research and evaluation, along with course development and delivery. Kay is nationally recognized for her expertise in extension evaluation. Both will play pivotal roles in the development and delivery of courses associated with the master of science degree to be offered to some students through distance methods.

AgLEC, through its historic ties to the former Department of Agricultural Education, has a rich history of collaboration with the Department of Vocational and Adult Education (VAED) in Teachers College. Many graduate courses are cross-listed between the departments and many

graduate faculty have courtesy appointments in VAED. As AgLEC moves to offer more graduate courses through distance technologies, more courses will be cross-listed with appropriate departments in Teachers College, and cooperative ventures among faculty in different departments will be encouraged. Efforts by Teachers College to offer a Ph.D. program in Educational Administration via distance delivery have been successful and offer opportunities for expanding the clientele base for some of AgLEC's graduate courses offered over distance technologies. AgLEC faculty have been involved in collaborative educational activities with College of Business Administration and College of Journalism faculty. These collaborative activities have the potential to develop into distance offerings.

CIT, ETV, and A*DEC are three critical players in the area of distance delivery. Each offers a dimension needed by AgLEC to successfully develop, deliver, and sustain efforts in distance education. CIT focuses on IANR production and marketing, ETV is nationally recognized for new and diverse methods in distance education programming, and A*DEC serves as a critical link to the national and international markets. Cooperative arrangements have already developed as a result of courtesy appointments (for example, a CIT staff member, Jim Randall, serves as co-chair of the department's Distance Education Committee).

Joint appointments between AgLEC and the Cooperative Extension Division offer tremendous opportunities for outreach and professional development. AgLEC's partnerships and collaborative arrangements across the campus can bring expertise and education to local extension educators. The Extension Office can provide a critical link between local clientele and the university. These same partnerships and collaborative arrangements can offer professional development opportunities for extension staff to update themselves on new technologies and theories.

AgLEC faculty members also participate, lead, and interact with other IANR committees as well as university-wide committees. They will be involved in a number of the teams associated with a W.K. Kellogg funded project which focuses on food systems professions education in the 21st century.

Program Development

The creation of AgLEC in 1992 positioned the department to respond to emerging needs that focus on leadership education in the food system. The general area of distance learning fits well with the outreach thrust in IANR, and AgLEC's tie with outreach education through Cooperative Extension provides a framework for expansion and leadership in outreach efforts. However, as AgLEC expands its use of distance education technologies and course delivery, a number of questions need to be addressed broadly within the university as well as within IANR and the AgLEC Department. These questions include:

- In general, how will the university focus on distance education and bring together a number of divergent activities in terms of production and delivery?

- How will AgLEC's distance education efforts relate to the proposed "Virtual University?"

- Who will lead research efforts in distance education, address learner outcomes, and assess teaching methodologies?

- How will AgLEC and UNL work with other agencies and institutions to implement the cooperative ventures envisioned by A*DEC?

- Will faculty be given release time to prepare and deliver courses using distance technologies?

- How will faculty be compensated? Will faculty who take the risks to develop and deliver courses through distance methods be acknowledged and encouraged?

- What are the possibilities and limitations associated with copyright laws as they relate to distance education?

Areas in Which the Program Excels

Since the development of its distance education plan in the fall of 1995, AgLEC has experienced some significant achievements:

- Two faculty with expertise in distance education have joined the department.

- Two inservice activities were conducted during the year for AgLEC faculty.

- Two courses (ALEC 102, Interpersonal Skills for Leadership, and ALEC 805, Advanced Teaching Methods) will be taught using distance methods in 1996-97.

- Program Evaluation in Adult Education and Training (ALEC 826) has been taught twice (1993 and 1995) using satellite delivery, and has been restructured so it can be taught continuously in a distance format using videotape, teleconferencing, and e-mail. It also has been developed in modules so it can be used for academic credit or for informal educational needs for lifelong learners. Text portions of the student manual will be available on the World Wide Web for spring semester 1997.

- Multimedia Applications for Instruction (ALEC 412/812) has been restructured to include a larger focus on the use of distance technologies.

- AgLEC faculty members are capitalizing on a wide array of developmental activities associated with distance learning:

- Four faculty participated in a three-day multimedia workshop sponsored by Teacher's College and the Teaching Learning Center.
- Several faculty have used the technology in national workshops or presented national teleconferences (e.g., Rewarding Teaching, Teaching Methods, Leadership) that integrated satellite, teleconferencing, and e-mail.
- The department has a World Wide Web site with faculty and departmental program information on it (see http://ianrwww.unl.edu/ianr/aglec/).
- Faculty use e-mail to communicate with colleagues on and off campus and with students.
- Faculty are taking advantage of distance learning opportunities through listservs and workshops or educational series delivered via distance.
- Several faculty are participating in distance education development activities sponsored on campus by the Teaching and Learning Center and the Nebraska Educational Telecommunication Consortium for Higher Education (NETCHE).
- Faculty are creating materials for distance learning using multi-media software for computers.
- Faculty are taking an interest in the technology and are implementing it into their teaching strategies. Some technical communication (ALEC 200 and 300) instructors, for example, ask students to submit some course assignments and participate in discussions with fellow students via e-mail. Students in ALEC 305 give a televised presentation as a course assignment.

- Three faculty members (Jim King, Kay Rockwell and Earl Russell) will formulate an ARD team project in the area of distance education in early fall 1996.

- A plan has been drafted for a specialization in distance and outreach education in the master's program.

- A new East Campus multi-media authoring center is opening in fall 1996 in a laboratory area adjacent to the AgLEC classroom, adding a major resource for distance education program development.

- Two educators from University Telecommunications who are involved with distance learning are interested in courtesy appointments in AgLEC.

Areas in Which the Program Needs Improvement

- The AgLEC faculty needs support in designing courses and materials. This support is not likely to come from one person, but perhaps from a design team.

- Because it is a new, emerging area within AgLEC, distance education efforts appear to be fragmented and somewhat disorganized at this point. Strong leadership from the distance education faculty team is needed to guide and direct the distance/outreach effort. Faculty members who teach distance education courses need assistance in moving courses into sustainable formats.

- The entire distance education thrust would benefit from a stronger, more harmonious working relationship with CIT. This may be expedited by a more definitive working relationship, which is currently being clarified and elaborated.

- AgLEC lacks laboratory settings (such as television studios and multimedia production units) that will support practicums in distance education production. Cooperative arrangements with other university units will lead to development of appropriate laboratories.

Strategies for Improvement

The following strategies will help further AgLEC's distance education goals:

- Form a design team to help the faculty develop distance education offerings. The makeup and function of such a design team will need to be addressed by the distance education committee in cooperation with AgLEC's department head.

- Continue joint planning sessions with CIT to clarify and elaborate more definitive working relationships. AgLEC's distance education activities might be enhanced by involving CIT professional staff, production facilities, and distribution capabilities. The relationship between AgLEC and CIT might be strengthened by involving extension communications specialists and CIT faculty members in the department's distance education activities and curriculum. CIT faculty might serve on graduate committees for distance education students and supervise graduate student practicums.

- Develop relationships with CIT, ETV, or other entities to support course offerings and course requirements (practicums). Developing these relationships will need to be addressed by the distance education committee in cooperation with AgLEC's department head.

- Seek grant support to plan and implement a master's degree specialization in distance and outreach education. It is anticipated that such a specialization could be offered jointly by several institutions participating in NN21.