

Sharpen the Focus – Summer 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 Mike Walters, Dean of Learning Resource Services at Carl Sandburg College; Julie Giuliani, Director of Distance Education at McHenry County College; Russ Stoup, Director of Learning Resources and Instructional Technology at Shawnee Community College; Kristen Hartz, Senior Program Coordinator for External Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Eric Johnson at the Moody Bible Institute. 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?

Carl Sandburg College (CSC) – The most important trend we are experiencing is the growth in enrollment in online courses. We currently offer stored media courses, however they will all be online after this year, so we expect a continued growth in online enrollments.

McHenry County College (MCC) – We have witnessed 3 significant trends in our distance education program. The first is rapidly increasing enrollments in online courses (46% for 2004-2005). Also, there has been an increase in the number of students enrolling in Internet Course Exchange (ICE) courses and more out-of-district students are contacting us as a result of searching the IVC web site for available courses. The last trend, noteworthy, is our distance education retention and completion rates. The average retention rate reported Spring 05 for online courses was 85.7% and 82.3% for telecourses. Both online and telecourse completion rates were the highest they have ever been.

Shawnee Community College (SCC) – Like most other schools, we have seen a growth in online course development and enrollment. The majority of our distance education enrollments are now generated by online courses. They are replacing our past leaders – telecourses (videotaped) and interactive TV (two-way audio and video connections that enable students at "remote site" locations to fully interact with the teacher and the students in the "instructor site" classroom) courses. We are also seeing a growth in the use of Internet components in face-to-face courses as instructors are adding streaming video/audio and other Internet technologies to their current courses.

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) – We have seen an increase in enrollments in the professional education area. These programs are credit non-degree or non-credit, with a particular trend towards the development of post-baccalaureate and post-masters certificate programs. For the credit programs, we've seen growing enrollments in the Public Health Informatics and Specialist in Blood Bank Technology certificate programs. Overall, the campus now has seven online certificate programs that are geared toward

working professionals who need skills or education in a specific area of their field in order for advancement or for credentials.

Moody Bible Institute (MBI) – At Moody Bible Institute we are moving to a cohort system that will allow for more collaborative online learning between students and faculty. This is a big development for our distance education courses.

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

CSC – Our General Education courses in math and science are very popular. Also, we see a lot of interest in our Criminal Law and CIS programming courses.

MCC – Our General Education courses such as English Composition I & II, Art, History, Math, Political Science, Humanities and Psychology fill very quickly. Other areas generating strong enrollment are: Medical Terminology, Geography of the Developing Worlds, Computer Literacy, International Business Studies, Marketing, Criminology and Spanish.

SCC – General Education courses fill very quickly. We have Music and English courses completely online that are very much in demand. Also our Introductory Biology course always fills quickly. However this course does require some campus visits for the lab work.

UIC – Our Graduate Medical Education (GME) non-credit program generates the highest enrollment numbers of all UIC's online programs. The GME is a contract program designed to prepare medical residents to function more competently in the modern healthcare environment. Currently, there are 2,500 students enrolled from 27 institutions nationwide. This program consists of 13 self-paced modules that the students must complete within 2 years.

MBI – Students often come to Moody Bible Institute specifically for Biblical Studies. Our Foundation Biblical Studies courses are very well received and account for a good deal of our online enrollments.

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

CSC – We are involved in the Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) course sharing and one of the services our students have difficulty with is obtaining the books necessary for courses offered at other institutions. This seems to be the biggest hurdle for our distance education students.

MCC – We find that our distance education students require more technical support help. Because we are involved in the ILCCO course sharing system, we get a number of

students from other institutions enrolled in our courses calling with access questions. We also receive calls from students who have seen our courses listed on the IVC web site and want more information about them. Lastly, our distance education students make use of our online Advising resource.

SCC – The majority of our online students are also taking courses on campus. So the support they request is usually focused on WebCT, our course management system. We have noticed, and I am sure it is true elsewhere, that our distance education students must be motivated, self-directed and organized in order to succeed

UIC – Our distance education students are not coming on campus so they need help navigating to services and they need an advocate who will work with and for them to get the services they require. The various program coordinators and the External Education office provides these advocates for online students.

MBI – We have found that the mean age for our distance education students is below the average. Our age group is between 20-30 years old. They are technically savvy, but need advising on career direction. They are looking for courses that are related to their area in life.

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?

CSC – We currently offer stored media, interactive TV and Internet courses. Our stored media classes will all be online by next year. Currently, the interactive TV and Internet courses are generating about the same number of enrollments and amount of interest – 47.5% interactive TV, 47.5% Internet, and 5% stored media.

MCC – We offer both telecourses and Internet courses. Telecourse credit hours decreased somewhat over Fall 2004. The decrease in telecourse activity can be attributed, in part, to the reduction of telecourse offerings each semester. Since most of our telecourses allow students to enroll at anytime during the semester, plans are to continue to offer these flexible enrollment options. Students enrolling in telecourses are generally stay-at-home women, working professionals and/or traditional students who for whatever reason can not attend an on-campus class.

SCC – We offer telecourses, interactive TV and Internet courses. All 3 modes are increasing in enrollment. On average we have 500 students enrolled in Internet courses, and 400 students enrolled in each of telecourse and interactive TV courses.

UIC – The College of Nursing offers interactive video courses, which are offered via the Internet using an IP address. All other distance education offerings are online.

MBI – For over 100 years, Moody Bible Institute has offered independent study

correspondence courses. About 40% of our distance education enrollments come from these courses. Forty percent of the enrollments are generated by Internet courses, and 20% are provided at our regional classrooms in 4 states – Illinois, Ohio, Florida, and Washington State.

What additional information about enrollment at your institution is significant?

CSC – Our county has experienced a drop in population of late, so overall our total (distance and face-to-face) enrollment is down 8%. The declining population combined with the loss of jobs are the major contributing factors in this decline. The partnerships we have built with the IVC and ILCCO help keep distance education enrollments growing at Carl Sandburg. Since 2000, we have had 132 total students enrolled in the course sharing program through ILCCO.

MCC – For McHenry County College, partnerships are important to continued success. Our partnerships with IVC, ILCCO and the course sharing system, have contributed to our growth in distance education. In terms of the future, the ability to leverage resources among institutions will be the key to growing enrollments. At MCC, by combining online courses, telecourses and traditional courses, students can earn an Associate Degree via distance education and transfer to one of our partnering institutions to earn a Bachelor's Degree as well.

SCC – Popularity is increasing for using Internet communication technologies and streaming video in face-to-face courses as well as distance education courses. Our instructors are leading this increased use along with student demand. The Web-enhanced courses are drawing more attention these days than standard face-to-face lecture courses.

UIC – UIC students on the whole are slightly older than the average age of most university students and are typically non-residential students with full-time or part-time jobs. Only 12% of UIC's student population lives on campus, but 34.7% are in Chicago and 62.6% are in Cook County. Online and blended learning work very well for our students who are seeking high-quality education but need flexibility in their schedules.

MBI – Because of the nature of our courses, students purposefully come to Moody Bible Institute searching for courses to transfer to other schools. The Foundational Biblical Studies courses are the most popular. We do offer a full degree online, but many students come for a specific course. The students who come to our campus, however, are almost 100% full degree seeking students.