
An Institutional Overview: Factors Influencing Faculty Participation in Distance Education in Postsecondary Education in the United States: An Institutional Study

By Dr. Kristen S. Betts

Kristen S. Betts, Ed.D., is the Director of Business Development at ICMI, Inc. based in Annapolis, Maryland, USA. She is also an adjunct professor in the Educational Technology Leadership Program at The George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA.

The integration of new technologies in higher education is inevitable (Gilbert, 1995). To a great extent, the success or failure of distance education rests on the enthusiasm with which these new technologies are embraced by the faculty (Willis, 1994). Faculty play an essential role in the implementation of distance education and technological change. However, despite the recent expansion of distance education programs across the United States, research indicates that many faculty resist participation in distance education (Olcott & Wright, 1995). Recognizing that faculty are an essential part of any distance education program, an institutional study was conducted at The George Washington University, Washington, DC, in spring 1998 to identify factors that influence faculty to participate in distance education.

Based on this institutional study, the following information will be highlighted: population, purpose, methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations.

Population:

The population for this study included faculty and deans contracted for the 1998 spring semester at GWU. The selected sample of 1,001 included 993 full-time regular active status faculty and full-time visiting faculty as well as the eight deans from the eight academic schools within GWU. A total of 532 faculty and seven deans participated in the study representing a 53.8% return rate.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study was to identify: (a) factors that have motivated faculty (who are currently participating or previously have participated in distance education) to participate in distance education; (b) factors that would motivate faculty (who have never participated in distance education) to participate in distance education; (c) factors that would inhibit continued faculty participation in distance education by faculty (who are currently participating or previously have participated in distance education); (d) factors that would inhibit future participation in distance education by faculty (who have never participated in distance education); (e) factors that would motivate faculty (who are currently participating or previously have participated in distance education) to continue and/or

increase their level of participation in distance education; and (f) any significant differences between what faculty identify as factors that would motivate and inhibit their participation in distance education and what deans perceive as factors that would motivate and inhibit faculty participation in distance education.

Methodology:

Three self-designed surveys were used for this study to identify factors that influence faculty participation in distance education and to examine the following four relationships: (1) faculty participation and demographics; (2) faculty participation and intrinsic motivation; (3) faculty participation and extrinsic motivation; and 4) faculty participation and inhibiting factors. The surveys were pilot tested at George Mason University prior to the study at GWU.

The collected data was analyzed using the statistical software program Advanced Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Pearson Chi-squares (crosstabs), ANOVAs, including Scheffe's post hoc analysis, and dependent paired t -tests were employed to identify and determine various relationships. All statistical tests used a .05 level of significance.

Summary of Results:

The following results are cited from the original dissertation. The results are broken down into the following categories: overall faculty, participators, non-participators, deans, and tested research hypotheses.

Overall Faculty

A total of 1,001 surveys were distributed to full-time regular active status faculty and full-time visiting faculty and deans across the eight schools at GWU. A total of 532 faculty surveys were returned and seven deans' surveys were returned for a total of 539 responses and a 53.8% return rate.

The analysis of data indicated that the faculty respondents were primarily professors and associate professors who taught credit courses to a combination of master's and doctoral level students on-campus in Washington, DC. The faculty participants were predominately male, 45 years old and older, and were tenured or in non-tenure-accruing positions. The average number of courses taught by the faculty was 4.33 years and the average number of years a faculty member had been at GWU was 12.62 years. Faculty indicated they primarily used e-mail, telephone, and fax to support their classes and to interact with students, other faculty, and the administration.

Participators

Eighty-six of the faculty respondents were identified as distance education participators. Of the participators, the data indicated they were primarily professors and assistant professors who taught credit courses to students at the master's and at the doctoral level on campus in Washington, DC. The participators were predominately male and were tenured or in non-tenure accruing positions.

The majority of the participators were faculty in the School of Medicine and Health Science, followed by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, and the School of Business and Public Management. Participators taught an average of 5.02 courses a year and had been working at GWU for an average of 12.43 years. In addition, participators had been involved in postsecondary education for an average of 17.87 years.

Nineteen of the participators reported they had taken a distance-education course; one participator reported that he/she had received a degree via distance education; and 24 participators reported they had received formal training for distance education. Of the 86 participators, over 50% had been involved in distance education for 1 year or less and over 90% had been involved for five years or less. In addition, 16% of the participators indicated they taught distance-education courses outside of GWU for companies, programs, and/or organizations.

The majority of the distance education participators taught a combination of distance education and traditional-education courses during the academic year at GWU. In addition, the participators primarily designed and taught distance-education courses rather than co-taught. The top five technologies participators used to teach their distance-education courses were: (1) computer-based technologies (e.g., Internet - WWW); (2) videotapes; (3) two-way audio-visual conferencing; (4) one-way audio, one way video conferencing; and (5) one-way live video. Participators also reported they primarily used e-mail, the telephone, and fax to support their classes and to interact with students, other faculty, and the administration.

Of the 86 distance education participators, 44% reported that they were no longer involved in teaching distance-education courses. Overall, the majority of the participators who were no longer involved in distance education did not choose to discontinue their involvement. Only seven participators indicated "they chose" to cease their involvement in distance education. Five prevalent reasons emerged explaining why these participators were no longer involved in distance education: (1) career/job changes; (2) course contracts ended (at GWU and outside of GWU); (3) too much time required; (4) program was closed; and (5) lack of opportunity.

Although not all participators were actively involved in distance education, 65% of the participators stated they would participate in faculty development programs that focus on technology training if offered at GWU. The top five topics of interest for these development programs as selected by the participators were: (1) computer-based technologies (e.g., Internet - WWW); (2) two-way on-line computer conferencing (e.g., CU-See ME, IRC); (3) two-way audio/visual interactive conferencing; (4) two-way audio, one-way video conferencing; and (5) one-way live video.

Faculty were asked in an open-ended question to make recommendations for faculty development programs. The participators and the non-participators provided a total of one hundred and fifty-four faculty responses. From the responses, three general recommendations emerged: (1) faculty would like support for course development (e.g., financial, administrative, and technical support); (2) faculty are interested in seminars and workshops that focus on skill development, the use of new technologies, designing courses, teaching

strategies, and on the educational merit of distance education techniques (e.g., hands-on training, coaching, access to technology, tutorials, guided practices, and pilot tests); and (3) faculty would like release time for training.

With regard to a stated policy on distance education at GWU, or an unstated but operative policy on distance education at GWU, 58% of the participants stated that they were not sure if there was a distance-education policy at GWU. Furthermore, 67% of the participants stated that they were not sure if an unstated but operative policy existed at GWU.

When asked what GWU's policy on distance education should be, a total of 292 participants and non-participants responded. From the faculty responses, five prevalent policy recommendations emerged: (1) the assurance of technical, administrative, and financial support (e.g., technical resources, funding, and incentives); (2) the assurance of quality courses and programs with evaluations (e.g., GWU should encourage with caution to ensure quality); (3) the opportunity to attend workshops and seminars provided by GWU (e.g., demonstrations, hands-on learning, tutorials, and collaboration between experienced and non-experienced faculty); (4) the implementation of feasibility studies, data, and information explaining the advantages, disadvantages, cost benefits, and student benefits of distance education; and (5) the option to participate or not to participate in distance education (e.g., some disciplines lend themselves better to distance education than others).

The participants also were asked if there were career advantages for faculty involvement in distance education at GWU and if faculty should be rewarded differently for participating in distance education at GWU. Of the participants, 71% stated that they were either not sure if there were any career advantages or that there weren't any career advantages. However, over half of the participants stated that definite career advantages would make a difference to them.

When asked if faculty should get rewarded differently for participation in distance education at GWU, over fifty percent of the participants stated that faculty should not be rewarded differently for involvement in distance education.

Concerning whether or not there is pressure to involve faculty in distance education at GWU, 75% of the participants reported that there was no pressure to involve faculty in distance education. However, for faculty who indicated there was pressure to involve faculty in distance education, four sources were identified from the 51 faculty responses provided: (1) the administration; (2) competition (e.g., other universities, programs, and markets); (3) financial opportunities; and (4) distance education/technology surveys.

As part of the survey, the participants were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent they believed the 34 factors listed on page four of the faculty survey "have motivated" them to participate in distance education. The top five motivating factors as rated by the participants were: (1) ability to reach new audiences that cannot attend classes on campus; (2) opportunity to develop new ideas; (3) personal motivation to use technology; (4) intellectual challenge; and (5) overall job satisfaction.

As part of the follow-up survey, the participants were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1-- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent they believed the 34 factors listed on page four of the faculty survey "would motivate" them to participate in distance education. The top five motivating factors as rated by the participants were: (1) ability to reach new audiences that cannot

attend classes on campus; (2) opportunity to develop new ideas; (3) personal motivation to use technology; (4) intellectual challenge; and (5) overall job satisfaction.

The participants were also asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent the 19 on page five of the faculty survey "would inhibit" inhibit them from participating in distance education. The top five inhibiting factors as rated by participants were: (1) lack of technical support; (2) concern about faculty workload; (3) lack of release time; (4) lack of grants for materials/expenses; and (5) concern about quality of courses.

Faculty were asked at the end of the survey to include any comments that they would like to share on distance education. Four themes emerged from the 142 responses provided by participants and non-participants: (1) faculty have questions regarding distance education (e.g., costs, benefits, what it means for GWU); (2) faculty have concerns about distance education and quality of education; (3) faculty would like to share their personal experiences with and without technology (e.g., traditional education vs. distance education); and (4) faculty would like to share their opinions on distance education.

Overall, over 90% of the participants stated they felt positive or neutral toward distance education in postsecondary education. Furthermore, 85% of the participants stated that they would participate or might participate in seminars and workshops on distance education if they were provided by GWU.

Non-Participants

Four hundred and forty-six faculty respondents were identified as non-participants. Of the non-participants, the data indicated that they were primarily professors and associate professors who taught credit courses to students at the master's and at the undergraduate level on the Washington, DC campus. The non-participants were predominately male and were tenured or in non-tenure accruing positions.

The majority of the non-participants were faculty in the Columbia School of Arts and Sciences, followed by the School of Medicine and Health Science, and the School of Business and Public Management. Non-participants taught an average of 4.19 courses a year, had been working at GWU for an average of 12.66 years, and had been involved in postsecondary education for an average of 16.99 years. In addition, 17 non-participants reported that they had taken a course via distance education and six reported that they had taught a course via distance education.

Of the non-participants, only ten indicated that they had been approached to teach a distance-education course. Furthermore, only five had been approached to co-teach a distance-education course and only fifteen had been approached to design a distance-education course. Of the 17 total non-participants who had been approached to teach, co-teach, or design distance-education courses, three planned to become involved, three had just become involved, and two indicated that they had initially gotten involved but in one case, the course was canceled and, in the other case, the course was carried out by other individuals. Nine non-participants, who had been approached to become involved in distance education, did not become involved in distance education. Overall, the reasons for not

becoming involved in distance education included: (1) time constraints - faculty do not have time to become involved in distance education, and (2) faculty enjoy teaching traditional education courses.

Although only 17 non-participants had been asked to participate in distance education, 94 non-participants indicated they had contemplated becoming involved in distance education. Eighty-five of the 94 non-participants did not become involved in distance education. Their overall reasons for not becoming involved included: (1) lack of time to become involved in distance education; (2) concern about not having the student-faculty (face-to-face) interaction that is found in the traditional classroom; (3) lack of opportunities to become involved in distance education; (4) concern about a lack of support in distance education (e.g., technical, administrative, and financial); and (5) lack of skills needed to become involved in distance education. The remaining, 341 non-participants, stated they had never contemplated teaching, co-teaching, or designing a distance education course.

With regard to interest in teaching, co-teaching or designing distance-education courses in the future, over 60% of the non-participants indicated some interest in becoming involved. However, 54% of the non-participants stated they would not participate in faculty development programs that focus on technology training. Of the 46% who wanted to attend faculty development programs on technology training, the top five topics of interest for training were: (1) two-way audio/visual interactive conferencing; (2) computer-based technologies (e.g., Internet - WWW); (3) two-way on-line computer conferencing (e.g., CU-See Me, IRC); (4) one-way prerecorded video (videotapes); and (5) two-way audio, one-way video conferencing.

Faculty were asked in an open-ended question to make recommendations for faculty development programs. A total of 156 faculty responded. From the responses, three general recommendations emerged: (1) support for course development (e.g., financial, administrative, and technical support); (2) seminars and workshops that focus on skill development, the use of new technologies, designing courses, teaching strategies, and on the educational merit of distance education techniques (e.g., hands-on training, coaching, access to technology, tutorials, guided practices, and pilot tests); and (3) release time for training.

With regard to a stated policy on distance education or an unstated but operative policy on distance education at GWU, 87% of the non-participants stated they were not sure if there was a stated policy on distance education or an unstated but operative policy on distance education at GWU.

When asked what GWU's policy on distance education should be, a total of 292 non-participants and participants responded. From the responses, five prevalent policy recommendations emerged: (1) the assurance of technical, administrative, and financial support (e.g., technical resources, funding, and incentives); (2) the assurance of quality courses and programs with evaluations (e.g., GWU should encourage with caution to ensure quality); (3) the opportunity to attend workshops and seminars provided by GWU (e.g., demonstrations, hands-on learning, tutorials, and collaboration between experienced and non-experienced faculty); (4) the implementation of feasibility studies, data, and information explaining the advantages, disadvantages, cost benefits, and students benefits of distance education; and (5) the option to participate or not to participate in distance education (e.g., some disciplines lend themselves better to distance education than others).

The non-participants also were asked if there were career advantages for faculty involvement in distance education at GWU and if

faculty should be rewarded differently for participating in distance education at GWU. Of the non-participants, 96% stated they either were not sure if there were any advantages or that there weren't any advantages for faculty involvement in distance education. However, 57% of the non-participants stated that definite career advantages would make a difference to them in terms of becoming involved in distance education in the future.

When asked if faculty should be rewarded differently for distance education participation at GWU, 76% of the non-participants indicated that GWU should not reward faculty differently for participating in distance education.

Concerning whether or not there is pressure to involve faculty in distance education, 86% of the non-participants reported that there was no pressure to get faculty involved in distance education. However, from the 51 faculty who indicated there was pressure to get faculty involved in distance education, four sources were identified: (1) the administration; (2) competition (e.g., other universities, programs, and markets); (3) financial opportunities; and (4) distance education/technology surveys.

In two open-ended questions on the survey, the non-participants were asked to specify what they thought GWU could do to encourage faculty to participate in distance education, and to include any comments they would like to share on distance education. In regard to encouraging faculty to participate in distance education, a total of 245 non-participants responded. From the responses, five themes emerged: (1) faculty are open to participating in distance education; however, for a number of faculty, there is nothing that could GWU can do to encourage them to participate in distance education – short of requirement or "threat of bodily harm"; (2) faculty would like to know more about distance education including information on the advantages, disadvantages, and cost-effectiveness; (3) faculty are interested in technical training and support (i.e., workshops, one-on-one training, tutorials, and seminars); (4) faculty would like to know about the opportunities available at GWU to participate in distance education; and (5) financial incentives and release time are essential in encouraging non-participants to participate in distance education.

Regarding comments on distance education, a total of 142 non-participants and participants responded. From the responses, four themes emerged: (1) faculty have questions regarding distance education (e.g., costs, benefits, what it means for GWU); (2) faculty have concerns about distance education and quality of education; (3) faculty would like to share their personal experiences with and without technology (e.g., traditional education vs. distance education); and (4) faculty would like to share their opinions on distance education.

As part of the survey, the non-participants were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent they believed the 34 factors listed on page four of the faculty survey "would motivate" them to participate in distance education. The top five motivating factors as rated by the non-participants were: (1) increase in salary; (2) monetary support for participation (e.g., stipend, overload); (3) opportunity to develop new ideas; (4) working conditions (e.g., hours, location); and (5) intellectual challenge.

The non-participants also were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent the 19 factors on page five of the faculty survey "would inhibit" them from participating in distance education. The top five inhibiting factors as rated by the non-participants were: (1) concern about faculty workload; (2) lack of technical support provided by the

institution); (3) lack of release time; (4) concern about quality of courses; and (5) lack of grants for materials/expenses.

Overall, 81% of the non-participants stated they felt neutral toward distance education or positive toward distance education in postsecondary education. In addition, 80% of the non-participants stated that they would participate or might participate in seminars and workshops on distance education if they were provided by GWU.

Deans

Seven of the eight deans participated in this study. The data indicated that the majority of the deans were 45 years old and older and had been in their appointed positions for an average of 2.77 years. The longest period of time a dean had held the position of dean at GWU was ten years. The average number of years the deans had been employed at GWU was 10.71 years and the average number of years they had been working in postsecondary education was 18.

With regard to teaching, six deans indicated they primarily taught credit courses on campus during the academic year. Four deans taught two courses and two deans taught one course.

Only two deans reported they had been asked to teach, co-teach, or design a distance-education course. Of these two deans, both followed through and designed and taught more than one distance-education course. Although only two deans had been asked to participate in distance education, five deans reported they had contemplated teaching, co-teaching, or designing distance-education courses. In addition, six deans stated that they would participate in faculty development programs that focus on technology training. Of the deans who showed an interest in participating in faculty development programs, the top five topics of interest for technology training were: (1) two-way interactive audio/visual interactive conferencing; (2) computer-based technologies (e.g., Internet - WWW); (3) two-way audio, one-way video conferencing; (4) two-way online computer conferencing (e.g., CU-See Me, IRC); and (5) one-way prerecorded video.

When asked about school and faculty involvement in distance education, the deans indicated that four schools offered one to five distance-education courses, one school offered more than twenty distance-education courses, and two schools did not offer any distance-education courses. In addition, only one school offered formal distance-education training.

With regard to faculty, four deans reported that one to five professors taught or designed distance-education courses in their school; one dean reported that six to ten professors taught or designed distance-education courses in his/her school; and two deans reported there weren't any faculty involved in distance education in their school. Additionally, only one dean indicated that he/she knew of a faculty member who was teaching distance-education courses outside of GWU.

As part of the survey, the deans were asked if GWU had a stated policy on distance education or an unstated but operative policy on distance education. Three deans stated there was a stated policy; two deans stated there wasn't a stated distance-education policy; and two deans stated they were not sure if there was a policy. In addition two deans stated there was an unstated but operative policy on

distance education at GWU, two deans stated they were not sure if there was an unstated but operative policy, and three deans stated there was no such policy. When deans were asked what GWU's policy on distance education should be, one policy recommendation emerged from the deans' responses: administrative and technical support for faculty, including training should be provided.

As part of the survey, deans were asked if there were career advantages for faculty involved in distance education at GWU and if faculty should be rewarded differently for participating in distance education at GWU. Three deans stated there were no career advantages for participation in distance education at GWU; one dean stated there were career advantages; and three deans stated they were not sure. However, six deans indicated that definite career advantages for participation in distance education would make a difference to the faculty in their respective schools.

When asked if faculty should be rewarded differently for distance education participation at GWU, the deans were divided in their responses. Three deans stated that GWU should reward faculty differently for involvement in distance education and three deans stated that faculty should not be rewarded differently. One dean did not respond.

Concerning whether or not there is pressure to involve faculty in distance education at GWU, only two deans indicated that there was pressure to involve faculty. The two sources of pressure indicated in their responses were: (1) prospective students, and (2) "At my school – ME."

As part of the survey, the deans were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and 5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent they believed the 34 factors listed on page three of the deans' survey "would motivate" the faculty in their school to participate in distance education. The top five motivating factors as rated by the deans were: (1) monetary support for participation (e.g., stipend, overload); (2) personal motivation to use technology; (3) increase in salary; (4) credit toward tenure and promotion; and (5) release time.

The deans also were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 -- being "strongly disagree" and

5 -- being "strongly agree") to what extent the 19 factors on page four of the deans' survey "would inhibit" the faculty in their school from participating in distance education. The top five inhibiting factors as rated by the deans were: (1) lack of technical support provided by the institution; (2) lack of distance-education training by the institution; (3) concern about faculty workload; (4) lack of support and encouragement by departmental colleagues; (5) lack of release time.

In two open-ended questions on the survey, the deans were asked to specify what they thought GWU could do to encourage faculty to participate in distance education and to include any comments they would like to share on distance education. In regard to encouraging faculty to participate in distance education, three themes emerged from the deans' responses: (1) faculty need financial incentives to encourage them to participate in distance education; (2) faculty need training (i.e., workshops) as well as technical assistance; and (3) faculty need more information about distance education (i.e., cost, benefits, and perhaps an oversight office). With regard to the comments on distance education, three deans voiced their opinions and shared their concerns:

- We need to do it well and systematically assess how well it works and how it should link with on-site education.
- If we are going to do it, we should do it well. We are way behind and I am afraid that this is low on a long list of priorities.
- I think it is advantageous – tends to be overrated, especially for high-quality education (as opposed to training programs).

Overall, all seven of the deans stated that they were positive or neutral toward distance education in postsecondary education. Furthermore, six of the deans stated they would participate in seminars and workshops on distance education if they were provided by GWU.

Tested Research Hypotheses

There were twelve research hypotheses generated from the seven research questions (Questions 41 – 47). Six hypotheses were tested to identify the extent to which demographics influenced faculty participation in distance education. As indicated in the data, academic division (School), age, and non-tenure-accruing status all had significant effects on faculty participation in distance education. However, gender, rank, and tenured/ non-tenured status were not found to have significant effects on faculty participation in distance education

Regarding academic division (School), this study revealed that although all eight schools within GWU had faculty participating in distance education, not all schools were involved at the same level. Two schools, in particular, had a larger percentage of faculty participating in distance education, and two schools had a lower percentage of faculty participating in distance education. The data gathered in this study indicated that the schools that had the larger percentage of faculty participating in distance education were led by deans who had distance education teaching experience and/or were positive toward distance education. The schools that had the lower percentages of faculty participating distance education were led by deans who did not have distance education experience and who indicated they were neutral toward distance education or did not support distance education.

With regard to age and tenure status, faculty 45 years old and older and faculty in non-tenure accruing positions were found to be the most active in distance education at GWU. The data revealed that 74.4% of the participants were 45 years old and older, and 80.9% of the participants were in non-tenure accruing positions. The active participation of the faculty 45 years old and older may be associated with their extensive experience in higher education. The active participation of non-tenure accruing faculty may be associated with the fact that they are not involved in the tenure and promotion process.

The data analysis in this study also indicated that intrinsic factors, such as intellectual challenge, personal motivation to use technology, and ability to reach new audiences that cannot attend classes on campus, had a positive effect on distance education participation. Inhibiting factors, such as lack of release time, lack of technical support provided by the institution, and concern about

faculty workload, had a negative effect on faculty participation. However, extrinsic factors, such as credit toward promotion and tenure, recognition and awards, and merit pay, did not have a significant effect on faculty participation in distance education.

In addition, distance education participators were found to be more intrinsically motivated to participate in distance education than non-participators. Based on these analyses, it is evident that intrinsic factors and inhibiting factors have a greater influence on faculty participation in distance education than extrinsic factors. Furthermore, it is apparent that faculty who have distance education experience are more intrinsically motivated to participate in distance education than faculty without distance education experience.

As indicated in this study, a significant difference was found between factors that "have motivated" distance education participators to participate in distance education and factors that "would motivate" participators to continue and/or increase their participation in distance education. The data revealed that factors that "would motivate" participators to continue and/or increase their participation in distance education had a more positive effect on participation than factors that "have motivated" participators to participate in distance education. This significant difference may be the result of incentives or established policies that are not meeting the needs of distance education participators. This significant difference may indicate that existing or perceived incentives and policies need to be reviewed.

Finally, there were no significant differences found between what deans perceived as factors that would motivate faculty to participate in distance education and what faculty identified as factors that would motivate them to participate in distance education. However, significant differences were found between what deans perceived as factors that would inhibit faculty from participating in distance education and what faculty identified as factors that would inhibit them from participating in distance education. The data indicated that inhibiting factors, such as lack of release time, lack of technical support provided by the institution, concern about faculty workload, and lack of grants for materials/expenses, had a greater negative effect on faculty participation than the deans had perceived. Therefore, it is apparent that although the deans are aware of the factors that motivate faculty to participate in distance education, they are not aware of the significant influence inhibiting factors have on faculty participation in distance education.

Conclusions:

Based on this study, the following conclusions were offered to GWU:

- (1) Distance education is of interest at GWU. This interest is supported by both the high survey return rate (N = 539 - 53.8%) and the extensive number of written comments (1,756) provided by the faculty and deans supporting their opinions, concerns, and ideas regarding distance education.
- (2) Deans who support distance education and/or who have experience with distance education at GWU will continue to have an increased number of faculty participating in distance education.
- (3) Faculty who have extensive experience in higher education and faculty who are not involved in the tenure and promotion process are more likely to participate in distance education than faculty with less experience in higher education and/or faculty who are vying

for tenure.

(4) Faculty are more likely to participate in distance education if inhibiting factors are eliminated by the administration, and the intrinsic benefits involved in distance education are stressed by the administration.

(5) Distance education participators will continue and/or increase their participation in distance education, if their needs are satisfied.

(6) Faculty participation will not increase significantly unless the administration begins to eliminate inhibitors that deter faculty from participating in distance education.

(7) Regardless of whether or not faculty felt positive or negative toward distance education, the faculty recognize the value of distance education in postsecondary education.

(8) Faculty and deans acknowledge the potential of distance education in postsecondary education and would like to take part in seminars, workshops, and faculty development programs that focus on distance education.

(9) Based on the 292 distance-education policy recommendations, it is evident that faculty have an interest in both the development of distance education at GWU and the development of a distance-education policy at GWU.

Recommendations:

There were five major recommendations offered to GWU, should the University choose to increase its level of participation in distance education:

1. Provide the deans in all eight schools with an overview of distance education and information on how to become involved in distance education.
2. Address and eliminate inhibiting factors that deter faculty from participating in distance education and stress the intrinsic benefits associated with distance education.
3. Establish a distance education central office to serve as a clearinghouse for information and projects regarding distance education.

4. Provide faculty with faculty development programs focused on distance education.
5. Create University-level distance education policies for GWU and establish

School-level distance education policies for each of the eight schools based on the 1,756 recommendations provided by the faculty and deans.

Author's Comments:

As indicated in this study, faculty interest in distance education is growing. It is no longer just for the technically-elite. Distance education is not a fad or a trend – it is a reality. It is changing the way education is being delivered (Gilbert, 1996). Based on this study, it is recommended that institutions interested in implementing or expanding distance education courses or programs begin to identify the factors that motivate their faculty to participate in distance education, as well as identify factors that inhibit their faculty from participating in distance education. Distance education involves more than just the physical infrastructure of an institution. It also involves the "human" infrastructure (Daigle & Jarmon, 1997). Moreover, it must be recognized that the success of any distance education effort rests primarily on the commitment of the faculty (Gottschalk, 1997).

References

- Betts, K. S. (in press). Factors Influencing faculty participation in distance education in postsecondary education in the United States: An institutional study. (Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, 1998). Dissertation Abstracts International: UMI.
- Daigle, S. L., & Jarmon, C. G. (1996). Building the campus infrastructure that really counts. Educom Review, 35-38.
- Gilbert, S. W. (1995). Teaching, learning & technology. Change, 27, (2), 47-52.
- Olcott, D. J., & Wright, S. J. (1995). An institutional support framework for increasing faculty participation in postsecondary education. The American Journal of Distance Education, 9 (3), 5-17.
- Willis, B. (Ed.). (1994). Distance education: Strategies and tools. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume I, Number 3, Fall 1998 State University of West Georgia, Distance Education Center

[Back to Journal of Distance Learning Administration Contents](#)

