

Update

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Distance Education in Higher Education Institutions

Highlights

The survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions was requested by the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning, U.S. Department of Education. The survey was designed to provide the first nationally representative data about distance education course offerings in higher education institutions. The study obtained information about the percentage of institutions that currently offer and that plan to offer distance education courses in the next 3 years; distance education course offerings, including the types of technologies used to deliver distance education courses and the sites to which such courses are directed; distance education enrollments and completions; characteristics of distance education courses and programs; distance education program goals; future plans for distance education course offerings; and factors keeping institutions from starting or expanding their distance education

offerings. For this study, distance education was defined as education or training courses delivered to remote (off-campus) locations via audio, video, or computer technologies. Data were collected in fall 1995 from 2-year and 4-year higher education

institutions and were weighted to provide national estimates.

■ A third of higher education institutions offered distance education courses in fall 1995, another quarter planned to offer such courses in the next 3 years, and 42 percent did not

Table 1

Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses, percent planning to offer them in the next 3 years, and percent not currently offering or planning to offer them, by institutional characteristics: 1995

Institutional characteristic	Currently offering distance education courses	Planning to offer distance education courses in the next 3 years	Not currently offering or planning to offer distance education courses
All institutions	33	25	42
Institutional type			
Public 2-year	58	28	14
Private 2-year	2	14	84
Public 4-year	62	23	14
Private 4-year	12	27	61
Geographic region			
Northeast	20	27	53
Southeast	31	28	41
Central	39	24	37
West	40	23	37
Size of institution			
Less than 3,000	16	27	56
3,000 to 9,999	61	24	15
10,000 or more	76	14	10

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

offer and did not plan to offer distance education courses in the next 3 years (Table 1). Public institutions offered distance education courses with much greater frequency than did private institutions: 58 percent of public 2-year and 62 percent of public 4-year institutions offered distance education courses in fall 1995, compared with 2 percent of private 2-year and 12 percent of private 4-year institutions.

■ An estimated 25,730 distance education courses with different catalog numbers were offered by higher education institutions in academic year 1994-95. Public 4-year institutions offered 45 percent, public 2-year institutions 39 percent, and private 4-year institutions 16 percent of the distance education courses in

1994-95. About half of the institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995 offered 10 or fewer such courses in academic year 1994-95.

■ Distance education courses were delivered by two-way interactive video at 57 percent, and by one-way prerecorded video at 52 percent of the institutions offering distance education courses in fall 1995 (Table 2). About a quarter of the institutions used two-way audio with one-way video, and computer-based technologies other than two-way online interactions during instruction (e.g., the Internet) to deliver their distance education courses.

■ About half of the higher education institutions that

offered distance education courses in fall 1995 directed such courses to students' homes (Table 3). Institutions also frequently directed distance education courses to other branches of their institution (39 percent) and other college campuses (35 percent). About a quarter of the institutions directed distance education courses to elementary/secondary schools.

■ More higher education institutions offered distance education courses designed primarily for undergraduate students (81 percent of institutions) and graduate students (34 percent of institutions) than for any other type of student (Table 4). Professionals seeking recertification were targeted by 39 percent, and other workers seeking skill updating or

Table 2

Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses that use various types of technologies to deliver distance education courses, by institutional characteristics: 1995

Institutional characteristic	Two-way interactive video	Two-way audio, one-way video	One-way live video	One-way pre-recorded video	Audio-graphics	Two-way audio	One-way audio	Two-way online interactions	Other computer-based technology	Other technologies
All institutions	57	24	9	52	3	11	10	14	22	5
Institutional type*										
Public 2-year	49	18	9	67	1	5	10	8	14	5
Public 4-year	78	36	13	42	5	17	6	17	26	6
Private 4-year	40	14	4	30	3	16	20	25	38	7
Geographic region										
Northeast	51	15	6	43	2	7	6	15	22	6
Southeast	60	24	7	64	2	11	5	11	10	4
Central	68	23	6	39	3	16	15	13	26	6
West	46	28	17	62	3	7	11	16	26	6
Size of institution										
Less than 3,000	51	20	4	42	1	10	12	13	18	4
3,000 to 9,999	56	17	8	57	2	10	9	9	19	4
10,000 or more	67	40	19	59	6	13	9	22	31	9

*Data for private 2-year institutions are not reported as a separate type of institution because too few of them in the sample offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to make reliable estimates. Data for private 2-year institutions are included in the totals and in analyses by other institutional characteristics.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents sum to more than 100 because an institution could use more than one type of technology.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

Table 3**Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses directed to different types of remote sites, by institutional characteristics: 1995**

Institutional characteristic	Other branches of the institution	Other college campuses	Students' homes	Work sites	Libraries	Elementary/secondary schools	Community based organizations	Correctional institutions	Other sites
All institutions	39	35	49	18	10	24	4	6	13
Institutional type*									
Public 2-year	39	25	58	8	14	24	2	10	7
Public 4-year	45	56	38	31	10	32	6	6	21
Private 4-year	27	22	41	23	1	10	3	0	15
Geographic region									
Northeast	34	17	49	23	7	31	2	8	15
Southeast	38	31	50	16	14	18	3	3	15
Central	38	49	36	16	10	35	4	5	14
West	43	33	62	20	9	14	4	10	9
Size of institution									
Less than 3,000	41	28	42	7	8	24	3	7	11
3,000 to 9,999	32	33	49	18	11	20	2	6	13
10,000 or more	48	48	57	35	12	30	6	8	16

*Data for private 2-year institutions are not reported as a separate type of institution because too few of them in the sample offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to make reliable estimates. Data for private 2-year institutions are included in the totals and in analyses by other institutional characteristics.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents sum to more than 100 because an institution could direct courses to more than one type of remote site. Zeros appear in the table when no institution in the sample gave the indicated response.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

Table 4**Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses designed primarily for specific types of students, by institutional characteristics: 1995**

Institutional characteristic	Type of student						
	Elementary/secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Adult basic education	Professional continuing education	Other continuing education	Other
All institutions	6	81	34	2	13	6	2
Institutional type*							
Public 2-year	5	97	3	4	5	5	2
Public 4-year	11	75	66	1	26	9	2
Private 4-year	1	47	60	0	11	3	1
Geographic region							
Northeast	11	75	33	1	11	5	2
Southeast	5	80	37	3	11	4	2
Central	5	84	31	2	18	10	1
West	6	83	34	4	11	3	2
Size of institution							
Less than 3,000	2	78	26	2	13	5	2
3,000 to 9,999	8	83	26	2	8	7	1
10,000 or more	10	82	56	3	22	5	1

*Data for private 2-year institutions are not reported as a separate type of institution because too few of them in the sample offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to make reliable estimates. Data for private 2-year institutions are included in the totals and in analyses by other institutional characteristics.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents sum to more than 100 because an institution could offer different courses designed primarily for different types of students. Zeros appear in the table when no institution in the sample gave the indicated response.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

Table 5**Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses targeted toward certain types of individuals, by institutional characteristics: 1995**

Institutional characteristic	Type of individual						
	Non-English-speaking individuals	Military personnel	Individuals with disabilities	Native Americans/Alaskan Natives on tribal lands	Professional seeking recertification	Other workers seeking skill updating or retraining	Other types of individuals
All institutions	3	12	16	7	39	49	17
Institutional type*							
Public 2-year	4	11	22	8	24	45	18
Public 4-year	2	15	12	8	65	60	15
Private 4-year	1	9	7	1	30	37	17
Geographic region							
Northeast	2	11	20	2	40	51	18
Southeast	3	16	15	1	40	47	12
Central	3	6	11	9	41	52	16
West	5	16	21	13	35	47	21
Size of institution							
Less than 3,000	2	6	8	9	30	39	17
3,000 to 9,999	3	13	19	6	36	50	15
10,000 or more	4	19	22	6	54	61	19

*Data for private 2-year institutions are not reported as a separate type of institution because too few of them in the sample offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to make reliable estimates. Data for private 2-year institutions are included in the totals and in analyses by other institutional characteristics.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents sum to more than 100 because an institution's distance education courses could target more than one type of individual.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

retraining were targeted by 49 percent of institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995 (Table 5).

■ There were an estimated 753,640 students formally enrolled in distance education courses in academic year 1994-95. Public 2-year institutions enrolled 55 percent, public 4-year institutions 31 percent, and private 4-year institutions 14 percent of the students enrolled in distance education courses in 1994-95.

■ About a quarter of the institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995 offered degrees that students could complete by taking distance education courses exclusively, and 7 percent offered

certificates that could be completed that way. There were an estimated 690 degrees and 170 certificates offered in fall 1995 that students could receive by taking distance education courses exclusively. An estimated 3,430 students received degrees and 1,970 received certificates in 1994-95 by taking distance education courses exclusively.

■ Access to library resources varied depending on the type of library resource. Access to an electronic link with the institution's library was available for some or all courses at 56 percent of the institutions, and cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries were available at 62 percent of institutions

(Tables 6 and 7). Institution library staff were assigned to assist distance education students at 45 percent of the institutions, while library deposit collections were available at remote sites at 39 percent of institutions.

■ Increasing student access was an important goal for most distance education programs, with making courses available at convenient locations rated as very important by 82 percent of institutions, and reducing time constraints for course taking rated as very important by 63 percent of institutions (Table 8). Making educational opportunities more affordable for students, another aspect of student access, was rated as very impor-

tant by about half of the institutions. Goals concerning increasing the institution's audiences and enrollments were also perceived as quite important, with increasing the insti-

tution's access to new audiences and increasing the institution's enrollments rated as very important by 64 percent and 54 percent of institutions, respectively. In general, insti-

tutions indicated that most of the goals were met to a minor or moderate extent. Goals particularly likely to be met to a major extent concerned student access.

Table 6

Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses that have various resources available for students enrolled in distance education courses: 1995

Institutional characteristic	Not available	Available for some courses	Available for all courses	Don't know
Instructor visits remote site(s) on occasion	32	42	25	2
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to instructor	17	24	58	2
Teaching assistant, tutor, or facilitator regularly available at remote site(s) . . .	41	32	23	3
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to teaching assistant, tutor, or facilitator	47	22	27	3
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to technical support staff . .	35	17	46	2
Access to an electronic link with institution's library	40	18	39	4
Institution library staff assigned to assist distance education students	50	11	33	5
Cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries	30	18	45	8
Deposit collections at remote sites	51	21	18	10
Online access to wide area networks (e.g., Internet)	44	27	26	4

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents are computed across each row, but may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

Table 7

Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses indicating that various resources are available for some or all courses for students enrolled in distance education courses, by institutional type: 1995

Resource	Institutional type*			
	All institutions	Public 2-year	Public 4-year	Private 4-year
Instructor visits remote site(s) on occasion	67	62	82	48
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to instructor	82	73	89	91
Teaching assistant, tutor, or facilitator regularly available at remote site(s) . . .	56	44	76	50
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to teaching assistant, tutor, or facilitator	50	34	64	65
Toll-free telephone, E-mail, or other online access to technical support staff . .	63	54	72	74
Access to an electronic link with institution's library	56	40	78	62
Institution library staff assigned to assist distance education students	45	41	45	53
Cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries	62	58	75	54
Deposit collections at remote sites	39	38	47	25
Online access to wide area networks (e.g., Internet)	53	36	76	55

*Data for private 2-year institutions are not reported as a separate type of institution because too few of them in the sample offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to make reliable estimates. Data for private 2-year institutions are included in the totals.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

Table 8

Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses indicating the importance of various goals to their distance education programs, and the extent to which the institution is meeting those goals: 1995

	Importance ¹			Extent goal met ²			
	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Not at all	Minor extent	Moderate extent	Major extent
Reducing your institution's per-student costs	29	51	20	20	46	29	5
Making educational opportunities more affordable for students	17	34	49	7	35	42	15
Increasing institution enrollments	8	37	54	4	40	46	10
Increasing student access by reducing time constraints for course taking	10	27	63	3	25	44	27
Increasing student access by making courses available at convenient locations	5	13	82	1	19	40	40
Increasing institution's access to new audiences	3	33	64	5	37	43	15
Improving the quality of course offerings	15	39	46	4	41	44	11
Meeting the needs of local employees	19	43	38	10	49	33	8

¹Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents are computed across each row, but may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

²Percents are based on institutions that rated that goal as somewhat or very important. Percents are computed across each row, but may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.

■ Among all institutions, including those with no future plans to offer distance education courses, factors frequently reported as keeping the institution from starting or expanding their distance education

course offerings to a major extent were program development costs (43 percent), limited technological infrastructure to support distance education (31 percent), and equipment failures and costs of maintain-

ing equipment (23 percent). However, in general, most factors were not perceived to be major hindrances keeping institutions from starting or expanding their distance education offerings.



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