

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 573

IR 015 468

TITLE Evaluation in Distance Education at a Glance.
 INSTITUTION Alaska Univ., Anchorage.
 PUB DATE 90
 NOTE 7p.; For related guides, see IR 015 466-471.
 PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Course Evaluation; Data Collection; *Distance Education; Feedback; *Formative Evaluation; Guidelines; Postsecondary Education; *Program Evaluation; Qualitative Research; Statistical Analysis; *Summative Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Evaluation can be crucial to help meet the needs and requirements of the teacher, students, and curriculum in distance education. Distance education usually encompasses a wide diversity of students, multi-site classrooms, little opportunity for interaction among students, and unfamiliar technology. Because of these uncertainties, evaluation of both courses and programs will provide teachers with information that can help make instruction effective. Formative evaluation takes place during all stages of instruction and is designed to promote revision of procedures and/or materials. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of instruction and is designed to assess the overall effectiveness of the instruction. A quantitative evaluation yields a breadth of information, and asks questions that can be statistically tabulated and analyzed. A qualitative evaluation gathers a wider range and depth of information using open-ended questions, interviews, and observations. A successful evaluation entails reviewing course goals and objectives, knowing students' needs, choosing the information to be gathered, collecting and analyzing data, and incorporating the evaluation findings in the revision. This brief guide begins with a statement on the importance and purpose of evaluation in distance education. It then presents guidelines for six steps in the evaluation process: (1) planning evaluation strategy; (2) reviewing course goals and objectives; (3) knowing students and their needs; (4) deciding what information should be gathered; (5) collecting and analyzing data; and (6) using the results to revise instruction. (DB)

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DESIGN

REVISION

DEVELOPMENT

EVALUATION

INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT A GLANCE

STATEWIDE DISTANCE EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SYSTEM

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EVALUATION—VITAL TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is an emerging field open to innovation, challenge, and development. As a distance educator,

You no longer have:

- A traditional, familiar classroom
- A relatively homogeneous group of students
- Face-to-face feedback during class
- Total control over the medium used in your teaching
- Ease and convenience for student conferencing

Now, you have:

- A multi-site "classroom"
- A wide diversity of students
- Learners who have little opportunity for interaction with fellow students
- An unfamiliar technology that may fight you
- Obstacles for student support.

The purpose of evaluation...

From an instructor's perspective, you evaluate to determine:

- Whether the course objectives are being met.
- What works, what doesn't.
- How well the students are doing.
- If and how the course can be improved.

Evaluation can be a key to help meet the needs and requirements of the instructor, students, and curriculum.

Why evaluate...

Course and program evaluation will:

- ***Give you control in creating a better program.***
- Provide you with information to help you make instruction, materials, and processes as effective as possible.
- Allow student involvement in helping them accomplish their objectives.
- Help to determine whether or not growth and change are taking place.
- Add to the information on effective distance delivered education.

To think about...

- How will I know if the students are getting the course content they need?
- How effective am I as a facilitator, lecturer, counselor, evaluator, discussion leader?
- Is everyone comfortable using the equipment?
- Are the assignments overwhelming or mundane?
- Is there clarity of content?
- Is class time well spent?
- What student information do I want? Age, occupation, reasons for taking the class...
- Will the evaluative information I gather enable me to make the course more interesting and relevant?

INTRODUCTION

Developing instruction is a critical part of the educational process. For instruction to be effective, it should be organized and well planned. Development of an effective program should include careful consideration of the need for instruction, the audience, and the course content. Instruction delivered via telecommunication can be even more complex and therefore best developed using a structured, systematic approach, such as the one presented here.

This instructional development process can be useful for providing organization and direction for your instruction. It can also provide the flexibility needed to expand or shorten the process itself. Decisions to modify the process should be based on the needs of the learner, requirements for content, and constraints placed on the instructor.

Most instructional development processes include four basic stages: Design, Development, Evaluation, and Revision. These are briefly described below in order of approach.

DESIGN

- Determine the need for instruction.** To begin, determine the need for instruction from a number of perspectives, such as:

- How do you know the planned instruction is needed?
- Why does the audience need this instruction?
- What factors led to this need for instruction?
- What past experiences indicate that the instruction you are planning could meet this need?
- What are the differing views on issues such as content and delivery methods?

Performing this assessment of need will help you develop your instruction to fill the gap between "What is . . ." and "What should be . . ."

- Analyze your audience.** It is also important to look carefully at the learner group or audience whom the instruction is intended. Your analysis may include a number of perspectives, such as:

- How large is the audience?
- What ages, cultural backgrounds, and educational levels are included?
- How familiar is the audience with various instructional methods?
- How will the audience use the information presented?
- What is the audience level of interest and ability?

The more thoroughly you understand the characteristics of each learner group, the more relevant the instruction can be.

- Establish instructional goals.** Goals can now be established. Instructional goals are usually broad, generalized statements of purpose based on the needs assessment and the audience analysis.

DEVELOPMENT

- Develop specific objectives for each goal.** Begin with a methodical division of your broad goals into a series of objectives or statements of accomplishment. Generally, have objectives build on each other, leading to the achievement of each goal. This step-by-step approach to developing objectives can help ensure that your topic is systematically examined and that major issues are covered in logical, sequential order.

When developing objectives, have them:

- Stated in precise terms describing exactly what should be done.
 - Written as descriptions of performance and stated in terms that can be measured.
 - Worded so that learning experiences can be developed to satisfy each objective.
 - Build into a learning hierarchy.
- Create a rough content outline.** After developing objectives, create a rough outline of the content to be covered based on the audience analysis, instructional goals, objectives, and your understanding of the course content.
 - Review existing materials.** Next, locate and review content-related print and non-print materials currently in existence. It is often more cost and time efficient to use or adapt existing materials than to develop new ones. However, avoid using materials or media just because they are available.
 - Organize/develop content to meet objectives.** Reorganize, revise, and refine your rough outline to correspond to the order and content needs indicated by your objectives. Next, develop the content required to meet your objectives.
 - Select/develop materials and methods.** Base your selection and development of materials and delivery methods on the following criteria:
 - Content and objectives.
 - Audience characteristics and experience.
 - Time, money, and personnel availability/constraints.

Notes:

EVALUATION

- Review Goals and Objectives.** The fundamental purpose of evaluation is to determine if your instructional methods and materials are accomplishing the goals and objectives you developed. Implementing your instruction represents the first real test of what you have developed. Try to pre-test your instruction on a small scale prior to actual use. If this is not possible, your first actual use will also serve as the "field test" for determining effectiveness.

- Develop an evaluation strategy.** Plan how and when to evaluate the effectiveness of your instruction. Evaluation throughout the teaching process (formative) can be used to revise instruction before the course is completed. Evaluation after instruction is completed (summative) provides a data base for planning future courses. If possible, it is best to use a combination of formative and summative evaluation methods throughout the instructional process. Consider evaluating the following:
 - Audience attitude and performance.
 - Strengths and weaknesses of program.
 - Effectiveness of teaching techniques and delivery systems.
 - Instructor effectiveness.
 - Degree to which course objectives were met.

- Collect and analyze evaluation data.** Following implementation of your course/materials, collect your evaluation data. Carefully analyze these results to identify gaps or weaknesses in your instructional process. It is equally important to identify strengths and successes.

- Recommend revisions based on analysis.** Results of your evaluation analysis should indicate which elements of your instruction should be changed or eliminated and which should be retained. They provide a "springboard" from which to develop a revision plan.

REVISION

- Develop and implement a revision plan.** A certain amount of revision is to be expected as a result of your evaluation efforts. Typically, however, this revision is worth the effort and should result in more effective instruction. Revisions will require returning to the Design, Development, or Evaluation stages to make changes in the ongoing process of Instructional Development.



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