

Sharpen the Focus – Spring/Winter 2005

The Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC) provides an additional enrollment reporting procedure to help institutions better understand the trends of distance education. This procedure involves phone interviews with administrators from select colleges and universities who can provide a “snapshot” of distance education enrollments at their institution. This term, interviews were conducted with Becky Parton, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Director at Lincoln Land Community College; Gary Newhouse, Dean of Library and Media Services at Oakton Community College; Philip Carlock, Dean of Learning Resources at Southwestern Illinois College; Pam Collins, School of Continuing Education Director at Eastern Illinois University; and Karen Gersten, Associate Dean and Managing Director of Distance Education at Roosevelt University. The interview consisted of five questions. The questions and individual responses are listed below.

What is the most important trend in distance education at your institution?

Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) – Online education grew 21 percent in 2004, with over seven percent of students now enjoying the convenience of taking instruction online. The college offers almost 200 different courses online and through the Computer Flex Center, where students may take classes that fit around their work or family schedules.

Oakton Community College (OCC) – We have seen a continuing significant increase in online course offerings and enrollment. Our online enrollment increased 44% from Fall 04 to Spring 05.

Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) – Like most other schools, we have seen a growth in online course development and enrollment. Many of our telecourses (televised or videotaped) are transitioning to teleweb courses which contain an online component. Some then make the transition to fully online courses. SWIC is also making the transition from traditional interactive video, to video conferencing over the Internet. Telecourses still account for the majority of our distance education enrollment (55%) with online courses coming in second (44%).

Eastern Illinois University (EIU) - Distance education at EIU has seen three trends develop over the past few years. The first trend is an increase in the variety of distance education courses available to our constituents. Another trend is the provision of training for faculty who wish to teach online. They must complete the training before September to teach online during the Spring Semester. Any new faculty must complete the training before teaching online. Finally, we have been able to reach a broader audience with the use of the classroom video conferencing system for interactive video courses. This system allows us to meet student demand with existing faculty members.

Roosevelt University – Our growth in online learning is beyond all expectations. We cannot meet the current demand. In Fall 2001 we had 261 online credit hours, and for

Spring 2005 those credit hours had jumped to 2883. We will offer 44 online sections for Fall 2005 and 15 of those sections are already filled for classes that do not even start until after Labor Day.

What programs and subject areas generate the most distance education enrollments?

LLCC – Students show the most interest in General Education courses. We offer Political Science, Psychology, English and Math. Our online math courses range from developmental all the way up to statistics. We also offer courses in Law Enforcement, Computer Technologies, and Business that are very popular.

OCC – Our General Education courses such as Science, Psychology, English and Math are always the first to fill. We offer an Associate of Arts degree online that consists of media-based (videotape) and Web-based courses. Our Associate of Science degree is 70% online with some lab courses requiring campus visits. The program area that generates the most enrollments is Nursing. We offer several Nursing courses online and they are very popular.

SWIC – The highest enrollments are found in our General Education courses such as English 101 and 102, History, Math, and Science. Overall our telecourses enroll more students, but the online courses are growing at a faster rate.

EIU – Faculty in the Psychology and Health Studies are very supportive of distance education students so they generate a lot of enrollments. Our General Studies degree program (formerly the Board of Trustees) is our most popular online degree program. The degree plan is designed specifically for adult learners. There are 1,600 students enrolled in the program this year. Around 80% of our distance education students are working toward this degree.

Roosevelt – Our graduate program in Training and Development generates the most distance education enrollments. Other areas with high enrollment numbers are Psychology, the Organizational Leadership major in the Bachelor of Professional Studies program for adult students and the Bachelor's degree program in Professional Studies.

How do students enrolled in your distance education courses differ from traditional students in the support services they seek?

LLCC – The online students usually have more technology related questions than face-to-face students. They have questions about Blackboard, the course management system, and other technology related questions that pertain to specific course materials. Online students may also receive other support services through the college homepage, the LLCC online website, through email, by phone, or in person.

OCC – All of our Library, Advising and Financial Aid forms are available online. Admissions, registration and payment can also be done online. Distance education students can contact an advisor or other personnel online and complete any needed tasks.

SWIC – Our Website has an entire section dedicated to distance learning. All distance education students are offered a face-to-face orientation before enrolling, to help them better understand the technology before the class begins. Our student services are currently on-campus only with the exception of library services. One note is that our telecourse student handbook has gone from print to CD. This allows for a tremendous cost savings and faster turn around for production.

EIU - Advising for distance education students is available through the classroom video conferencing system. The students have direct access to advising personnel. Our administrative and financial aid forms are also available online and students can use an electronic signature in place of driving to campus to sign the forms. We also offer student ID cards to distance education students. The IDs are mailed to the students so they can use them for access to libraries and to other student service centers near them. One unique thing about EIU is that we use a textbook rental system. Students are charged a per credit hour fee and the books are mailed to their door at no cost to them. Distance education students find this to be a great cost savings and convenience.

Roosevelt - All distance education students at Roosevelt have a single point of contact. Any questions the students have go through this person. If the contact cannot directly help the student, he/she can make the connection between the student and the correct person. Our ratings have been off the charts for service to our distance education students. They really like having someone who knows them, their schedule, and their needs. We also take a proactive approach to service to our distance education students by supplying them with a CD that includes everything they need to know about being an online student at Roosevelt University.

If your institution currently offers distance education courses in delivery modes other than the Internet (such as correspondence courses or broadcast TV), what are your plans for continuing to offer them? What segment of the student population enrolls in these courses?

LLCC – We are continuing to offer telecourses. However the number of these courses has been shifting. We offer 4 telecourses now compared to 16 in 2000. The 12 courses previously offered as telecourses are now being offered online. Seven percent of our total student population enroll in online courses with telecourses representing less than one percent.

OCC – We offer Web-based courses (online or hybrid), interactive TV, and media-based courses (videotape.) We are seeing a blurring of the lines when it comes to delivery mode. Media-based courses are moving more toward online. However there is still a niche of people who need other delivery modes. For Spring 2005, 14% of our student population was enrolled through distance education.

SWIC – Telecourses account for the largest distance education enrollment numbers at SWIC. Hybrid courses (partially online) are growing in popularity among our face-to-face instructors. More online courses will be coming in the near future. For Spring 2005, 12% of our total student population was enrolled through distance education. SWIC will also be offering video conferencing courses beginning in Fall 2005.

EIU – There are approximately 35 online courses available each semester. We also offer a couple of courses through the interactive video format. Distance education accounts for approximately 5% of the total student population at EIU.

Roosevelt - For over 30 years, Roosevelt has been offering print based guided independent study courses through the External Studies Program (ESP) Over one million dollars per year are generated from the ESP program. There is obviously a need for these courses and we will continue to offer them in the current format as well as some in CD format.

What additional information about enrollment at your institution is significant?

LLCC – Online course development is continuing to grow at LLCC. We are in the process of developing 5 or 6 courses in the science area. We are also working toward offering a complete degree online. We currently have several certificates available online in the Computer Science area. Growth and development are the key to the success of our distance education offerings.

OCC – We offer in-district tuition rates to all our distance education students. There was concern from the board about revenue loss when we first implemented this, but it has proven to be very successful. Distance education offers students the flexibility and time they need to complete coursework. We still find that over 92% of our distance education students live within the district.

SWIC – One interesting statistic about our distance education enrollments is the age groups for online courses versus telecourses. More students in their 30s and 40s enroll in online courses, and those in their teens and 20s enroll in telecourses. This falls in line with the reasoning behind taking a distance education course. Online students (30s and 40s) are taking the course to prepare for a future job. Telecourse students (10s and 20s) are taking the course to prepare for transfer to a 4 year institution. Another note is the technical prowess of the students is changing face-to-face instruction as students are expecting to see technology in their courses. Web supplements to face-to-face courses are becoming commonplace.

EIU – The student services available online for distance education students along with the textbook rental program have made it much easier for international students to attend EIU. Our international student population continues to grow.

Roosevelt - In the programs that we have fully online, the demand has exceeded the demand for the same program at either of our physical locations. The online sections fill

faster so students are not signing up for online solely because the face-to-face sections have filled. It is the other way around. Students are attracted to the program and not the physical location. Twenty five percent of our students live more than 25 miles from either of our two campuses.

We have also found that online teaching has changed the way we teach face-to-face courses. There is more of a focus on achievement and measurement of learning, more focus on the process as well as the content.