

# Comparing the Distance Learning-Related Course Development Approach and Faculty Support and Rewards Structure at AACSB Accredited Institutions between 2001 and 2006

Heidi Perreault, *Missouri State University*

Lila Waldman, *University of Wisconsin-Whitewater*

Melody Alexander, *Ball State University*

Jensen Zhao, *Ball State University*

## Abstract

The study compared the support and rewards provided faculty members for online course teaching and the development approaches used at business schools accredited by AACSB between 2001 and 2006. Data were collected from 81 professors in 2001 and 140 professors in 2006. The professors were involved in developing or teaching online courses at AACSB business schools across the United States. The findings indicate that faculty members received limited support and are not taking advantage of training options. Faculty members are most likely rewarded for their involvement in distance learning through stipends based on the number of online sections taught. Little has changed during the five-year period in regards to course development. Faculty members continue to use an individual instead of a team approach to course development and most faculty members learned online course development and delivery techniques on their own.

**Keywords:** online course development, distance education faculty support, online teaching, online education compensation

## Introduction

Distance learning is an accepted component of institutions' long term plans for delivering post secondary education (Sloan Consortium, 2005), and it is the fastest growing segment of adult education (Carr-Chellman, 2004). Although no longer viewed as a trend or experiment, distance learning is not totally integrated into higher education administrative procedures. Many educational units have no set plan for creating distance learning courses or supporting faculty members involved in developing and delivering distance learning courses (Blakelock & Smith, 2006).

Changing from a traditional to an online teaching environment can be a threatening experience filled with challenges (Grant & Thornton, 2007). Online teaching requires different skill sets from those used in traditional face-to-face teaching. Faculty members must adjust to different student interaction models, create new assignments and assessments that fit the online delivery format, and use different technologies as teaching tools (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Another challenge faced by faculty members relates to the limited amount of support or respect they receive for their efforts. There often is a lack of administrative and technical support for online instructors, as well as a perception by colleagues and administrators that distance learning is inferior to traditional course delivery methods (Blakelock & Smith, 2006). These challenges may be an indication why less than 10 percent of the faculty members at postsecondary institutions offering distance education options are teaching a distance learning course (Contexts of postsecondary education, 2006).

The focus of this study was to investigate the changes between 2001 and 2006 regarding distance learning course development approaches used by and support and reward plans available to faculty members at AACSB accredited schools of business. The findings will identify changes that have been made during the five-year period in regards to online course development by faculty members at AACSB institutions and may provide some insight into why the percentage of faculty members participating in distance learning endeavors is so low.

## Review of Related Literature

Kennedy and Duffy (2004) noted the need for recognition to be provided to those educators willing to exert the extra effort required for online teaching. In addition to compensation or release time, recognition can be provided by customizing the reward to meet the preferences of individual faculty members. Examples would be providing enhanced computer equipment, new software, or additional travel funds (Tastle, White, & Shackleton, 2005). Grant and Thornton (2007) stressed the difficulty associated with creating and delivering quality online courses and predicted that faculty would be unwilling to participate unless adequate promotion and tenure plans were provided to reward and recognize their efforts. Overall, Pina (2008) noted that universities have not yet found an adequate means for recognizing or rewarding faculty members who participate in distance learning endeavors.

In addition to being recognized for delivering online courses, faculty members should expect to receive support while developing online courses. Training on how to integrate best practices into online learning will result in more interactive and challenging courses (Grant & Thornton, 2007). Educational institutions vary in the amount of support and/or training provided to the faculty members who develop distance learning courses. For those administrators wanting more faculty members to be involved in distance learning endeavors, Bower and Hardy (2004) challenged them to create a supportive developmental environment. In addition to facilitating program growth, development support reinforces quality expectations. As part of the support and training provided, select course development approaches can be promoted. Wallace (2002) encouraged institutions to support a team approach when creating distance learning programs.

A team-based development methodology includes technology and pedagogical specialists who take responsibility for certain aspects of the course development, thereby allowing faculty members to concentrate on the subject matter (Restauri, 2005). The specialists and the faculty member are equal contributors to the course development process. In

addition to pairing specialists with faculty members, a team approach encourages faculty members to help one another and to share development duties.

In comparison to using the team approach, distance learning course development decisions can be left solely in the hands of a single faculty member. Restauri (2005) noted that the sole developer approach often is a slower development approach because the faculty member does not have immediate access to or support from experts. Also with the sole developer approach, courses may not meet student expectations in the sense that they do not engage the online learner. The lack of input from pedagogical and technology specialists may result in online courses that are not leveraging instructional technology to support learning (National Education Association, 2000).

Another online course development approach is called the hybrid approach. With the hybrid approach, course development responsibility is given to a sole faculty member and access to support personnel is provided by the institution. Instructional designers, technology experts, and/or mentors are readily available. Kennedy and Duffy (2004) noted that teachers new to distance learning course development often have questions relating to online instruction and student participation issues. A mentor with experience in teaching distance learning courses can provide valuable guidance and encouragement (Focus on distance education, 2001.)

A certain amount of training is needed regardless of the development approach selected. Educators new to distance learning may not have had experience using the collaborative tools available through a distance learning platform (Kennedy & Duffy, 2004). In addition to training on the platform tools, guidance is needed on designing engaging online activities that support student learning (Blakelock & Smith, 2006). Chenoweth and Schramm (2004) reported significantly higher student ratings when distance learning faculty members applied online course pedagogy guidelines shared through a university-sponsored training session.

## Purpose of the Study

The study focused on the course development approaches and faculty support and rewards plans relating to distance learning programs at business schools accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Business schools accredited by AACSB have met high standards and exhibited a commitment to continuous improvement (AACSB, n.d.). Online programs offered through schools accredited by AACSB should receive the same rigorous review as traditional programs.

Online programs are relatively new to schools of business. This study sought to determine what changes have been made over a five-year period relating to specific distance learning issues. The data from a 2006 study was compared to a similar study conducted in 2001 to examine the changes relating to online course development and faculty support and rewards. The following research questions were posed.

1. Are there differences between the types of distance learning-related training the faculty members received in 2006 as compared to 2001?
2. Are there differences between the developmental approaches used by and the institutional support provided to faculty members involved in distance learning in 2006 as compared to 2001?
3. Are there differences between the faculty rewards and/or recognition provided to faculty members involved in distance education in 2006 as compared to 2001?

## Methodology

Considerable research has been shared in recent years on best practices associated with preparing for and delivering distance learning. This study focused on comparing faculty member experiences relating to developing distance education instruction at AACSB accredited colleges of business between the years 2001 and 2006 to determine what changes have been put into practice during that five-year period.

Three areas, associated with distance learning development and delivery, were examined. The areas included the course developmental approaches used by the institution, the support available to faculty members creating online learning instruction, and the rewards or recognition given to faculty members responsible for creating and delivering distance learning. In the 2001 study, a questionnaire was developed by the researchers and reviewed by a ten-member panel of administrators and faculty members who had experience with developing courses for distance learning. For the second study, the same panel members reviewed the survey and agreed that the questions were still valid for the 2006 survey.

During the academic year of 2000-2001, each of the 355 AACSB accredited business schools was contacted by telephone to determine if the school was offering online courses. Sixty-one schools indicated they were offering courses through distance learning. The deans at those schools were invited to participate in the study and asked to identify faculty members involved in developing and teaching distance education courses. Questionnaires were sent to each of the 184 faculty members identified. Completed, usable questionnaires were returned by 81 faculty members.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, a second study which used a slightly different procedure was completed. Instead of contacting each school to determine if distance learning was part of the course delivery plan, the information was obtained from the AACSB web site. According to the information on the web site 414 of the 436 accredited schools of business were offering distance learning courses. Mailing labels for the 414 schools were provided by AACSB with the stipulation that the labels be used for one mailing only. The deans at the identified schools were sent a letter soliciting their support of the study. Forty-three of the schools responded that they did not yet have a program in place or declined to participate. Included with the letter sent to the deans were five surveys. The deans were asked to identify five faculty members who were involved in distance learning course development and to ask those faculty members to complete the surveys. Usable surveys were returned by 141 faculty members. No follow up was conducted because of the single mailing limitation imposed by AACSB.

Data from both surveys were analyzed. To identify areas of significant differences between the 2001 and 2006 responses, the Pearson chi-square test was used with statistical differences set at the .05 alpha level.

## Findings

The respondents in both the 2001 and 2006 studies were predominately male (72% in 2001 and 63% in 2006) with the rank at either the full or associate professor level (75% in 2001 and 55% in 2006). Having earned the rank of associate or full professor indicates the respondents are experienced and successful educators. The academic departments represented by the respondents in both studies included accounting, business education, economics, finance, information systems, marketing, and management.

### Training Support

The majority of the respondents in both 2001 and 2006 indicated that when it came to learning how to develop a distance learning course, most had taught themselves. In 2001, 63% of the respondents indicated they learned to develop distance learning courses on their own and 74% indicated they were self-taught in 2006.

Blakelock and Smith (2006) reported an increase in the amount of training being provided to online course developers. Faculty members at AACSB institutions, however, are not taking advantage of training opportunities available to them. The most common type of training in which the respondents participated was an in-house workshop. About half of respondents in both 2001 and 2006 (53% and 52% respectively) indicated they had attended at least one in-house workshop which was designed to help them create a distance learning course. Other training options in which the respondents participated were one-on-one mentoring or coaching sessions, outside workshops, and outside or web-based courses. Table 1 displays the types of training in which respondents participated to support their online learning course development. There were no significant differences at the .05 alpha level between the types of training received in 2001 and the types of

training received in 2006. Differences at the .10 alpha level were noted and are listed in Table 1 for informational purposes.

**TABLE 1: Comparison of the Type of Training Faculty Received between 2001 and 2006**

Type of Training Received	Percent and Number of Faculty		
	2001	2006	
Self-taught	63.0% (51)	74.3% (104)	P<.10
In-house workshop	53.1% (43)	52.1% (73)	
Mentoring/Coaching (one-on-one training)	30.9% (25)	20.0% (28)	P<.10
Outside workshop	11.1% (9)	5.0% (7)	P<.10
Outside web-based workshop/course	6.2% (5)	6.4% (9)	

2001 n=81; 2006 n = 140

### Development Approaches

Both individual and team approaches were identified by the respondents as approaches they used to develop distance learning courses. The individual instructor approach was by far the most widely used approach. Seventy percent of the respondents indicated they developed online courses on their own in 2006 and 69% indicating they were solely responsible for course development in 2001. No significant differences at the .05 alpha level were noted between the course development approaches used in 2001 and the approaches used in 2006.

In addition to being solely responsible for course development, most respondents indicated they did not have ready access to technical or graduate assistant support during the development phase. Less than half of the respondents (46% in 2001 and 43% in 2006)



reported having technical support available to them during the course development process. And, fewer than 10% of the respondents in 2001 and in 2006 had the help of a graduate assistant. No significant differences were noted in the availability of support provided in 2001 and in 2006.

### Faculty Rewards

The only type of reward or recognition for creating and/or delivering a distance learning course reported by the respondents was receiving an additional stipend for developing and/or teaching online courses. In 2001, 33% of the respondents indicated they received a stipend for developing and/or teaching online courses as opposed to 26% in 2006. As shown in Table 2, faculty members receiving a stipend in 2006 indicated that the amount typically was based on the sections taught not the number of students enrolled.

**TABLE 2: Comparison of Stipend Calculation Methods between 2001 and 2006**

Calculation Method	Percent and Number of Faculty*	
	2001	2006
Number of Sections Taught	34.5% (10)	44.7% (17)
Student Enrollment	34.5% (10)	34.2% (17)
Other	31.0% (9)	21.1% (8)

\* Not all respondents who indicated they received a stipend specified how the stipend was calculated.

### Discussion

According to the experts, teachers need training to create effective distance learning courses (Restauri, 2005; Blakelock & Smith, 2006). However, seventy-four percent of the faculty members at AACSB accredited institutions who responded to the 2006 survey

indicated they taught themselves. The problems with self instruction are that faculty members may not learn how to leverage the instructional tools available through the distance learning delivery platform and they are not getting the opportunity to learn from others' experiences and expertise. Instead, faculty members are learning by trial and error.

Although many faculty members are self taught, training is available. About half of the respondents took advantage of the training opportunities provided by their institutions. A few (11% or less) took workshops or courses from outside their institution. The relatively light participation in training to prepare for online course development and delivery is a concern.

Another concern is that the majority of the 2006 respondents indicated they were solely responsible for developing the online course. A drawback of the sole developer approach is that a new distance learning teacher is not benefiting from the experiences of others. Restauri (2005) proposed that supporting a team approach would result in a more successful and resilient distance learning program. When an institution supports a team approach to online course development, it shows a commitment to the development process. Instead of expecting faculty members to become experts in course subject matter, pedagogy, and technology, the institutions provide faculty members with access to the expertise. Ideally, faculty members new to the distance learning format will have multiple opportunities to interact with experienced distance educators through mentoring, and they will have access to online technology experts during the design and delivery phases.

Institutions need to find ways to recognize and reward faculty members who are willing to teach and develop online courses. Pina (2008) reported that faculty members teaching online wanted recognition that positively supports promotion and tenure decisions. About two thirds of the respondents indicated they did not receive any recognition or reward for developing or teaching a distance learning course. Rewarding faculty members who are willing to put forward the extra effort required to develop an online course is a way to

encourage involvement. Although additional compensation may be highly valued by some faculty members, others might prefer a different reward option. Providing multiple reward choices such as release time, computer equipment, and travel support should be considered as a way to encourage more faculty members to become involved with distance learning. Participation also can be encouraged through providing a means to recognize involvement in online teaching endeavors for promotion and tenure considerations

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Faculty members at AACSB are not fully taking advantage of training to prepare for creating and delivering distance education courses. Over 40% of the respondents indicated they did not participate in any training relating to distance learning design or delivery. For those who did participate, there were no differences noted in the types of training they received in 2006 as compared to 2001.

AACSB institutions should continue to offer training and encourage distance learning faculty to participate. The current study focused on the type of training (online, workshop offered outside university, etc.) but did not obtain information on the content of the training classes being provided. More research is needed to determine why faculty members are not more engaged in training activities. Grant and Thornton (2007) stressed that faculty development opportunities must be offered that meet the needs of online instructors.

Research question two documented that distance learning faculty members at AACSB institutions typically take sole responsibility for course development and have very limited graduate assistant or technical support. A significant difference relating to development approaches used in 2001 and in 2006 was not noted. This finding may be indicative of a need for a more direct commitment toward distance education being made by AACSB institutions. Restauri (2005) noted that institutions that have integrated distance learning into the overall delivery plan are more likely to support a team-development approach and that a team approach is more likely to produce quality online

instruction. AACSB administrators should consider providing an infrastructure that supports a team-development approach. Increased access to technology experts and mentors is also suggested as a means for providing new distance learning educators with a stronger foundation for online course development and delivery.

The final research question examined rewards provided to faculty members for developing and delivering distance learning courses; again, no significant differences were noted between the rewards reported in 2001 and 2006. Most AACSB faculty members are not rewarded for designing or delivering online courses. Those who are rewarded for their efforts receive a stipend based on the number of online sections taught.

Although the availability of online courses has increased at post secondary institutions, the attitudes of faculty members toward teaching online courses have remained relatively stagnant. Many are still reluctant to get involved (Growing by degrees, 2005). Only a relatively small percentage of faculty members are involved in schools' distance learning programs. Those who are involved typically teach multiple sections (National Education Association, 2000). To entice more faculty members to participate in distance learning, institutions can provide better professional incentives (Pina, 2008).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Additional research should be conducted to examine if there is a higher degree of student satisfaction and/or enrollment in distance education courses at institutions that support a team-development approach, provide training options, and reward faculty members as they develop and/or teach distance learning courses.

A similar study should be conducted that includes non-AACSB accredited institutions to determine if a stronger commitment to online delivery is evident or if the same issues are present.

Conducting additional research specific to distance learning training is recommended. It will be beneficial to determine the topics that would be considered most useful by both

faculty members who have and those who have not yet been involved with distance learning endeavors. Topics may include designing the course content, using the instructional tools, engaging online learners, providing feedback to students, and assessing online learning.

A study should be conducted to determine the factors that most influenced faculty members to develop and teach distance learning courses. Additionally, research could be conducted to determine factors that might influence involvement in distance learning instruction by AACSB faculty members and faculty members at institutions not accredited by AACSB who have elected not to be involved in developing or teaching distance learning courses.

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