



# Trends in Distance Education— What College Leaders Should Consider

A White Paper from the Instructional  
Technology Council Delivered to the  
American Association of Community  
Colleges Commission on Academic,  
Student, and Community Development

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*The perspectives shared in this report are the result of a collaborative effort. However, unless otherwise noted, specific statements may not be representative of individual team members.*

For a decade, growth at America's colleges has predominately been the result of an expanding enrollment in distance education. Starting from the perspective of institutional purpose and mission, how can college presidents and the executive or academic leadership master the concepts involved and determine the role and nature of their students' distance learning?

The intent of this brief white paper is to outline the larger issues related to online and other forms of distance instruction. It will provide a battery of key terms for campus leaders and, perhaps most important, a list of resources for strategic planning and practice. The role and impact of distance education on a college can vary, depending on the school's nature, its students and the role and interest of the leadership. Rather than offering a prescriptive solution to fit all campuses, this report offers six key questions college leaders can ask to develop an institutional approach. The questions include:

1. What is distance education?
2. What is the role of distance education within my college's mission?
3. How can my college manage "disruptive innovation"?
4. How can my college maintain course quality in an online environment?
5. How can my college maintain security while serving distance education students?
6. What resources should be acquired or reallocated to meet the needs of distance learners?

## Question 1.

### What is Distance Education?

Distance education, where students engage in the learning process at a location separated from their instructor and, often from other students, is transforming education at the community college. Remote instruction is hardly new. Some colleges experimented with television-based courses as early as the 1960's and with correspondence study decades earlier. However, the Internet's permeation throughout today's culture has moved online and other forms of distance instruction to the forefront of what many expect from our colleges.

**The Basics.** A good source for definitions related to distance education and differentiating among a variety of learning formats is a 2011 article, "[eLearning, Online Learning, and Distance Learning Environments: Are they the Same?](#)"<sup>1</sup> The delivery methods for courses are commonly differentiated between asynchronous and synchronous instruction.

**Synchronous Instruction** has all of the students involved in live course activities and lectures at the same time. In a distance learning environment, synchronous delivery formats can include two-way interactive video, Webcasts (also known as Web-conferences, Webinars, or Web-chats), conference calls, and, live desktop video, such as [Skype](#) or [Vidyo](#).

**Asynchronous Instruction** may follow a general schedule, but students are free to participate individually and at their own location within a given time period. Most courses offered online via the learning management system fall in the asynchronous category.

<sup>1</sup> Moore, Joy I., and Camille Dickson-Deane & Krista Galyen. "eLearning, Online Learning, and Distance Learning Environments: Are they the Same?" Internet and Higher Education, vol. 14 (2011), pp. 129-135. <https://scholar.vt.edu/access/content/group/5deb92b5-10f3-49db-adeb-7294847f1ebc/e-Learning%20Scott%20Midkiff.pdf>

Asynchronous courses have also been provided by print (correspondence), by pre-recorded video, or through another digital format.

**Blended Learning.** Courses can also be designed with components of both delivery methods in place. Blended learning is the broad category of delivery where part of the instruction occurs at the student's own time and place and part takes place in person. For example, Web-enhanced or Web-assisted courses meet face-to-face for the prescribed credit hours. However, some course materials and assignments are posted online and require student access to online resources. Hybrid courses represent another form of blended learning but where the process is generally more formalized. A hybrid course usually requires class attendance on a set number of dates, and allows students to work online for a substantial portion of the course credit.

## Question 2.

### What Is the Role of Distance Education within My College's Mission?

If you are a leader at a two-year college, you are most likely involved in distance education. Distance education advocates argue that their medium is a natural ally to a longstanding tradition of community colleges—increasing student access to learning. The Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) 2012 Report<sup>2</sup> showed that more than a quarter of all two-year students were taking at least one distance class and that

<sup>2</sup> Table 311.15. Digest of Education Statistics—2012, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. December 2013. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_311.15.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_311.15.asp)

about one in ten students were learning exclusively online. Most community colleges have shown continued growth in distance learning enrollments, even as overall college enrollment has stabilized and even declined<sup>3</sup>.

**Mission Critical Roles.** In *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future*<sup>4</sup> and *Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation's Future*,<sup>5</sup> AACC's 21st Century Commission recommended a refocus of the college mission, resulting in seven recommendations. A solid first step in evaluating the role and position of distance education within your organization is to examine remote instruction and support within the context of the Commission's recommendations. The Commission's recommendations ask colleges to:

1. Increase completion rates of students earning college credentials while preserving access, enhancing quality and eradicating attainment gaps.
2. Dramatically improve college readiness. Double the number of students who complete developmental programs and successfully complete related freshman courses.
3. Focus career and technical education to provide students with skills and knowledge for jobs in regional and global economies.
4. Refocus the college mission and institutional roles to meet 21st Century educational and employment needs.

<sup>3</sup> Lokken, Fred and Chris Mullins. [2013 Distance Education Survey Results: Trends in eLearning: Tracking the Impact of eLearning at Community Colleges](#). The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) of the American Association of Community Colleges, April, 2014, p. 2. [www.itcnetwork.org/resources/itc-annual-distance-education-survey.html](http://www.itcnetwork.org/resources/itc-annual-distance-education-survey.html).

<sup>4</sup> American Association of Community Colleges. 2012, April. *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future*, Washington, DC. <http://aacc.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/21stCenturyReport.pdf>, pp. ix – x.

<sup>5</sup> American Association of Community Colleges. 2014, *Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation's Future: An Implementation Guide*, Washington, DC. Available at [www.aacc21stcenturycenter.org](http://www.aacc21stcenturycenter.org).

5. Invest in collaborative support structures to serve multiple colleges, partnering with philanthropy, government, and the private sector.
6. Target public and private investments to incentivize community college efforts to reclaim the American dream.
7. Implement policies and practices for college rigor, transparency, and accountability.

How can a distance learning program be implemented to impact completion, improve student readiness, and prepare students for current and future jobs? Examples come from a number of colleges. Virginia's Patrick Henry Community College is using online advising and other tools to support traditionally low-achieving students.<sup>6</sup>

Twelve community colleges in Connecticut are partnering with the state's public universities in a degree completion effort. Entitled [Go Back to Get Ahead](#),<sup>7</sup> the project offers returning students options online and in the classroom to complete their degrees. More than 100 colleges are participating in the Department of Labor's [Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training \(TAACCCT\) Grant Program](#),<sup>8</sup> with most using distance education and collaboration to provide immediate job options and placement for their students.

**The Student Success Agenda.** Growing out of the *Community College Completion Agenda*,<sup>9</sup> and national initiatives from the kindergarten to graduate level, the *Student Success Agenda* focuses on college readiness, student processes, and college completion to assure better outcomes for students. Resulting in the American Association of Community Colleges 2014

<sup>6</sup> *Achieving the Dream*. 2014. Patrick Henry Community College. [http://www.achievingthedream.org/college\\_profile/patrick\\_henry\\_community\\_college](http://www.achievingthedream.org/college_profile/patrick_henry_community_college)

<sup>7</sup> Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education. 2014. [Go Back to Get Ahead](https://www.gobacktogetahead.com/). <https://www.gobacktogetahead.com/>

<sup>8</sup> US Department of Labor. 2014. TAACCCT: Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program. <http://www.doleta.gov/taaccct/grantawards.cfm>.

<sup>9</sup> McPhail, Christine Johnson. *The Completion Agenda: A Call to Action*. American Association of Community Colleges, April 2011. [http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Reports/Documents/CompletionAgenda\\_report.pdf](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Reports/Documents/CompletionAgenda_report.pdf).

release of the *Voluntary Framework of Accountability*,<sup>10</sup> the process defines cohorts of students for assessment and includes measures of achievement for tracking success.

The *Student Success Agenda* can offer colleges a barometer for examining the effectiveness of their distance programs. Academic leaders in particular will want to assess the role and impact that distance options have on the Success Agenda and work with their campus teams to track and improve distance outcomes.

**Alternative Agendas.** Distance education programs can be put at risk when college leaders bring alternative agendas to the table, moving the focus from student achievement. With and without success, college leaders have been known to place a variety of agendas for distance teaching on the table. Some may see it as a catalyst for a change in the teaching process.

Others have used it to introduce faculty to regular professional development requirements, implement principles related to andragogy, and even as an option for changing the personnel structure. However, faculty and student reticence may result, when the focus on student success is lost. For example, program support can decline rapidly if a new learning management system or course rubric system becomes viewed as an administrative tool to limit academic freedom or to change faculty loads.

Distance education can be part of a mission of program change and expansion, with schools pursuing entirely new academic areas or student populations through alternative instruction. The tools used in distance education have led many to a self-discovery of new teaching styles, the benefits of technology, and the importance of student interactivity that can change

<sup>10</sup> Phillippe, Kent A. *Voluntary Framework of Accountability, Metrics Manual Version 2.1*. American Association of Community Colleges. February 2014. <http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/Documents/VFAMetrics-Manual.pdf>.

in ways to improve teaching. Yet, when the first priority of the program moves outside of the agenda for student success, caution is the rule.

**System-Wide Planning.** For most community colleges, distance education will impact an institution's strategic plan and the campus master plan.

**Strategic Plan.** The role of distance education in the overall mission will help determine how it will be used to advance strategic plans goals for the college or district. Planning within the institutional strategic plan can determine the resources and funding mechanisms needed for program expansion, student support, and faculty development.

As the initiative matures, campuses generally find the need to develop an intrinsic strategic plan specifically for the distance program. Incorporating executive and academic leadership, along with the college's distance learning professional team, a distance learning plan can outline goals and a vision for the program within the context of the campus strategic mission. By incorporating faculty, leadership and staff, the process should result in a shared vision of the goals, priorities, necessary tools, and processes required to insure success.

**Campus Master Plan.** It is vital to include distance learning in the development of a campus' master plan for facilities and growth. As important as it is to look at future buildings and campus development, distance programs may require capital expenditures for broadband technology, course development, faculty development, production facilities, and software conversions. Existing and potential regional and statewide collaborative efforts, similar to the Michigan Community College System's [Michigan Online](#), the Texas Association of Community Colleges' [Virtual College of Texas](#), or North Carolina's broadband [MCNC network](#), should likewise be considered in the planning effort.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Fishman, Rachel. State U Online. New America Foundation and Education Sector ([www.newAmerica.net](http://www.newAmerica.net)), April 2013. [http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/FINAL\\_FOR\\_RELEASE\\_STATE\\_U\\_ONLINE.pdf](http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/FINAL_FOR_RELEASE_STATE_U_ONLINE.pdf).

## Question 3.

# So, How Can My College Manage “Disruptive Innovation”?

In 2008, the authors of *Mastering the Hype Cycle*,<sup>12</sup> Jackie Fenn and Mark Raskino outline a reaction cycle to popular innovations, starting with the “wow” moment, to “this is going to change the world,” to “wait, there’s a problem,” to “this won’t work at all,” and then settling down to “well, let’s see where it really applies.” Known as the “hype cycle,” the [Gartner Group](#) has built a technology assessment firm around the cycle’s application to new and “disruptive” innovations.

Even the term, “disruptive innovation” and its partner, “disruptive technology,” first coined by Harvard professor [Clayton Christensen](#),<sup>13</sup> has suffered some elements of hype. Clatsop Community College President Larry Galizio has described the concept that change is inevitable as “so pervasive in public discourse that it has no utility for higher education leadership teams.”<sup>14</sup>

College leaders vary in their approaches to change, as do colleges themselves, falling into categories of innovators, those who lead the change; implementers, who allow others to test the waters, then move forward with proven strategies; and traditionalists, who hold onto the educational traditions with a belief that tradition and time-proven methodologies equate to quality.

Few campuses implement distance education at any significant level, however, without disruption. If an institution fully embraces distance education, says Mary Rittling of Davidson County Community College, it will affect the technical support system for students and faculty, the IT infrastructure, and even campus culture.

<sup>12</sup> Fenn, Jackie and Mark Raskino. 2008. *Mastering the Hype Cycle: How to Choose the Right Innovation at the Right Time*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

<sup>13</sup> Christensen, Clayton. 1997. *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>14</sup> Galizio, Lawrence. Email correspondence, Clatsop Community College, 1/24/2014.

Elements of great importance in an online course are such things as social presence, cognitive presence, teaching presence, visual design, varied assessments, sufficient feedback, netiquette, and more. Retention in online courses would be of particular concern for leadership as they would hopefully focus on addressing the common problem of the isolated learner.<sup>15</sup>

Knowing how you, your college, students, and community deal with change is a vital component of leadership. A degree of compatibility with current skills and tools is needed for any innovation’s success. Partnered with strategic planning, self-knowledge of your own leadership style and your institutional personality may turn a “disruptive innovation” from a potentially wasteful pursuit into an opening for greater student achievement.

It is important to stay alert to the possibilities on the horizon. One of the better tools for staying ahead of the crowd is the previously cited source, New Media Consortium’s [New Horizon](#) project reports.

A campus leader should be aware of major trends that are impacted by or are impacting distance learning. Trends can affect the legislative perception of colleges and distance learning with a direct impact on funding interests and ideas. Here are seven trends or movements that should be in a leader’s repertoire:

**Badges.** Built on the scouting concept of merit badges, badging represents an alternative certification from the gaming world.<sup>16</sup> Corporate trainers and academics have recognized the use of badges as an incentive, as customers earn badges while shopping, visiting Web sites on [TripAdvisor](#), or reviewing books on [Amazon](#). In the online environment, educators can use badges throughout a course or program sequence to move

<sup>15</sup> Rittling, Mary. Private correspondence, Davidson County Community College fax, April 14, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> “[Digital Badges](#).” eCampus News: Technology News for Today’s Higher-Ed Leader. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.ecampus-news.com/category/online-learning/digital-badges-online-learning/>

students forward with their instruction. Badges, in which students earn a pre-defined level or goal, can provide a more meaningful measure of achievement than traditional grading and CEUs. [Mozilla Open Badges](#) has developed an open source platform for developing and rating badges used by more than 1,000 organizations. Badge structures are also being built into the major learning management systems, with a “gamification” process that allows students to see their ranking (anonymously) among others who take the class and receive badge recognitions for completing a variety of steps along the way.

**Competency Based Education (CBE).** Competency-based education removes the traditional funding and assessment of education based on seat-time, and awards credit when students “master clearly-defined competencies.”<sup>17</sup> Constructed on the ability of students to demonstrate clearly defined competencies, CBE developed from behaviorist models and military training techniques from the 1950s and 1960s. Asynchronous learning models and mediated instruction, along with the AACCC 21st Century Commission’s emphasis on workplace-ready skills, has given new life to the CBE approach. Following suit, the US Department of Education has provided guidance for schools seeking to gain Title IV eligibility for competency-based programs.<sup>18</sup>

CBE-based credits require colleges to re-evaluate the nature of student achievement within courses and, where mixed with traditional instruction, determine equivalency standards for the acceptance of credits. Competency-based curricula also incorporate “prior learning assessments,” evaluating military, corporate, and life experience for equivalency credit in the college curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> ELI. “7 Things You Should Know about Competency Based Education,” Educause, 2-11, 2014. <http://www.educause.edu/library/resources/7-things-you-should-know-about-competency-based-education>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education. “Applying for Title IV Eligibility for Direct Assessment (Competency-Based) Programs.” Dear Colleague Letter, March 2013. <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/GEN1310.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Klein-Collins, Becky. “Sharpening Our Focus on Learning: The Rise of Competency-Based Approaches to Degree Completion,” Occasional Paper #20, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, November, 2013. <http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Occasional%20Paper%2020.pdf>.

Distance learning courses, by no means, are required to follow a strictly CBE format. However, a number of colleges are constructing CBE-based distance curricula and entities such as the [Western Governors University](#) have based their entire distance model around the concept.

**Flipped Classrooms.** Reversing the traditional lecture-in-the-classroom mode of instruction, a flipped classroom delivers the professor’s content via distance approaches. Course material, traditionally offered via lectures, is provided to students through readings, Web material, or by pre-recorded streaming videos. When students convene, their classroom time is dedicated to face-to-face discussions or active, experiential learning. Students in the flipped classroom still meet on campus, but the additional *blended* approach is considered an outgrowth of and a benefit of the distance learning movement.

### **Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs).**

MOOCs, a catchy acronym for massively open online courses, are distance education classes that are open to all comers, without fees, tuition, and with limited, or no, enrollment caps. Made popular by announcements from several key universities, such as MIT, Harvard, and Stanford, that made courses available online for free<sup>20</sup>, the format gained significant attention as a change agent for higher education. Although expectations have since lowered, educators have learned lessons about managing interactivity with significant numbers of students, collecting of course analytics, and student-to-student project-based learning. Experience has led to format modifications, such as scalable open online courses (SOOCs).<sup>21</sup>

Initially, specialized commercial course engines, such as [Coursera](#), [Udacity](#), and [Iverson](#), were built around the MOOC phenomenon. More recently, traditional learning management systems have entered the arena. [Blackboard](#), [Canvas by Instructure](#), and [Desire2Learn](#)

<sup>20</sup> “MOOC Report: List of 128 free online courses starting in April 2014,” Free Online Education, Class Central. Web site, 2014. <http://www.blog.class-central.com/mooc-report-april-2014/>.

<sup>21</sup> Marshall, Stephen. “A Taxonomy of MOOCs,” [Stephen’s Blog](#). 2012.

[2Learn](#) now offer MOOC platforms which are increasingly popular among community college students and administrators.

Several state legislatures have examined the MOOC platform with an eye toward cutting student costs and eliminating duplication of courses. Success and completion rates remain low, however, and the inability to collect tuition and fees has made the model dubious at best for most institutions.

However, community colleges have offered several promising MOOC applications. For example, a MOOC allows students to preview traditional distance education courses prior to enrollment.<sup>22</sup> Scottsdale Community College offers returning students the refresher class [Basic Arithmetic](#), and could be a new avenue for providing developmental education. Local interest MOOCs that are unique to a campus' geographic area could also prove successful. Bunker Hill Community College has offered a MOOC based on a popular MIT introduction to computer science course.<sup>23</sup>

**The Open Educational Resources (OER).** The OER movement is a grass-roots campaign to promote the use of educational software and teaching materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license. OERs allow educators and students to freely access, use, adapt and redistribute materials with limited or no restriction. Through the [Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources](#),<sup>24</sup> colleges can learn to create and use “free, high-quality content and open source learning systems to replace expensive and proprietary systems.” Open source repositories and projects, such as [Creative Commons](#), [Merlot](#) and the [Open Textbook Initiative](#), offer colleges and students cost savings and online resources for faculty developers.

<sup>22</sup> Flannigan, Patrick, “[Interview with Stephen Downes, New Brunswick Community College.](#)” *Half an Hour Blogspot*, 2013. <http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2013/11/moocs-and-community-colleges.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Fifield, Mary J. “[Coming to Terms with MOOCs: A Community College Angle.](#)” *New England Journal of Higher Education*. New England Board of Higher Education, Jan. 22, 2013. <http://www.nebhe.org/thejournal/coming-to-terms-with-moocs-a-community-college-perspective/>

<sup>24</sup> “About the Consortium,” OER Consortium. Web site, Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources, 2014.

**Privatization and Outsourcing.** College campuses have been outsourcing services during the past two decades, with contracts such as food services, bookstores, and other components of campus life. This trend has also impacted distance education, from IT services to student support components, and even instruction.<sup>25</sup> For example, after Hurricane Rita devastated the Galveston Gulf Coast in 2005, Lamar University outsourced most of its campus activities.<sup>26</sup> The most common elements campuses outsource include hosting the learning management system, various student support components, such as tutoring and counseling services, and marketing services to recruit new students.

### **State Authorization Reciprocal Agreement (SARA).**

The requirement that institutions obtain authorization from the states in which they operate is not a new concept, although its recent application to distance education is a new phenomenon. The US Department of Education recently failed to link state authorization with the ability of colleges to offer student financial aid reimbursement. Regardless of the federal attempts to create punishments to colleges that do not obtain state authorization, colleges that have even one out-of-state student need approval from the state in which the student resides to continue.

In response and in collaboration with regional accreditation bodies, the State Authorization Reciprocal Agreement creates an approval mechanism for colleges with student enrollments in participating states.

Instructions for individual colleges that wish to participate in SARA are available on the [National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements](#) Web site. For colleges located in states that are not SARA members, institutions must register with the applicable

<sup>25</sup> Milstone, David. “[Outsourcing Services in Higher Education: Consider the campus climate.](#)” *The Bulletin*, Vol. 78, Issue 2. Association of College Unions International, March 2010. <http://www.acui.org/publications/bulletin/article.aspx?issue=22641&id=12134>.

<sup>26</sup> Howard, Carolyn. “[No College Left Behind: Randy Best's Money-Making Mission To Save Higher Education.](#)” *Forbes*, 2/12/2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinehoward/2014/02/12/no-college-left-behind-randy-bests-money-making-mission-to-save-higher-education/2/>.

state agency and submit the required paperwork and fees to operate within the state. Colleges will need to take special note if new guidelines and rules emerge from the US Department of Education.

## Question 4.

# How Will My College Maintain High Quality in an Online Environment?

Perceptions of quality in online learning are as complex as the various models and delivery methods available. Quality must delicately balance the expectations of the academic discipline, students, faculty, and accrediting agencies. Many characteristics and models for quality in the distance education classroom replicate those seen in a face-to-face learning environment. A hiring process to assure engaged and appropriately-credentialed faculty and faculty leaders is essential. Support teams, composed of individuals who can assist faculty and students with the technical aspects of instruction, are also necessary.

**Regional Accreditation.** Of course, the regional accreditation process will examine distance education instruction, with regular reviews and approval required for substantive program changes. The regional accrediting bodies in the United States have created a common set of standards for distance education programs, the Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning).<sup>27</sup> This document cites nine components for quality which, in summary, include:

1. Appropriateness of the online program to the college's mission and purposes.

2. The planning process for distance education is integrated into the college's overall planning process.
3. Online learning is included in the college's "system of governance and oversight."
4. Distance curricula are comparable in rigor to traditional instruction.
5. Distance learning is evaluated with the results used to improve instruction.
6. Faculty are qualified and supported.
7. The institution provides student and academic services.
8. Resources needed for program support and expansion are provided.
9. The integrity of the course offerings is maintained.

In addition to providing for quality, the accreditation guidelines offer structural guidance for the strategic planning process.

Online Quality Course Rubric. Within the distance learning context, a rubric offers a set of criteria to assess the quality of online course design, taking into account course components, levels and quality of interaction, student assessment procedures, and more. Many colleges and systems have created rubrics such as the [California State University Rubric for Online Instruction \(ROI\)](#)<sup>28</sup> Others use peer-based systems like [Quality Matters](#). When embraced by faculty and supported institutionally, a course rubric will increase the standards of distance course design and program quality.

Learning Analytics. The New Media Consortium's Technology Outlook report on community colleges cites learning analytics as a major innovation to emerge in 2014-16 as a "game-changer" for institu-

<sup>27</sup> The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC). [Distance Education Programs: Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education \(Online Learning\)](#). Middle States Commission on Higher Education. 2011. <http://www.msche.org/publications/Guidelines-for-the-Evaluation-of-Distance-Education-Programs.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> California State University, Chico. 2010-2011. [Rubric for Online Instruction](#). [http://www.csuchico.edu/roi/the\\_rubric.shtml](http://www.csuchico.edu/roi/the_rubric.shtml).

tions.<sup>29</sup> Massive data collection, which measures and analyzes information about learners, can be collected in real time to re-direct and improve the teaching and learning process. Distance education tools, such as learning management systems, elements built into student information systems, constituent resource management (CRM) technologies, and social media applications, such as Twitter and Facebook, offer improvements for the process.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance, Accessibility and Universal Design.** Federal standards mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act<sup>30</sup> ensure that services provided by publicly-funded entities are accessible to all potential students. For course materials delivered at a distance, the act has led to the implementation of closed-captioning for video segments, color-coding and adaptive tools for those with visual impairments, written transcripts of course materials, and more.<sup>31</sup> For many colleges, this has been a litigious area,<sup>32</sup> ranging from accessibility of learning system, Web sites, streaming video, assignments, and library offerings.

One of the more promising benefits of the ADA has been the promotion of a movement for [universal design for learning](#) (UDL). Originating at the Center for Applied Special Technology ([CAST](#)), universal design looks at practices in technology and processes to improve learning for every student, including those with disabilities.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, L., S. Adams Becker, M. Cummins, V. Estrada, A. Freeman, and H. Ludgate. 2013. [Technology Outlook: Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges 2013-2018: An NMC Horizon Project Sector Analysis](#), p.11. Austin, Texas; The New Media Consortium. <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2013-technology-outlook-community-colleges.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. "Proposed Regulations, Accessibility of Web Information and Services Provided by Entities Covered by the ADA." *Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act*. <http://www.ada.gov/anprm2010.htm> accessed June 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Silva, Rito. "ADA Support Issues," [Online Student Support Services: A Best Practices Monograph](#). Northeast Texas Consortium of Colleges and Universities, 2006. <http://www.onlinestudentsupport.org/Monograph/ada.php>.

<sup>32</sup> University of Montana. *Resolution Agreement between the University of Montana and the US Department of Education for Civil Rights*. March, 2014. [http://www.umt.edu/accessibility/docs/AgreementResolution\\_March\\_7\\_2014.pdf](http://www.umt.edu/accessibility/docs/AgreementResolution_March_7_2014.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> National Center on Universal Design for Learning. "About UDL." [CAST Web site](#). <http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html>.

## Question 5.

# How Can My College Maintain Security while Serving Distance Students?

Data Security. With campus networks and student information under constant attack by malicious and recreational hackers, distance education tools may open opportunities for breaching a college's data system. The majority of tools available to IT professionals, such as the Higher Education Security Council's [Information Security Guide: Effective Practices and Solutions for Higher Education](#),<sup>34</sup> are applicable in traditional and distance education settings.

Student authentication becomes a concern, in addition to the ability and requirement of some distance learning technologies to breach the external firewalls campus networks have created to protect themselves from predators. Web-conferencing software, in particular, may allow faculty or others within the college network to share controls with external patrons and breach the college firewall. Distance education programs will want to work with information security staff to develop usage and access policies, training and documentation to track and prevent abuse.

### **Student Authentication and Financial Aid Fraud.**

Who is taking your online classes and are they the students they claim to be? Student authentication has become a topic of concern as financial aid "fraud rings" have scammed colleges of Pell Grant and other financial aid funds. The US Department of Education requires institutions to have student authentication processes in place to verify a remote students' identity. At the time of this writing, verification procedures are limited to a college requirement that students use a login and password, but this could change.

<sup>34</sup> Higher Education Security Council. [Information Security Guide: Effective Practices and Solutions for Higher Education](#). Educause/Internet2, 4-30, 2014. <https://wiki.internet2.edu/confluence/display/2014infosecurityguide/Home>.

Many colleges are experimenting with a variety of technical fixes, including live video identification, fingerprint recognition, and eye scans, but cost is a consideration. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the US Department of Education has recommended colleges use several measures to mitigate financial aid fraud, including using independent public accountants to assess the effectiveness of schools' processes for verifying a student's identity as part of the school's annual compliance audit.<sup>35</sup> However, neither the Department nor Congress have imposed any regulations to this effect at this time.

## Question 6.

# What resources should be acquired or reallocated to meet the needs of distance learners?

The bottom line for leadership concerns regarding distance education returns to resources. What needs to be allocated, or redirected, toward a distance education program to make it successful?

**Financial Resources.** Educational leaders frequently face legislative bodies and governing boards that assume they can reduce educational funding as colleges advance online learning. However, colleges must provide the necessary administrative services for a successful online program—including a business office, registrar and admission functions, an instructional platform, IT support, faculty training, student support services, and more. Most of the financial return colleges experience, due to the increased tuition dollars received from an increasing number of distance learning students, will be integrated within the general enrollment. Yet, many administrators have recognized that the need for infrastructure investment for distance

learners is equivalent to that for residential students. Services should grow to manage expansions in online education.

**Human Resources.** Colleges will need to invest in human resources, as they do for traditional faculty, but they may also require specialized staff as they build their distance education program. There will be a need for those who are skilled in instructional design and development, experts in tablet and Internet applications, and academic student coaches. Once the staff roles are established, campuses often find that the benefits to student success and completion justify similar resource extensions for traditional courses.

Positioning of the distance learning staff is a concern and will need to reflect the goals and personality of the institution. For example, a decentralized structure and support team may be the required option for some scenarios. Other colleges will push for centralization with an entirely separate virtual campus. Most sites and staffing plans, however, will fall between the extremes.

**Physical Resources.** Facility needs will include infrastructure upgrades to the campus network and connectivity to wide-area networks that support remote teaching locations. Internet bandwidth will continually need to be monitored and increased, as more students reach out to your servers and as campus-based students increase their usage of online tools. Like many businesses, colleges could benefit from letting their faculty and staff work from home. However, the need for faculty-to-faculty interactions continues in the distance education environment, and provisions need to be made to assure it occurs.

Technology investments are always tricky. Vendors place possibilities in front of campus leaders, often prior to extensive testing or consideration of potential fallout issues from implementation. Outsourced student services for specific functions can easily turn into a proverbial money pit, funding rarely-used options at a high cost per service.

A good resource for assessing technology trends is from EDUCAUSE's Leadership Board for Chief Information Officers. Publications of their annual CIO

<sup>35</sup> Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Education. Title IV of the Higher Education Act Programs: Additional Safeguards are Needed to Help Mitigate the Risks that are Unique to the Distance Education Environment, Feb. 14, 2014, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/auditreports/fy2014/a07I0001.pdf>

survey, [Information Technology in Higher Education: 2013 Survey of Chief Information Officers](#), provide a strong insight into academic possibilities.<sup>36</sup>

**Student Support Services.** Infrastructure support also needs to be in place to ensure distance education students can access the support services they need. Regular scrutiny and investment is required to assure off-site students can acquire all of the services that are available on campus. Hornak, Akweks, and Jeffs “Online Student Services at the Community College<sup>37</sup>” offers a good starting point for identifying support options and strategies for distance learners. Services designed for remote students often increase access for, and sometimes become the primary means for supporting, traditional students. Online enrollment services, and electronic advising or counseling, are prime examples. An older, but good resource is available at [www.onlinestudentsupport.org/monograph/](http://www.onlinestudentsupport.org/monograph/).

Professional Development. Creating and funding a structure for professional development for all distance education staff members, within the context of the *Student Success Agenda*, becomes an additional real cost. Faculty must be guided to master the art of developing online courses, the dynamics of effectively teaching online, and the mechanics of managing remote students. Professional activities also provide an incentive for many faculty to develop online courses and programs.

**Course Development Resources.** From open educational resources to publisher-created materials, a great amount of externally-produced material is available for online faculty and course developers. Every major publisher offers online learning options with their textbooks. Materials often take the form of an ePack that is designed to fold directly into a learning management system. Externally-produced materials can streamline the course design process and produce a

high level of quality. However, faculty must assure the material is accurate and supports the desired course outcomes. Librarians, likewise, have a role to play.

David Wright, chair of the National Council for Learning Resources, describes some pushback he has seen from faculty who complain they lack the time and resources to identify appropriate open education resources. He assures them “librarians can help!”<sup>38</sup> Students may like the richness offered by multiple resources, but they may need to be guided through conflicting sources and differing formats. Many sources may also mean multiple user accounts and passwords for each student, an issue that should be minimized.

**Information Resources.** Identifying legitimate sources of information is vital to the administrative process of allocating resources. With all of the press in the *New York Times*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, regarding each new delivery format and the immediacy placed on different needs, what distinguishes fads and money-making schemes, from useful innovation?

Although others exist, a list of credible information resources includes:

**The Instructional Technology Council, ITC** ([www.itcnetwork.org](http://www.itcnetwork.org)) An [affiliated council](#) of the [American Association of Community Colleges \(AACCC\)](#), ITC provides leadership and professional development in higher education to its membership of more than 400 colleges “by advocating, collaborating, researching, and sharing exemplary, innovative practices and potential in educational technologies.” ITC sponsors the annual [eLearning Conference](#), weekly Webinars, and an annual distance education survey, [2013 Distance Education Survey Results: Trends in eLearning: Track-](#)

<sup>36</sup> Zastrocky, Michael. [Information Technology in Higher Education: 2013 Survey of Chief Information Officers](#). The Leadership Board for CIOs in Higher Education (LBCIO), 2013. [http://lbcio.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/CHE\\_LBCIO2013SurveyExecutive-Summary-Final.pdf](http://lbcio.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/CHE_LBCIO2013SurveyExecutive-Summary-Final.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Hornak, A. M., Akweks, K. and Jeffs, M. (2010), Online student services at the community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2010: 79–87. doi: 10.1002/cc.407

<sup>38</sup> Wright, David A. Private correspondence. Surry College email. May 29, 2014.

[ing the Impact of eLearning at Community Colleges](#).<sup>39</sup> The organization tracks federal legislation affecting the distance programs of two-year schools, coordinating advocacy activities with AACC.

**EDUCAUSE** ([www.educause.edu](http://www.educause.edu)) Best known as the registrar for Web sites using addresses that end in .edu, EDUCAUSE focuses on the information technology component of the college mission, addressing campus enterprise systems, IT strategic leadership, Web presence, network security, and identity management. EDUCAUSE's Education Center for Analysis and Research ([ECAR](#)) provides background papers for many of the information technology decisions higher education institutions face. Their "[7 Things You Should Know About](#)" publications series offers insights on a variety of innovative technologies and practices.

**The U.S. Distance Learning Association (USDLA)** ([www.usdla.org](http://www.usdla.org)) Addressing the broader arena of distance practitioners, including pre K-12, higher education, continuing education, corporate training, military and government training, home schooling and telemedicine, the USDLA supports distance learning research, development and practice. Also active at the state affiliate level, the association sponsors [state and national conferences](#), podcasts and Webinars, and the national USDLA Distance Learning Week.

**The Online Learning Consortium** ([www.onlinelearningconsortium.org](http://www.onlinelearningconsortium.org)) An organization originally consisting of recipients of Alfred P. Sloan Foundation grants, it has grown into a group of researchers and practitioners "dedicated to providing access to high quality eEducation." With services including an [an-](#)

[nual conference and specialized symposia](#), Webcasts, and their [Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks](#), the Online Learning Consortium is also recognized for an [annual distance learning survey](#) covering all of higher education.

**Gartner, Inc.** ([www.gartner.com](http://www.gartner.com)) A commercial technology research and advisory group, Gartner has built a business around the [Gartner Hype Cycle](#)<sup>TM</sup>, a tool used to assess the evolution of individual technology innovations and practices. Gartner's Web site contains a number of tools and publications on the latest innovations.

**The New Media Consortium** ([www.nmc.org](http://www.nmc.org)) Publishers of the New Horizons project reports, the New Media Consortium looks at technology trends projected to impact education and other fields over a five year time span. A recent report, [Technology Outlook: Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges 2013-2018](#),<sup>40</sup> offers a guideline to the innovations that will impact two-year schools within a one-year time frame, within two to three years, and in a four to five year span.

**Quality Matters (QM)** ([www.qualitymatters.org](http://www.qualitymatters.org)) Originating from a FIPSE grant, Quality Matters has developed a peer review process that uses a rubric administrators and faculty use to assess distance instruction at the course and program level. QM offers a certification program for faculty and can provide a number of tools for the review process. Although a fee-based service, portions developed within the framework of the original grant are available at no cost on the [project Web site](#) under the heading "QM Matrix of Research Standards 2005."

<sup>39</sup> Lokken, Fred and Chris Mullins. [2013 Distance Education Survey Results: Trends in eLearning: Tracking the Impact of eLearning at Community Colleges](#). The Instructional Technology Council (ITC) of the American Association of Community Colleges, April, 2014, [www.itcnetwork.org/resources/itc-annual-distance-education-survey.html](http://www.itcnetwork.org/resources/itc-annual-distance-education-survey.html).

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, L., S. Adams Becker, M. Cummins, V. Estrada, A. Freeman, and H. Ludgate. 2013. [Technology Outlook: Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges 2013-2018: An NMC Horizon Project Sector Analysis](#). Austin, Texas; The New Media Consortium. <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2013-technology-outlook-community-colleges.pdf>.

**The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)** ([www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)) With a primary focus on K-12 education, ISTE offers insights in educational technology with state affiliates throughout the United States. The organization maintains an excellent summary of [standards for administrators](#) and [standards for teachers](#) many of which are applicable to the college setting.

**The Community College Research Center (CCRC)** (<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>) Based at Columbia University, CCRC conducts research into the “problems and performance of community colleges” to create greater student success at two-year schools. The Center maintains a number of research areas, including distance education, with [their related publications](#).

## In Conclusion

Since the 1970's, community colleges have been at the forefront of the distance learning movement. Today, two-year institutions continue to be the leaders in enrollment and achievement for online learners.

It is hoped that the six questions offered here offer a compass for college leaders can use to gauge their distance education needs and chart the direction for their college within the movement. Whether one holds the president's role or serves as an academic or executive leader, the resulting discussions can focus your planning, support student success, and lead to the best use of your college's resources.

*The contributors to this report included a team of two-year college presidents and AACC affiliated council leaders who serve as Commissioners for Academic, Student and Community Development. Input was also sought from the New Initiatives Group of the Instructional Technology Council (ITC), an affiliated council of AACC focusing on distance education.*

## About the Instructional Technology Council

The Instructional Technology Council, ITC, provides exceptional leadership and professional development to its network of eLearning experts by advocating, collaborating, researching, and sharing exemplary, innovative practices and potential in learning technologies.

An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges established in 1977, ITC represents higher education institutions in the United States and Canada, and is leader in advancing distance education. ITC is constantly working to raise awareness about the benefits of distance learning, instructional telecommunications, and future needs and possibilities. ITC tracks federal legislation that will affect distance learning, conducts annual professional development meetings, supports research, and provides a forum for members to share expertise and materials. Visit the Web site [www.itcnetwork.org](http://www.itcnetwork.org) for more information.

### Annual eLearning Conference

ITC will hold eLearning 2015 in Las Vegas, Nevada on February 18-21, 2015. eLearning 2015 is the annual event distance educators cannot afford to miss! This gathering of distance learning professionals features more than 80 workshops and seminars. eLearning 2015 will introduce you to other distance learning professionals so you can share ideas, insights and tips that work! The College of Southern Nevada is the host institution for eLearning 2015. Visit the Web site [www.itcnetwork.org/elearning-conference.html](http://www.itcnetwork.org/elearning-conference.html) for more information.

### ITC Distance Education Leadership Academy

ITC will hold its seventh Distance Education Leadership Academy for distance educators on July 29-31, 2015. Twenty participants will work with academy faculty to create a sound leadership strategy, develop a model to fit their institution, identify and acquire key tools for successful distance learning leadership, and obtain a new network of fellow eLearning practitioners. Visit the Web site [www.itcnetwork.org/leadership-academy.html](http://www.itcnetwork.org/leadership-academy.html) for more information.

## About the Author

**Mickey Slimp** has represented the Instructional Technology Council on the American Association of Community College's Commission on Academic, Student, and Community Development. A past council chair for ITC, he now heads their New Initiatives Group and has been instrumental in the creation of their multinational Distance Education Leadership Academy. A former director of the Virtual College of Texas and projects such as Internet Teachers at Every College, and the Texas Leadership Alliance, he was inducted during 2013 into the Texas Distance Learning Hall of Fame. Dr. Slimp lives in Tyler, Texas, where he built a nationally recognized distance learning program as a dean at Tyler Junior College. Now based at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Tyler, he serves as the executive director of the Northeast Texas Consortium of Colleges and a professor of education. Email: [mickey.slimp@netnet.org](mailto:mickey.slimp@netnet.org)

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author's and do not necessarily represent those of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), its officers, or employees or of the Instructional Technology Council (ITC), its officers, or employees.*



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