

## Sharpen the Focus – Summer 2004

The Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC) has initiated an additional enrollment reporting procedure to help institutions better understand the trends of distance education. This new procedure involves phone interviews with select colleges and universities who can provide a “snapshot” of distance education enrollments at their institution. Those chosen were Danville Area Community College, Kaskaskia College, South Suburban College, Illinois State University, and University of St. Francis. 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?**

**Danville Area Community College (DACC)** – We have seen an increased student interest in online degrees and certificates. We now offer 8 online degrees and certificates including an Associate of Science and Arts (ASA) that can be transferred and credited toward a Bachelor’s degree. They have all received North Central Association (NCA) approval.

**Kaskaskia College** – Our online course sections are filling faster than the face-to-face or interactive TV sections. We currently offer courses that will allow a student to complete an Associate degree online, but we are adding additional courses to allow greater flexibility. We are finding this is important to both the traditional and non-traditional students.

**South Suburban College** – At South Suburban, we are witnessing the increased demand for online courses. However, we have come to the end of faculty that are interested in developing online courses. We currently offer 46 online courses taught by 12-15 faculty members. New courses and sections are hard to create and teach with minimal faculty.

**Illinois State University (ISU)** - The incorporation of distance education technology into courses that would not ordinarily be thought of as distance education. For example, many of our face to face courses have added web-based assignments and communication among students and instructor.

**University of St. Francis (USF)** – Unlike many institutions that began using the Internet as a supplement to face-to-face courses, USF began by offering its courses completely at a distance. The most important trend is the growing popularity of distance learning. This is especially noticeable with our healthcare professionals. During the Spring 2004 11.9% of our total registrations were online.

### **Did the majority of your online classes fill last semester?**

**DACC** – Yes, all our general education online classes filled and we opened 6 new sections. We had some specialty classes that did not fill. However, we did not cancel

most of these. We allow these courses to be taught as a tutorial of small class size with full credit for the student.

**Kaskaskia** – Yes, and many had waiting lists. We offered 67 online courses and they all filled. Out of approximately 50 interactive TV courses we canceled 2 and out of approximately 24 telecourses, only 1 was cancelled.

**South Suburban** – Yes, most of the online classes filled to capacity. Student enrollment in the telecourse area has been decreasing.

**ISU** – Yes, we average 24 courses per semester and they all fill. The online courses are popular with our resident students as well off-campus students. The graduate online courses are smaller due to the nature of the course and attract more non-resident students.

**USF** – Yes, we cap our enrollments on average to 20 students per online class. For the Spring 2004 semester, classes were full and additional sections were opened to meet student demand.

**What are your institution's plans for developing and offering additional online courses/programs? Will you be offering the same, more or fewer?**

**DACC** – Plans are in the works to increase the number of General Education courses we have available online. We are working toward placing whole degree and certificates online, but the math and sciences are hard to teach online. We are looking at hybrid courses for these subject areas.

**Kaskaskia** – We plan to offer more courses and programs along with additional sections of established courses. We have also recently added 3 online student support staff to help keep retention and grade point averages high. This online support will be available to students from 9 am to 9 pm, 7 days a week.

**South Suburban** – The development of courses and programs is faculty driven. The administration has no set plan. We will wait to be approached by faculty interested in teaching and developing online courses.

**ISU** - If we mean completely online, we would expect to offer slightly more over the next few years and then to hold constant. We would expect the use of distance education technologies to rapidly increase as faculty and students increasingly are more technologically savvy. We have no institutional plans for online courses - but colleges and departments develop programs that meet their strategic interests - i.e. College of Education and Mennonite College of Nursing have a more state-wide mission than other colleges.

**USF** - USF is in the process of developing additional courses and programs for online delivery. The most recent project is funded through a grant received by the College of

Nursing and Allied Health to place a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Clinical Nurse Specialist with an education concentration program online. USF's College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education are also developing additional courses.

### **What was unexpected about online enrollments last term?**

**DACC** – Student demand exceeded capacity. We expected to see a leveling off but actually saw an increase in online enrollment. Our overall enrollment at the college is remaining constant with the increase in online enrollments. Interactive TV and telecourses both saw a decrease in enrollment. From Spring 02 to Spring 04, we saw an increase of almost 40% in online enrollments.

**Kaskaskia** – Online classes filled and had waiting lists with no drop in face-to-face enrollments. In Spring 04, there were 3338 students enrolled in distance education.

**South Suburban** – Nothing for last term, but already this term we have seen an increase of nearly 1/3 in enrollments. In Spring 04 we had 656 students enrolled online and Fall 04 has 900 students.

**ISU** – The enrollments increased more than we expected. We thought the online courses were close to peaking but last term had a larger enrollment. This growth is department and instructor driven and not a set policy within the University.

**USF** - More than three quarters of our new undergraduate students enrolled in our Health Arts degree completion program chose to take their courses over the Internet or through faculty directed instruction with one-half of our new graduate students choosing online instruction.

### **What additional information about enrollment at your institution is significant?**

**DACC** – Online courses are the first to fill and we are offering more sections due to demand. Ten percent of our total enrollment is online, and many students are concerned with articulation. To help students, we have started listing all our syllabi online to allow prospective institutions the ability to review the courses for transferability.

**Kaskaskia** – Retention rates and grade point averages for online students are slightly higher than face-to-face students. This is in part due to the non-traditional students in online courses. We are also working to keep the retention rate and GPAs high by offering the new online student support staff. We are also offering more interactive TV courses district-wide from the 6 education centers around the district along with 2 locations on campus.

**South Suburban** – We are surprised that the enrollments for our Office Administration Technology program are not higher. The numbers are healthy, but could be even higher.

The faculty reluctance to develop and teach online courses keeps us at a standstill with our distance education offerings.

**ISU** – That the enrollments have grown as rapidly as they have despite a lack of university plan to grow them. Also that we have a completely online Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. Also we have completely shifted from compressed video technology to Internet Protocol Video, meaning that all of our distance ed courses rely exclusively on Internet technology. This fact gives us a flexible and ubiquitous platform for online courses.

We also have a lot of hybrid courses, particularly courses that are a cross between extension and online. This allows us to take more risk with courses with instructors contracted specifically to teach those courses, as we can deliver contract courses online if enrollments drop, thus making it impractical to pay travel expenses for the contracted instructor.

**USF** - In graduate and degree completion programs there is a striking shift from face-to-face classes due to the increased comfort with computer technology. With the availability of a BSN Fast track and MSN online, USF is seeing a significant increase in nursing enrollments. The University of St. Francis serves 4,300 students nationwide with 60 programs of undergraduate study and 10 graduate programs.