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ABSTRACT

This paper delineates common concerns about less popular, lower-enrollment distance education courses that are deemed important for students to be able to function effectively in an increasingly global community. Educational institutions encourage the broadening of students' experiences by offering them options in international courses. However, limited budgets and expertise limit various courses from being offered through distance education. Thus, a group of faculty members from the University of Wisconsin system (River Falls, Stevens Point, Eau Claire, and La Crosse) got together in August 1996 to plan for a collaborative effort at putting together an Asian studies minor using distance education strategies and tools. A previous paper laid the groundwork and foundation for the use of distance education for an introductory course in Asia. Various concepts of distance education were examined, such as, what is meant by distance education, and what tools are part of the strategy of delivering distance education. The previous paper laid the theoretical foundations surrounding the project and provided the reader with the project's status which was suspended because of the resignation of the project director and lack of students. This paper, which revisits the issue of distance education in a political science course, reiterates some of the background information and theoretical foundations found in the previous paper and focuses on the project's status with special emphasis upon cost and commitment. (Contains 37 references.) (Author/BT)

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND POLITICAL SCIENCE REVISITED

by

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ABSTRACT

This interest in distance education is borne out of a University of Wisconsin system wide project I was asked to become a part of in April 1996. Political Science and Social Science faculty attending a technology conference on our campus voiced common concerns about less-popular, lower-enrollment area studies courses which are deemed important for our students in order that they could effectively function in an increasingly global community. System institutions encourage the broadening of students' limited, parochial experiences by offering them options in international courses. However, limited budgets and expertise do not allow them unlimited, varied choices.

Thus, a group of faculty members from the University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Stevens Point, Eau Claire and La Crosse with similar interests in Asia got together in August 1996 in order to plan for a collaborative effort at putting together an Asian Studies minor using distance education strategies and tools. This paper and last year's paper are the evolving product of that effort. At last year's meeting the paper laid the groundwork and foundation for the use of distance education for an introductory course on Asia. The various concepts of distance education were examined. The paper took a look at what is meant by distance education, determined what tools are part of the strategy of delivering education at a distance, provided the advantages and disadvantages of such a strategy. That paper laid the theoretical foundations surrounding the project and provided the reader with the status of the project which at that time was suspended because of the resignation of the project director and the lack of students.

This paper which revisits the issue of distance education in a political science course will reiterate some of the background information and theoretical foundations found in the first paper and will focus attention upon the status of the project with special emphasis upon cost and commitment.

DISTANCE EDUCATION, DISTANCE LEARNING OR DISTANCE TEACHING: THE CONTINUING DEBATE

> The time has come to share resources. Every university cannot expect to have an expert in every field and to offer everything in every field. (Rossman, 143)

In the MODEMOCRACY (modem democracy) that we increasingly find ourselves, it has become quite important for the citizenry to be educated in the use of technology in order to make important political decisions. The nation's educational institutions are aware of the growing impact of technological change in the delivery of educational material. As knowledge expands the impetus to share this knowledge becomes more urgent as we seek to improve our global condition and global relations.

But on a more micro level, academic institutions constantly have to struggle with the issue of expanding access to education, learning and information. The idea behind distance education is to give educational opportunity to those who cannot go to an ordinary school or university for financial, social, geographical or remedial reasons. This needs to be done within the limits of finite resources and faculty. Thus the need to share finite resources on the education superhighway. In *In Search of the Virtual Class* by Tiffin and Rajasingham (Tiffin, 74-80) there is a recognition of the various problems that distance education is meant to solve: problems of space, problems of storage, problems of time (when does learning takes place? in the morning, afternoon, or evening), problems of teacher to learner ratio.

The concept of distance education offers such a solution or alternative to the traditional fixed schedule, place, program or structure type of education. However, the term means many things to different people and has had a tendency to be equated with various other concepts. Thus, it is originally thought of as being similar to correspondence school offerings, outreach programs and continuing education efforts. And historically there are ties to such methods of delivering education. It is also sometimes equated with tele-education, tele-work, tele-teaching, tele-learning. And the preponderant use of television technology has lent itself to the reasonableness of the use of those terms. It is also often associated with open learning and open university activities. Sometimes it is confused with computer assisted instruction or computer assisted learning and computer mediated communication or computer mediated learning all of which emphasize mainly the use of technology in order to bridge the instructional gap between teacher and learner. It emphasizes that technology is designed to amplify and extend teacher's effort rather than to replace him/her.

I maintain that distance education is more than what each of the above mentioned terms imply. Distance education denotes an ability to transcend space and time and to arrive at a sense of community especially if done for the global components. Thus the distance being bridged is not necessarily just that of miles. Distance can also be cultural and emotional.

Some of the standard definitions of distance education only take a look at this distance aspect such as delivery and access for students separated by time and physical location from faculty (Boettcher, 14). Some only take a look at the delivery methods, as in all those teaching methods mentioned previously that cater to the separateness of learners and teachers and therefore emphasize

the conduct of education through print, mechanical and electronic devices. It has been distinguished from distance learning which is merely the use of instructional materials or media for self-instructional purposes. Often distance learning is associated with live, simultaneous transmission of instruction from a teacher located at an origination site to students located in one or more distant or remote sites but it is one-way. In fact distance learning definitions concentrate on the media used to deliver information, as in the **AAAA** Initiative where technology is viewed as that which permits **Anyone** to send or receive **Anything** electronically to or from **Any place** at **Any time** (Anglin, 265). It stands at the pinnacle of individualized instruction.

Thus, a short definition of distance education is any formal approach to learning in which a majority of the instruction occurs when educators and learners are far apart from each other. To some it is a special kind of education with a special teacher-learner relationship, where teacher and learner are separated by time and often times all types of transactional distance. These special characteristics of learner and deliverer are further discussed and elaborated on in a different section. This definition, however, focuses on both the distance and the education components of the term. It also focuses on four defining elements of distance education (Verduin, 10-12):

1. the separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of the instructional process;

2. the influence of an educational organization including the provision of student evaluations;

3. the use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry course content; and

4. the provision of 2-way communication between teacher, tutor or educational agency and learner.

Distance education has become both a sign of change and a tool for change in our society. It is a special kind of learning, a special kind of teaching (some have referred to it as distance teaching) (MacDonald, 36), a subset of overall education which relies on the existence of ever-increasing technological resources for organizing, presenting and disseminating knowledge. Distance education has grown as the result of technological advances. Some current delivery systems for distance education are: telecourses, interactive TV courses, videoconferencing and desktop videoconferencing, Internet and Web courses, and those that make use of merging technologies (MacDonald, 37). These new technologies provide for interactivity, a concern for some who view education as essentially a two way communication process. And as technology becomes more sophisticated the definition of interactive changes to show that there is two-way audio and/or video transmission taking place in order to facilitate this interactivity. Thus, ideally, for distance education to be effective it allows for communication of faculty with students, students with students, and students with resources and course materials. More specifically it is pointed out by Abrahamson that four major issues relating to interactive communication in distance education are: 1) personal contact between the primary instructor and the student; 2) personal contact between the primary instructor and the on-site instructor; 3) personal contact between the on-site instructor and the student; and 4) interactions between the students themselves in the various campuses and sites. (Abrahamson, 33).

And distance education will continue to rely on the increasing importance of technology for

delivery systems because of the wide range of technology available; because the cost of technology is rapidly dropping; because technology is becoming more user-friendly and easier to use; because technology is becoming more powerful pedagogically like the current influence of radio and TV; and because of the political and social pressure of the technological imperative.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Various sources on distance education will point to formal distance education having been around at least since the early 19th century. Most acknowledge that it started out with its roots in early university correspondence and extension programs designed primarily to educate students via paper based processes. However, it has evolved quietly over the past quarter century so that the 1960s to 1980s has seen the most impressive growth in distance education literature world wide.

The early open learning initiatives can be traced since 1951 at the University of South Africa. Then Open Universities all over the world including the UK, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Netherlands, France, etc. would spring up so that now there are such institutions in Asia, Africa, Latin American (Mexico) and Europe. However, if we remain true to the distinction between open learning and distance education then the Distance Education term may have first appeared in the 1892 catalogue of the University of Wisconsin and reportedly used by then Director of the University of Wisconsin Extension, William Lightly, in 1906. The term may be found to have been used in Germany and France in 1960s and 1970s and reintroduced in America by Bjorn Holmberg and Michael Moore in the 1980s at a meeting of the International Council for Correspondence Education (Verduin, 8-9). Whatever its origin distance education may be here to stay for various reasons.

WHY DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Education is geared towards students. But the traditional student body has changed. Thus the modes of education have changed too. Distance education answers the question FOR WHOM in many ways: It is for adult students who are in search of adult education and/or continuing education opportunities; it is for traditional students with schedule conflicts; it is for lifelong learners; it is for working professionals who are working at recertification, advanced degrees and to enhance job related skills. Distance education provides flexibility to a school system which does not have enough clientele in a school, a system, a state, nationally, and globally. It bridges the geographical distance, isolation, shrinking population bases, and inadequate telecommunications infrastructure problems of school systems.

Thus distance education broadens programs available to non-traditional as well as traditional students; it eases logistical problems; it provides new services; and can be a magnet for business/education collaboration. Those who have gone through distance education courses know it has helped them get the courses that are required for graduation, courses that are job related. Some have taken it for the convenience or just on the basis of curiosity about the medium.

THE TOOLS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

A figure or chart in the Hanson Resource and Planning Guide (Hanson, 2) shows the exponential development of the telecommunications infrastructure that we have been relying on since 1847. The projection to the year 2000 shows an even greater variety of communications technology becoming available. The guide also provides a wide variety of examples of the uses of different forms of instructional technology in many settings in classrooms all over the state of Wisconsin, nation-wide and even in global collaborative efforts.

There are four major categories of tools for distance education, various combinations of which serve to enhance teaching and learning: print, audio, video and computer. They also correspond with the four generations of learning technologies that have been associated with distance education. (Mark Rossman, 23-25)

Generation One is associated with correspondence study which includes not only print materials but also mailable materials such as audio and video cassettes. Generation One is identified with a single technology and very often a lack of student interaction with the teacher as in self-paced learning environments. In a sense it does not have to be interactive and is at best a one-way street.

Generation Two makes use of available audio and video conferencing technologies. There is a deliberate integration of multiple media approaches especially designed for students at a physical distance from the instructor or institution. This is where educational interactive television courses come into the picture.

Generation Three relies on prevailing computer technological capabilities. It includes 2 way audio and video; compressed video which can handle four simultaneous video signals for videoconferencing purposes; the Internet; television via satellite and microwave; and computer resources delivered via disk, CD or the net. Aside from the developments in phone communication technology with the use of the facsimile (FAX) machine, another characteristic of the third generation is the enhanced use of computer communication capabilities via electronic mail (e-mail), bulletin board systems, listservs and computer conferencing through the Internet. Students and teachers can then avail of the ability to converse with scholars in their field from all over the world during online seminars and conferences. A description of the third generation will not be complete without mentioning the role of the World Wide Web. Educators can now develop web-centric courses where syllabi, course outlines, resources, activities, tests, and feedback may be delivered to the students on-line. Thus a characteristic of this third generation seems to be the merging of various types of technology in delivering information.

Generation Four, although in existence, is not yet common, such as virtual reality and video desktop technology. This fourth generation promises to bring a new experience in a new environment at a stage when computer, telephone and television technologies are being merged. Some examples include electronic book experiences and virtual reality experiences which allow students to visit museums in other countries or visit another period in history without leaving the classroom.

THE ACTORS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Embarking on distance education involves many characters among which are the students and faculty, administration and staff, computer center people and distance education or media services people, the registrar of the institutions involved.

Distance education requires a special kind of teacher and a special kind of student which exhibit special kinds of characteristics. For one, both student and teacher would not be of the type that cater to traditional chalk and talk approaches.

Distance education students are those who are not bored easily and those that welcome challenges that will allow them to reach their potential. These are usually students who are prepared to spend time in more demanding situations. Distance education is therefore not for those who just want to sit passively by and let the world pass them by. It is definitely not for those who want to do as little work as possible. In fact in surveys of students who have taken distance education classes (Holmberg, 30) students who gave their reasons for why they chose distance education reveal a lot about their characteristics. Students chose distance education classes because it relieves them of the burden of conventional schools and universities; it creates a cost effective system for them; and it encourages individualization and independence. This is because distance education caters to autonomous learners with self discipline and the ability to manage their own time. But it also requires a certain level of student maturity and ability. And certainly class standing correlated with the educational level and readiness of students for distance education classes. It is usually not recommended for those deficient in reading, writing, and computational skills. It is geared towards those who have a positive attitude towards computers and therefore will get the most benefit out of it since there will be no major learning curve to hurdle. And what it does is it enlarges the passion for learning especially for those used to the technology.

It also takes a special kind of faculty member to engage in distance education. The method itself requires changes in the faculty's role - less lecturing, more mentoring. It requires a willingness to engage in interactive exchange and understand that the job does not start and end in the classroom and is not confined to the perimeters of the classroom. Thus one becomes a "perpetual professor," like a 24-hour drugstore. But there are faculty who consider themselves the font of learning that they are not willing to do that. Distance education moves faculty from being question and answer experts and podium performers to being fellow students, learners and facilitators of a wide variety of learning experiences. Thus the teacher serves as guide, advisor and facilitator and as such must be flexible and patient especially when technological difficulties occur and when student difficulty in following instructions occur no matter how clear we think instructions we have provided are. Faculty also have to understand that distance education students require more regular and consistent feedback. We enhance faculty effectiveness by keeping these things in mind (Willis, 278-279). Faculty should look at their distance education course in a new way; gain comfort and proficiency in using the technology; shift from the role of content provider to content facilitator; learn to teach effectively without the visual eye to eye contact of the classroom pretty much like a movie or television actor/actress; develop an understanding and appreciation of the distance learners' lifestyle.

A teacher serious in delivering material using distance education may benefit from these

golden rules for using technology in teaching (Bates, 12-14): good teaching matters; each medium has its own aesthetic; education technologies are flexible; there is no super technology (and in fact technology is constantly changing); make all four media available to teachers and learners; balance variety with economy; interaction is essential; student numbers are critical (a course should have at least some students to make it worthwhile and meaningful or else you have individualized instruction or independent study); new technologies are not necessarily better than old ones; teachers need training to use technologies effectively; teamwork is essential; and more importantly technology is not the issue but how and what I want students to learn.

Despite the special attraction for distance education it is not for all faculty, not only because it requires special characteristics but also because there are realistic incentive and support issues that constantly need to be dealt with by faculty who engage in such endeavors (Willis, 285-286). Some of these are: Will this attempt at distance education lead to promotion and tenure? Will I be able to do it over and above my regular teaching load or will I get released time or additional pay or incentive for doing it? How much course updating and revisions will be required? How much time will be spent on this compared to conventional teaching methods? How much weight is given to the use of innovative methods of instruction when it comes time for faculty evaluation of performance? Are there opportunities for publishing in the field? Will there be faculty mentoring for those embarking on the field by those already in the field? And can we expect consistency of delivery and treatment of those who deliver distance education across departments and across campus?

The good distance learning instructor takes the following into consideration: 1. have I developed a course outline; 2. have I selected the most suitable media; 3. have I developed and produced all of the materials I will need for the semester; and 4. am I ready to deliver this course. Thus what is required is the type of faculty who is innovative, is a creative content and subject matter expert and who understands how students learn and can put something pedagogically sound together in print, for audio, video and/or on-line.

BACKGROUND TO THE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

In April 1996 the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse hosted a system wide conference entitled "Virtually There: Teaching, Learning and Technology in the 21st Century." It was at this conference that colleagues from other system institutions approached me about the feasibility of collaborating in the field of Asian Studies. Political Science and Social Science (History and Economics, specifically) faculty voiced the same concerns about less-popular, lower-enrollment area studies courses. They are considered important courses for our students in order for them to function effectively in an increasingly global community. Cultural ignorance and insensitivity prevails despite paying lip service to the notion that racism is dead in America. One of the University System's goals for its institutions is to encourage the broadening of students' limited, parochial experiences by offering them options in multicultural and international courses. However, limited budgets and expertise do not allow them unlimited, varied choices. As a result of this dilemma, I had indicated I was willing to explore the possibility of system wide technological collaboration with them.

Such a project lends itself well to distance education tools and strategies. On any given campus, the enrollment pool is usually not that large and could be erratic. During times of crisis in

the Middle East a Middle Eastern Government and Politics class might fly and can draw around 20 students. During periods of upheaval in Asia, an Asian Government and Politics class can solicit a lot of interest. But barring those periods of major historic significance, these area studies courses will not normally have a high student enrollment on any of our campuses. It would be great to have ten students but realistically more than six is often a large audience for me in those specialized courses.

Also, the area expertise may not always be present. Small state institutions may not have the resources to find specialists in every field of endeavor. Distance education can help bridge that lack of expertise by allowing the different campuses to benefit from resources available in the other campuses. Such a pooling of resources broadens the field for the benefit of the clientele. Thus distance education allows for the sharing of expert instructors in various fields than any one institution can possibly provide.

Thus, a group of faculty members from the University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Stevens Point, Eau Claire and La Crosse with a common interest in Asia got together in August 1996 in order to plan for a collaborative effort at putting together an Asian Studies minor using distance education strategies and tools that we saw were available in our campuses. The River Falls campus would serve as the principal investigator and the other campuses will provide the needed supporting documents, manpower, and funding to get the project off the ground. Our plan of action involved working on grant applications and to undertake a pilot course delivered using distance education tools of the third generation in order to determine and strengthen the feasibility of our request to put together a collaborative minor in Asian Studies for the system. This meant making use of videoconferencing technology and the Internet to deliver the designated experimental course.

Much of the fall semester was spent finding sources of funds for our project and writing the grants for submission to various agencies. Three of the sources we vigorously pursued were the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board, the University of Wisconsin System Council on International Education and the University of Wisconsin System Undergraduate Teaching Improvement Council. Our applications were successful and we got a total of almost $20,000 to fund the delivery of the introductory Asian Studies course and to further pursue the feasibility of developing a collaborative Asian Studies minor. (For more information about these grants, you are welcome to contact the author.) The initial experimental course was to be offered in the fall of 1997.

Our media and computer services people had been appraised of my involvement in the distance learning project. The director contacted me and set up a meeting during which we discussed what services would be available to me in order to deliver the course on-line. I was shown our facilities and was told that I would receive the necessary training during the summer to enable me to be an effective distance education teacher. I was also told of the various services I could avail of: video, transparencies, slides, computer graphics, etc. whatever I needed to enhance my teaching.

Despite the funding which happened to be there for distance education efforts and the institutional support, the logistical problems of trying to coordinate such a course in four campuses became a nightmare, let alone try to coordinate the schedules of four instructors to the course. One can imagine that the major problem became: when is this course going to be offered. Since we were attempting to offer the course when schedules for other course offerings had been submitted months,

sometimes even years in advance, we had to deal with open slots in the distance education video transmission bandwidth that was still available and when specialized classrooms were available on our campuses. That severely limited our choices initially. Tuesdays and Thursdays, evenings and late Monday and Friday options were the only ones left to choose from. The Tuesday and Thursday schedules were ideal for me since I do not teach on those days. However, my colleagues had schedules all over the week and evenings, which were fine with me since I do not have evening classes, did not prove to be feasible for the others either. My colleagues thought that the best option, and that which they pushed for, was a Friday 3:00 - 6:00 schedule! I thought I knew our students quite well. I knew that was not going to fly on our campus. I argued long and hard for another schedule. I lost and the only compromise I could get was to at least offer it for two days (both equally unpalatable!), on Mondays at 3:00-4:30 and Fridays from 3:00-4:30 to complete the three credit requirement. Can you guess what the enrollment outcome was?

On top of this scheduling problem, we were to learn at the end of the spring semester, during finals week in May to be precise that the principal investigator of the project was leaving his post to take on another job in another state. His question was: would I like to take over the responsibility? To make a long story short, I was saddled with this funding and responsibility without a reduction in load or increase in salary and with only moral support from my institution and the other system institutions as well. Needless to say the project was on hold during the summer until I could obtain agreement from my institution that this was indeed something that I could do over and above my already full teaching, research and service plate.

STATUS OF THE PROJECT

To make a long story even shorter, I did take on the directorship of the project. More than $12,000 of the original $20,000 funding was transferred to our campus. The other $8000 grant we lost out on because the Council on International Education had a timetable for completion of the project which was not flexible and which we could not meet.

The next step was to ensure the participation of the various campuses that had originally indicated that they would be a part of the project. River Falls which initiated the project in 1996 maintained its commitment through the designation of their temporary replacement for the project director who left as their liaison, coordinator and spokesperson. Although his area of specialization was not Asia and his participation was tenuous because of his temporary status, he worked hard on the River Falls component of the project, applied for the permanent position at the institution and by the end of the school year obtained the position which reenforced the River Falls commitment to the project. Eau Claire remained interested but their representative indicated that because of personnel changes the institution could not fully participate until the 1999-2000 school year. Stevens Point withdrew its support after the project participant felt that his efforts were not being compensated. (No one was compensated until the end of the 1997-1998 school year when we felt that we had fulfilled the project's grant objectives.) It was at this point that I was glad I had initiated contacts with other system institutions in order to broaden our participation. The University of Wisconsin - Superior was interested in becoming a part of the project and so we asked them to be a major component of, and participant on, the project.

Thus, the campus participation was reduced from four to three - River Falls, Superior, La Crosse. We met on our campus in the fall for a two-day discussion of the introductory course, hands-on demonstration of the distance education facilities, and a preliminary discussion of the collaborative minor in Asian Studies. The groundwork was set for the Introductory Asian Studies course to be delivered via distance education. We were to set the dates and time for the course and sell it to each of our campuses in order to have faculty who would be willing to teach various modules or components of the course. We agreed to meet a few more times, preferably via videoconference because of the winter, in order to iron out disagreements face to face.

We were able to get a more reasonable time slot for the fall course offering. It would be offered in each of the campuses on MWF, 12:00-1:00, taking into consideration that each of the campuses may have a five minute difference in schedule. It could be offered under a different course number and title in each campus so long as the course description, course objectives, course components are the same. And so on our campus it came under our POL 333 Asian Government and Politics course which I normally teach every two years.

In each of the campuses, a coordinator was designated and faculty members who were interested were invited to participate as module lecturers. Each of the campuses got at least two other people interested in being part of the introductory course. They came from different areas: History, Economics, Women's Studies, Literature, Political Science. This meant that the various topics we had agreed to cover about Asia - history, culture, society, religion, economy, politics, etc. - would have a content or subject expert. Some of our faculty were so enthusiastic about it that I had one volunteer to do five modules on religion and history complete with readings and topics to be covered and he submitted his ideas before the end of the spring semester.

We had discussed many areas of difficulty: a common syllabus, textbook vs. readings; testing method and grading; attendance; and the final grade. The makings of a common syllabus were enough to interest the representative from Eau Claire who requested for what we had agreed upon which I dutifully provided to him. For the most part we were in agreement that it was difficult to have a text that everyone could agree on which would cover all the areas that we wanted to cover for the course. Thus, sets of readings prepared by each of the participating faculty for their module was agreed upon. Testing was left to the individual faculty member and the grading of those tests were also the responsibility of whoever gave the test. Students would be expected to be present for the course at transmission although in cases of emergency a video of each module was available from media services. And the final grade for each student was to be agreed upon by the various teachers of the course.

So it seemed the stage was set for offering the course in the fall. It was in our fall schedule and I assumed it was in the other campuses' schedules as well. Upon preregistration I watched the numbers for our campus and tried to get the numbers from the two other campuses. Ours never went beyond three students. The River Falls campus fluctuated and started from a high of seven and dwindled to three. I was not sure of what the reason was for that. Superior regretfully was not able to push for the course because the coordinator got involved in other projects and therefore he could not assure us of numbers until the fall.

Early in the summer then I knew the project was in danger when my department chair kept harping on the fact that I needed more students in my general education American National Government classes in order to make up for shortfalls in my upper division classes: I had only 15 in Research Methods and 3 in the Asian Government and Politics class. I therefore needed to increase the class size in American Government to 50 each. (The original cap was 40!) I thought that by agreeing to that it would end my problem. But it did not. The 3 students in Asian Government was glaring to the Dean's office. Although I was amenable to taking on an extra American Government class of another 50 students, I had other problems to deal with. There was the concern with FTE (full time equivalency) numbers. There was the additional burden of making up for departmental shortfalls due to faculty who were teaching abroad, teaching half-time, were on release time, etc. And the Dean's new policy of not allowing faculty to take on overloads led some to try and think of other ways to solve the problem. It let to the option of trying to buy me out of the Asian course not by money from the Dean's office but by taking $3000 from the grant and paying someone else to teach the additional American Government class. I did not feel comfortable with that option since it meant paying someone who was not part of the project a large amount from the grant. Upon consultation with the coordinators in the other campuses we agreed that it was best to forego the course, pay everyone involved in the project their just compensation, and consider one component of the grant fulfilled since the grant stipulates looking into the feasibility of offering a distance education course and does not require the actual offering of one if it is not feasible. The second component of the other grant was meant for looking into the feasibility of a collaborative Asian Studies minor. We will focus our attention on that hereafter.

Needless to say it is a disappointment not to be able to offer the course. We had come so close to going beyond where we were last year. We had gone from no students to some students. In fact ironically, after the decision to abandon the course had been made I received phone calls and e-mail from students at Eau Claire who had enrolled for the course wanting to obtain a copy of the syllabus and expressing their enthusiasm for the course. Upon further investigation I had found out that there were three students registered at Eau Claire which could have raised our numbers closer to 10. Knowledge of that fact could have given me greater leverage with the Dean to offer the course.

It was after learning about the additional students that our registrar, the coordinator at Eau Claire, and the coordinator at River Falls all assured me that it was not my fault. That I had done the best I could to keep communication flowing but that there were gaps in the communication link that caused such a problem which we need to watch out for.

LESSONS LEARNED

According to Judith Boettcher the costs for effective and efficient distance education are still increasing (Boettcher, 56-58). Embarking on distance education requires time and money in the areas of initial design and development; marketing and delivery; and on-going maintenance. She indicates that it takes about a thousand (1,000) hours to move a course on the web let alone move it to different distance education media. Kroder indicates that distance education and web-based courses will be naturally small and in many experiments and initial offerings institutions are

willing to offer and should be willing to offer courses with class sizes ranging from 7 to 15 (Kroder, 66). Thus an institution that embarks on such an endeavor needs to consider it an investment. Failure to consider it as such leads to bean counting that leads to missed opportunities to being part of the cutting edge in the field.

Given our situation I believe that we had the key ingredients to making a go of the project: 1) developmental grants that would allow faculty the incentive to engage in such an effort; 2) a well-constructed development plan; 3) the technology and technical support staff; 4) students who understand the benefits and the challenges they face; 5) faculty members who are willing to learn a fundamentally new way of conveying the message and are willing to undertake the requisite learning for this to take place. But what we were missing was something vital. Call it the political will. I call it plain lack of administrative support. The proper administrative support system must be in place to facilitate this new approach. Lip-service to the concept is not enough. Interest in the project as a showcase if it succeeds from its own effort is not enough. It required a commitment which was not there for me.

ISSUES INVOLVED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

So you tried to get involved with a distance education project and what did you end up with? A lot of knowledge about distance education, some money, but still in search of a project that will be implemented! Such a dilemma points to the various needs that have to be addressed by such collaborative efforts.

One major issue is that of commitment to the project that participants are willing to provide. Foremost is the commitment to cooperate. Many a time did I feel that the individuals involved in the project were not really in it wholeheartedly. It may be that the project was being pursued because it was the "in" thing to get involved with, the one that would secure tenure and promotion or a better alternative job. I was in it because I felt a commitment to the institution and to my colleagues who had indicated a frustration with course offerings that did not have the enrollment in a single campus, an increasing characteristic of some of my more highly specialized upper division area studies courses - Asian Government and Politics, Middle Eastern Government and Politics, African Government and Politics and Latin American Government and Politics. I felt that it was my responsibility to provide these courses to students who want and need them even though there are not many of them because an international education can make for better students in a highly interdependent global environment. I would not have taken on the project if I had known I was not going to be committed to it in the long run. However, the new hand had been dealt to me and I will need to make the most of my new dilemma.

A second issue has to do with a thorough assessment of local resources in order to provide distance education support. Local resources to use and to share need to be available to the distance education instructor. These include library resources which some articles have pointed out to be lacking (Faulhaber, 854-856). Training resources are also necessary. Laboratories or distance education classrooms also need to be available. In this second attempt at completing the project I felt that all of these were in place.

Other issues are involved in the delivery of distance education courses. There is the question of who has access to these types of courses - students, faculty, staff. Technical difficulties need to be eliminated. Not getting materials and transmission are the two major stumbling blocks of such a method of delivery. Some questions involve the use of this technology as another sign of watering down education to "McLearning," the fast diploma with impersonal service. Some questions involve the perception of this method of delivery as replacing other forms of classroom instruction and interaction even though reassurances to the contrary have been made. There are also concerns about the effectiveness of such a method of delivering education especially when two-way communication has been a fairly recent phenomenon with the use of new technology. It is no longer useful to talk about the loneliness of the long-distance learner since new technologies have enhanced learning as a social activity and three types of social interaction are made possible by distance learning: 1) interaction between the learner and the originator of the teaching material; 2) interaction between the learner and the tutor who mediates between the original material and the learner providing guidance and assessment; and 3) interaction between the learner and other learners. Thus, interactive student discussions can now be undertaken assuaging some of the concerns about the quality of distance education in the past when it had fallen short in the area of interaction. Our careful development of a syllabus and negotiations regarding the course content is an indication of our attempt to maintain academic integrity and our desire to move away from any type of McLearning.

In order to ensure the quality of distance education, professional course development needs to take place. We need to ensure quality training for faculty members delivering education in this way. We were ready to provide this with our faculty and the faculty in the institutions involved.

We need to assure them of their worries that transforming their courses into distance education ones may or may not take up too much of their time. Institutions seriously pursuing distance education options should provide faculty with the necessary incentives to engage in them including release time, overload pay or even just an acknowledgment that this is helpful to the institution. Institutions also need to do a better job of promoting these courses instead of having the individual faculty engage in self-promotion. It is in these three areas that we feel we have come short so that the project no longer became feasible.

However, barring the difficulties outlined above, if distance education technical difficulties are conquered then the similarities between distance education and traditional education delivery should show no differences. Technology becomes invisible. It no longer intrudes on teaching or learning and eventually fades into the background with education, not the medium, becoming the main concern.

Despite the exposition of the costs/benefits and advantages/disadvantages involved in distance education, there are those who may still be interested in embarking on distance education opportunities on your campuses. There are many internal resources that you can rely on especially if your campus views this as a collaborative effort at delivery where a content expert, usually the faculty member together with an instructional designer, media specialist and library resource person, come together to plan the various aspects of the course. External resources would include the reference sources at the end of this article specifically the Verduin, Mark Rossman and Weaver books which end with valuable resources listings. There is mention of Gopher, ERIC and First Search

sources as well as mention of the following distance education institutions which would provide a lot of help: the National Distance Learning Center; the University of Wisconsin Extension Clearinghouse for Distance Education; the Institute for Academic Technology and the International Center for Distance Learning. The Willis book also provides examples of distance education cooperatives that exist in the United States and all over the world - something valuable to political science area studies courses like our collaborative Asian Studies minor.

At this time in the history of distance education it is still subject to extremes of view. There are those who fanatically push it as the ultimate answer to the educational problems of access. On the other hand there are those who adamantly insist that it cannot equal face to face learning and therefore has no place in the educational system. Being new and experimental it is not real education to some. However there are those who take the road of compromise and indicate that methods and media should be matched in order to meet educational aims and goals. Not just because media is there should it be always used. Distance education should complement rather than supplement effective traditional methods of instruction and it should be matched with students' preferred learning styles.

Given all of these lessons learned about this approach to delivering political science courses, one would think that I have what it takes to complete this project. But as indicated in the previous section, the infrastructure may be laid but if the political will, administrative support and commitment are not there the project falls by the wayside like a bad seed as ours has. Despite some assurances by the Associate Dean that we can try again next fall, I doubt that I will have then the support that I did not have now.

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