Chapter V

Three Strategies for the Use of Distance Learning Technology in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

"University A" is a small, private liberal arts school with a religious affiliation. Located in a large city, it draws locally and from its particular religious group. With an enrollment under 3,000, it carries a Carnegie Classification of Baccalaureate II and has its own board of trustees. The school has pushed the use of new technology in instruction. For instance, it was one of the first schools in its area to install a fiber optic network across campus. Programs such as business feature the active use of technology to enhance learning. For example, in an international business course, students develop links with fellow students in other countries. However, University A differs from other schools that have embraced new information and communication technology; it has rejected some uses as not appropriate to the mission of the school. For instance, University A will not use videoconferencing to send instruction to remote sites. Why? School leaders feel that a significant part of a student's experience at University A comes from faculty providing role models, and that role modeling cannot be done through a television monitor.

"University B" is a regional public university located in a small town in a heavily rural portion of its state. The nearest small city is an hour's drive away, and it draws students regionally, mostly from nearby counties. With an enrollment under 10,000, the school carries a Carnegie Classification of Master's I. For years, University B has used its Continuing Education program in aggressively serving the region, beginning with such means as "circuit rider" faculty who traveled to remote sites to teach classes and broadcast television instruction through local public television. The school has continued its aggressive outreach with new technology. In the 1990s, University B quickly moved into videoconferencing (compressed video) to phase out at least some of the circuit rider faculty. At the same time, the school has expanded the off-campus sites to which it sends instruction. Lastly, University B has augmented its MBA program by bringing in a health care administration concentration from another university via videoconferencing, and it has been considering the future servicing of majors in declining programs such as geography by outsourcing instruction.

Officers at the two universities described above were among those at several schools who participated in a series of case studies (Rayburn, 1997). The two schools use distance learning technology (DLT) in very different ways, but they do share at least one common trait: they have clear pictures of how to use available technology. Put another way, they have identifiable strategies for using technology that conform to the missions of the schools.

The point of this chapter is to identify and describe strategies for using distance learning technology (DLT) at higher education institutions. Research suggests three major strategies, the "Guest Lecturer" strategy, the "Automated Correspondence Course" strategy, and the "Large Lecture Hall" strategy. All three strategies have antecedents in the recent history of higher education, and each has its own implications for the future. The next section looks at literature and field research on the strategic use of DLT.

BACKGROUND

The literature provides many examples of how institutions have used distance learning technology (DLT). The case study research that included University A and University B, while adding to the body of knowledge on distance learning from an *organizational* perspective, also suggested a useful working taxonomy of DLT strategies. Both history and current literature support this taxonomy.

Schools employ DLT to achieve different goals. Those goals also have antecedents elsewhere in academe. Broadly speaking, the goals

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