



Chapter IV

The Future of Distance Learning in the Traditional University

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The growth in college and university offerings of Internet courses has been phenomenal and, as that growth accelerates, some writers have predicted that the university, as we now know it, will cease to exist. There is little doubt that distance learning with Internet courses will have an impact on the traditional university and a very important question is, will Internet courses represent a new and significant improvement over traditional pedagogy for educating students or just a lessening in the rigor of academic programs? This chapter presents the attitudes of accounting department chairpersons and College of Business (COB) deans on Internet courses. Ninety-four accounting chairpersons and 66 COB deans returned E mail questionnaires. In the view of the nearly 65% of the chairs and almost half of the deans. Internet courses are simply correspondence courses presented with new technology.

SYNOPSIS

For decades universities have delivered instruction over long distances through correspondence courses. During the decade of the 1990s developments in technology offered new delivery vehicles for correspondence courses. Internet courses, where the interaction between faculty and student

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occurs primarily over the Internet, represent a substantial departure from the traditional learning model. The growth in college and university offerings of Internet courses has been phenomenal and, as that growth accelerates, some writers have predicted that the university, as we now know it, will cease to exist. There is little doubt that distance learning with Internet courses will have an impact on the traditional university and a very important question is, will Internet courses represent a new and significant improvement over traditional pedagogy for educating students or just a lessening in the rigor of academic programs?

This chapter presents the attitudes of accounting department chairpersons and College of Business (COB) deans on Internet courses. In the view of the nearly 65% of the chairs and almost half of the deans, Internet courses are simply correspondence courses presented with new technology. Those who agree that Internet courses are correspondence courses are more negative on offering Internet courses in university programs or offering degrees through the completion of only Internet courses.

Results of this research suggest that, while the traditional university will face some challenges from the distance learning revolution, its survival will not be in jeopardy. Rather, the challenge may well be integrating the new technology without significantly diminishing the quality of the educational process.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is not a new instructional model for universities, only the delivery techniques are evolving. For decades universities have delivered instruction over long distances through correspondence courses. Typically these courses required a student to finish a specific program of relatively independent study and successfully complete one or more exams. These exams were, almost universally, proctored by an independent third party. Although correspondence courses have been offered by a number of universities, the percentage of universities offering these courses is relatively small. Additionally, correspondence courses have never obtained the same degree of acceptance as traditional on-campus courses requiring a student's attendance and participation. Perhaps that is why they have not been a threat to the traditional on-campus model of instruction. Schools that have offered a degree completely by correspondence have typically not been mainstream colleges and universities, but tend to have offered paraprofessional degrees.

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