

FACULTY GOING THE DISTANCE: MOTIVATIONS, INCENTIVES, AND SATISFACTION IN FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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While the practice of distance learning has been a part of higher education for more than a century, today's technology has placed this instructional method in the forefront of discussion on teaching and learning in higher education. Recent technological advances have resulted in a movement in higher education toward increasing use of distance learning technologies. A December 1999 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) stated that 65% of the public two-year institutions in the NCES study reported offering distance learning courses and an additional 20% are planning to begin offering these types of classes (NCES, 1999). The inevitable result of this increase in distance learning courses will be an increased number of faculty engaged in distance learning efforts.

A number of authors have taken on the task of investigating how the responsibilities of faculty translate into the distance learning paradigm. There have been investigations of faculty attitudes toward distance learning (Clark, 1993; Taylor & White, 1991) and explorations of faculty rewards, motivations, and incentives for involvement in distance learning (Miller & Husmann, 1997; Wolcott, 1997). One of the themes in the literature on faculty participation in distance education is a discussion of motivating or enticing faculty participation in distance learning. Much of this literature is an extension of current concepts of faculty job satisfaction. A review of the literature on job satisfaction among community college faculty has shown consistently that interaction with students is an important source of satisfaction for this group of faculty. A recurring dissatisfier is the time it takes to adequately prepare for classes, which has been shown in several studies to be a source of concern (Hutton & Jobe, 1985; Milosheff, 1990).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate faculty perceptions of distance learning courses, their training in and types of compensation for participation in distance learning, and factors influencing their satisfaction in these areas. The findings presented are part of a statewide program review conducted by the Florida State Board of Community Colleges. Eighteen colleges participated in the study. Of the 233 faculty members engaged in distance learning, as defined by this study, usable responses were received from 153 (66% response rate). Responses were captured using a 43 item questionnaire designed to gather information about a number of issues relating to the faculty experience in distance learning.

RESULTS

The faculty who participated in the study reported teaching 155 different courses in a variety of disciplines. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were female, 53% male; the large majority (85%) were full-time faculty. The years of

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community college experience ranged from 1 to 35 years (mean=14 years; mode=10 years). Most faculty (65%) reported teaching only one distance learning course. Reported class size ranged from 1 to 85 students. The mean class size for those teaching only one class was 23 students; mode was 20 students.

Faculty in the study were asked several questions regarding the efforts taken to prepare them for teaching a distance learning course. The data were analyzed to investigate whether the receipt of training or the perception of the adequacy of the training had any effect on the faculty's overall perception of the distance learning experience. Chi-square values were computed and four significant relationships were found to influence the overall rating of the teaching experience in distance learning: adequacy of general training in the use and application of distance learning technology ($\chi^2 = 8$, $p = .046$); adequacy of training in curricula development for distance learning ($\chi^2 = 9.35$; $p = .025$); adequacy of training in distance learning teaching methods ($\chi^2 = 13.15$, $p = .004$); and effectiveness of training in distance learning teaching methods ($\chi^2 = 13.20$, $p = .001$). This finding suggests that training designed to prepare faculty for various aspects of distance learning makes for a more satisfying experience for faculty involved in distance learning.

Faculty were also surveyed regarding incentives and motivations for distance learning participation. Computer equipment was the incentive most frequently reported and the only incentive significantly correlated with willingness to teach another distance learning course ($r = .169$, $p < .05$). Four types of motivations to *become* involved in distance learning correlated significantly ($p < .01$) with the overall experience: ability to reach a new audience ($r = .378$), ability to develop new ideas ($r = .351$), personal interest in technology ($r = .360$), and intellectual challenge ($r = .328$). Similarly four types of motivations to *continue* involvement in distance learning correlated significantly ($p < .01$) with the overall experience: ability to reach a new audience ($r = .357$), ability to develop new ideas ($r = .393$), personal interest in technology ($r = .328$), and intellectual challenge ($r = .469$). These same motivations also correlated significantly with faculty willingness to recommend distance learning to their colleagues ($r = .275$, $r = .392$, $r = .221$, $r = .361$, respectively). Personal interest in technology was the only motivator to correlate significantly with willingness to teach another distance learning course ($r = .251$, $p < .01$).

While the large proportion (84%) of the faculty indicated that distance learning course development took longer than development of conventional courses, and 67.9% indicated that distance learning class preparation took longer than class preparation for conventional courses, these sentiments did not correlate significantly with overall satisfaction with the distance learning experience. However a significant correlation was found in the relationship between the agreement that distance learning courses are more time consuming to develop than traditional courses and willingness to teach another distance learning course ($r = .177$, $p < .05$).

Most of the faculty in the study found the distance learning experience to be positive, would teach another distance learning course, and would recommend teaching a distance learning course to their colleagues. As might be expected

finding the quality of distance learning courses to be at least equivalent to the quality of traditional courses correlated significantly with having an overall positive experience ($r = .393$, $p < .01$), recommending to their colleagues teaching via distance learning ($r = .403$, $p < .01$), and willingness to teach another distance learning course ($r = .284$, $p < .01$). Additional correlations indicated that female faculty were more positive about the overall distance learning experience than their male colleagues ($r = .249$, $p < .01$), as were part-time faculty ($r = .220$, $p < .05$), and female faculty were more inclined to recommend to their colleagues teaching a distance learning class ($r = .254$, $p < .01$).

CONCLUSIONS

Several themes emerged from a review of the data. Results of this study indicate that training influences faculty perception of the distance learning experience. Those faculty who receive training that they consider to be adequate or effective reported more satisfaction with the distance learning experience. Institutions that want to offer distance learning courses should make efforts to provide sufficient training for faculty who will teach those courses. For the faculty in this study, incentives were not especially effective in influencing their perception of or willingness to engage in distance learning efforts. Intrinsic motivations were a stronger influence on faculty satisfaction and continuing interest in and support of distance learning initiatives. As they plan for and develop distance learning programs, institutions should consider ways to enhance faculty participation and commitment to distance learning efforts by exploring ways to tap into influences uncovered in this study.

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