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# Examining the Relationship Between Institutional Mission and Faculty Reward for Teaching Via Distance

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## Abstract

Distance education is fast becoming an elemental part of the fabric of academic life on many campuses, and this has implications for existing reward structures for faculty at these institutions. In addition, distance education is becoming an essential feature of the outreach mission of a number of departments at college and university campuses. Without adequate and valued rewards for this increasingly important dimension of faculty work, institutions may have little chance of recruiting and retaining highly capable faculty who are willing to teach at a distance.

This study focused on a U.S. land grant, public institution of higher education that has been offering distance education courses and programs for over a decade, and utilizes faculty members at all levels for distance education instruction. The intention was to explore how the institution translates its values regarding distance education into reward policy and practice for faculty who teach via distance. The aim of the study was to add to the research on distance education policy and development in higher education. Specifically, it was designed to understand distance education policy from the perspective of internal stakeholders (administrators, faculty, and support staff) in order to inform policy and practice. Further, a thorough examination of the literature produced no findings of a study that specifically examined the relationship between institutional mission and core strategies with reward structures for faculty distance efforts, including comparisons of reward practices at the academic subunit level.

What emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, and relevant policy documents and mission statements, led to the grounded theory components that higher education administrators can use to convey an institution's commitment to distance education through mission, core strategies, and faculty reward policies and practices. In addition, the deeper theoretical understanding of policy and practice that was derived from this study can form a basis for further investigations in this area.

## Introduction

Distance education is fast becoming an elemental part of the fabric of academic life on many campuses, and this has implications for existing reward structures for faculty at these institutions. Kenneth Green, founder and director of the annual Campus Computing Survey, attests online education is moving "from the periphery to become a much larger and more significant component of the instructional portfolio for many institutions" (2009, pg. 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) reports in the 2006–07 academic year, 66% of the 4,160 2-year and 4-year Title IV degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the nation offered college-level distance education courses. The Sloan Consortium, consisting of institutions and organizations committed to quality online education, affirms more than one in four higher education students take at least one course online (Sloan, 2010).

Additional faculty members will be needed to teach as distance education offerings (including online and blended/hybrid) continue to increase. Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) contend to a significant extent, it is the faculty that enable higher education institutions to meet the numerous demands of the market, and Bates (2000), Moore (2003) and Wolcott (1999, 2003) argue for the inclusion of distance education in promotion and tenure policies and guidelines.

Over the past decade, there has been widespread discussion about reforming the tenure system, faculty outside the tenure system, and the changing demographics of faculty members (Gappa, 2008; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Together, these forces are reshaping the role and expectations of faculty. To sustain distance education and also allow for growth, administrators and policymakers should understand the issues surrounding distance education instruction. In addition, the present criteria for rewarding faculty work at many institutions, based primarily on the scientific model of research and publication rather than teaching, can be counterproductive to reaching larger academic goals such as educating a greater number of students and satisfying the changing needs of modern students.

Without adequate and valued rewards for this increasingly important dimension of faculty work, institutions may have little chance of recruiting and retaining highly capable faculty who are willing to teach at a distance. Specifically, if distance education instruction does not count toward promotion and tenure, why would junior faculty seeking tenure want to, or be motivated to instruct these courses? In addition, if institutional mission statements actually convey a commitment to distance education offerings and providing this form of instruction for its students, but then the institution lacks practices and/or policies for rewarding distance education faculty, a disconnect exists. The mission statement of an institution is an expression of its purpose and values; in theory, there should be a strong connection between these values and the goals, priorities, and policies that derive from them (Diamond, 1999; Wolcott, 2002). Therefore, the closer the match between the mission of an institution and the priorities as described in the reward system, the more useful the faculty may be in helping the institution reach the goals that have been identified.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study was to add to the research on distance education policy and development in higher education. Specifically, the study was designed to understand distance education policy from the perspective of internal stakeholders (administrators, faculty, and support staff), and was directed toward exploring how an institution translates its values regarding distance education into reward policy and practice for faculty who teach via distance. Further, a thorough examination of the literature produced no findings of a study that specifically examined the relationship between institutional mission and core strategies with reward structures for faculty distance efforts, including comparisons of reward practices at the academic subunit level.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

Theoretical perspectives focusing on faculty reward for distance education instruction began emerging in the 1990s. Diamond (1999) theorized faculty rewards need to be strongly aligned with an institution's mission, whereas Wolcott (2002) went a step further by theorizing the importance of this connection to distance education. Olcott and Wright (1995) provided the missing framework needed for Dillon and Walsh's (1992) research by emphasizing a central leadership role for faculty who teach via distance.

Rogers' (1983) theory about the adoption and diffusion of innovations has been widely used within studies of technological innovations (Donovan, 2004; Hoppe, 2000), and is therefore appropriate for studies about distance education. His theory helps to explain how the characteristics of an innovation shape faculty decisions to adopt it, and the rate at which it is adopted. If we apply his theory to distance teaching, the perception of distance education by senior administrators, department chairs, and fellow faculty members may be key to whether or not a faculty member decides to instruct via distance.

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) developed a theory of academic capitalism based on their analysis of the relations between higher education and society at the turn of the 21st century. They view "faculty, students, administrators, and managerial professionals" (p. 306) as creators of new circuits of knowledge that link the university to the new economy. Their theory helps inform an understanding of the complex policy issues, such as reward structures, that arise as faculty build new networks that connect them with the new economy.

These theories were used in relation to distance education instruction to help inform the study.

## **Previous Studies**

During the 1990s, there was considerable discussion about the institutional reward system in higher education,

and the impact of information technologies on teaching and learning has added urgency to the debate. Orr, Williams and Pennington (2009) found an institution's recognition of faculty members' efforts to teach online in relation to the traditional concepts of scholarship, tenure, and promotion was an important motivational factor for sustaining effectiveness in the online learning environment.

Andersen (as cited in Green, Alejandro & Brown, 2009) discovered tenure-track faculty were more likely to teach distance education courses if they knew beforehand their efforts would count toward tenure, and Sumrall (2002) discovered lack of fit with institutional missions and goals was a primary deterrent for faculty participation in distance education. Premeaux (2008) surveyed administrators and faculty from 411 higher education programs in the U.S. regarding tenure's impact on higher education. Based on study results, Premeaux argued only faculty who appear to be capable in areas that most support mission achievement, and are most flexible and adaptive to a changing environment, should be tenured. He further posited, "Administrators must focus on improving traditional tenure to attract an effective and adaptive staff of faculty members" (p. 54).

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation conducted an online education benchmarking study as a resource for campus leaders. A key observation from their 2009 report pertaining to institutional mission, campus acceptance, and administrator support of online education follows:

Online learning programs have the capacity to change campus culture and become fully integrated if presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers and other senior campus leaders are fully engaged in the delivery of "messages that tie online education to fundamental institutional missions and priorities" (p. 5).

In addition, issue-specific recommendations were made that focus mainly on supporting online faculty members. In regard to policy, the following was suggested:

Campus leaders and faculty governing bodies need to regularly re-examine institutional policies regarding faculty incentives, especially in this era of declining financial resources. Perhaps most importantly, campus leaders need to identify strategies to acknowledge and recognize the additional time and effort faculty invest in online as compared to face-to-face teaching and learning (p. 6).

What is important to note is fundamental issues of structure, finance, and faculty support and engagement in online learning programs were apparent whether institutions were fairly new at offering these type of courses, or had been doing so for quite some time. Participants from institutions that are further along with "mature" online learning programs reported many of these fundamental issues have resurfaced or emerged in new ways as programs have matured over the years.

Zhen, Garthwait, and Pratt (2008) examined factors that influenced faculty members' use of online course management applications in higher education, including administrator support. Their findings suggest administrators' roles should include providing appropriately scheduled faculty-centered workshops and training programs, and recognizing and rewarding online faculty with policy initiatives that include credit toward promotion and tenure, and funding or merit pay based on performance. Parthasarathy and Smith (2009) connected "valuing the institution" with faculty adoption of online education in their study of 60 business faculty members at a large, urban, public university. They advised higher education administrators to stress the strategic value of online education to the institution when they communicate with faculty about the adoption of teaching online courses.

Earlier studies included focus on policies associated with distance education faculty. For example, Meyer's (2002) study looked at the impact of how various policies (e.g., faculty compensation, workload, intellectual property) affected distance teaching faculty behavior. Her findings demonstrated that faculty policies at the five institutions she examined were all found to be supportive of faculty teaching via distance. Meyer suggested support likely existed as a result of the institutions' longer experiences with distance education programs than many other institutions in the U.S., and she recommended other institutions explore similar policy initiatives.

In 2000, Schifter wrote that 43% of the 160 institutions represented in her survey reported participation in distance education was applicable toward tenure and promotion. According to the respondents, "Teaching a distance education course is treated just like any other teaching assignment, service or professional development [activity]" (p. 4). It is important to note, however, many of the institutions did not have specific policies considering all facets of distance education, including the time needed for creation of online courses and assignments, additional workload, and technological training.

While the formal faculty reward system at colleges and universities may consist of a number of extrinsic incentives and rewards, few policies currently exist that specifically address distance education faculty issues, such as its place in promotion and tenure (Gappa et al., 2007; Olcott & Wright, 2002; Rhoads, 2005; Schifter, 2005; Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw, & Liu, 2006; Wolcott, 2003). With the quality of distance education continually being challenged by educators, administrators and policymakers, studies uncovering what factors influence reward practices are certainly warranted. Moreover, if distance education efforts at institutions across the nation are expected to be successful, close examination of policies affecting its faculty are needed.

## **Contribution and Significance**

This study examined how distance education is valued, and how it fits into the culture of institutional rewards at a land grant, degree-granting institution in the U.S. in order to inform policy and practice. The study also directly connected institutional mission and core strategies with reward for faculty distance education efforts, a focus lacking in the existing literature. The results of the study can, therefore, aid administrators as they consider reward for distance education faculty at both institutional and academic subunit levels, and as they consider the value of distance education to their strategic mission and associated imperatives.

## **Methods**

The institution represented in this study has a tripartite mission consisting of research, teaching, and service, and reflects the changing climate in higher education. It offers more than 200 programs of study from 14 degree-granting colleges, and has an affiliated law college. In addition, distance education courses and degree programs are a part of its regular academic offerings. New technologies made it possible to provide instruction without the time and place constraints of traditional university programs. One administrator pointed out the institution's distance education courses consist of completely online and blended learning where learning occurs both in the classroom and online.

Similar to other institutions of higher education, this institution is under considerable pressure to hold down costs while providing high quality programs, greater access, and accommodation for the demands of a changing student population. In an effort to respond to these challenges, a number of its academic subunits have sought solutions in distance education. **But how does the institution translate its values regarding distance education into reward policy for faculty who teach via distance?**

To address this research question, the study consisted of an embedded, single case design with a qualitative orientation. Yin (2003) argued one rationale for a single case is the representative case; for example, a single case may be a representative school, or an institution. According to Yin, lessons learned from single cases can be assumed to be informative about the experiences of an average institution. In addition, the case study approach can be useful for understanding the process of distance education policy development, policy changes over time, and what the changes reveal (Nelson, 1999; Wolcott, 2003). Therefore, the institution examined for this study can possibly be considered a "representative" of U.S. public, land grant higher education institutions that offer distance education courses and programs.

Within the context of a case study design, grounded theory was utilized in order to emphasize theory development that is specific and useful to practice. Since a lack of testable theory of effective distance education policy emerged from the literature, the grounded theory design using the constant comparative method of analysis of data aided with understanding meaning and context, identifying influences, understanding processes, and developing causal explanations. In order to assist with managing and analyzing the documentary materials, a qualitative research software program known as ATLAS/ti was employed to code and rearrange the data through the iterative process of data resource analysis.

Seven academic subunits that offer distance education and the five support departments that together handle distance education needs for the institution constituted the sample frame for analysis. Faculty members from each of these academic subunits, at least one administrator from each of these subunits, and at least one staff member from each of the five support departments were interviewed for the study (n=29). In addition, the mission statement and written faculty reward policies for each of the academic subunits were examined in detail, as were the institution's overall mission statement and relevant institutional policies.

Extant texts (i.e., mission statements and policy documents) were obtained from the institution's website or from

study participants (mainly administrators). As Merriam (1998) argues, “Data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations,” and can be used to “furnish categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on” (p. 126).

The analyses from these sources drew from the work of Olcott and Wright’s (1995) faculty support framework, Roger’s (1983) theory about innovation, Slaughter and Rhoades’ (2004) academic capitalism theory, and St. John and Priest’s (2006) less critical view about “the shifting concepts of the public interest in higher education” (p. 271).

## **Results**

Overall, findings indicated the institution utilizes distance education to generate an alternative source of revenue and remain competitive with other higher education institutions, but varies in regard to faculty reward for, and commitment to distance education efforts across its different academic subunits. At the same time, distance education is considered an enhancement to the institution’s mission due to its ability to provide outreach, increase student access, and provide flexibility for both faculty and students.

Findings also indicated faculty distance efforts are not rewarded commensurate with traditional efforts in five of the subunits, but that informal rewards are more the norm. All seven subunits lacked policies specifying whether distance teaching and/or course development count toward promotion and tenure, and these were absent from the institution’s faculty reward policies as well. These findings support an earlier point made from examination of the literature about the lack of policies that specifically address these reward issues at U.S. higher education institutions.

### *Emergent Patterns Related to Mission*

Analysis of mission statements and transcripts from the interviews conducted for this study revealed the following patterns:

- ◆ The transition from land grant to ‘\*\*\*\*\* Grant’ is considered an institutional priority.
- ◆ The institution’s decentralized model provides relative autonomy for subunits’ use of distance education.
- ◆ Distance education enhances the institution’s mission, but is rarely explicit in mission statements.
- ◆ Distance education increases student access, thus staying close to the land grant mission.
- ◆ Distance education is considered an important outreach tool that assists the institution’s efforts toward meeting the goals of its mission.
- ◆ Distance education is viewed as integral to the institution’s core mission.

The institution strategically aims to be recognized worldwide as the leading land grant research university in the U.S. by 2012. The belief is as states and the country globalize, education should as well. A new vision framework for its transformative journey to meeting this goal was adopted several years ago, and five strategic imperatives were identified: 1) enhance the student experience; 2) enrich community, economic, and family life; 3) expand international reach; 4) increase research opportunities; and 5) strengthen stewardship.

The overall mission statement for the institution was recently revamped as well. The statement does not explicitly refer to distance education, but does include outreach, and suggests the use of innovative means for delivering education to a modern society. Although distance education is offered by each of the seven academic subunits examined, it was found to be explicit in only one subunit’s mission statement, whereas outreach was specifically mentioned in not only the institution’s overall mission statement, but also in three subunits’ statements. More than half of the faculty members had, however, admitted to a lack of awareness of a mission statement for their subunit, and surprisingly, one administrator did as well. Two other patterns emerged among four of the subunits, including specification of teaching and serving needs of the community.

Eighty-three percent of the participants communicated they believe distance education enhances the institution’s mission. Participants from each of the three groups also view distance education as a benefit to students, whether in terms of flexibility for student schedules, or increasing access to higher education. In addition, participants commented on the severe lack of classroom space on campus for students and how distance education has helped

with this dilemma by increasing access and outreach.

During the interviews, 12 of the participants emphasized the institution's decentralized model. It was conveyed that while there is priority setting at the top level, there is also a demand for subunits to plan and set priorities themselves, making sure they align with the institution's overall priorities. Study data indicated most of the participants did view subunits' distance education "initiatives" as aligned with the institution's priorities and mission.

### *Emergent Patterns Related to Policy*

Study data indicated subunits vary with regard to formal and informal faculty reward for distance efforts, and that variation also exists in terms of intrinsic rewards received. Analysis of relevant policy documents and transcripts from the interviews revealed the following patterns:

- ◆ Online distance education brings in an alternative revenue source, similar to Slaughter and Rhoades' idea of academic capitalism.

- ◆ Faculty reward for distance education efforts varies across the subunits due to the institution's decentralized model.

- ◆ Subunits lack written distance education policy for faculty reward.

- ◆ Distance education teaching and/or development's weight in the promotion and tenure process varies among subunits.

- ◆ Subunit culture plays a major role in how distance education is valued by the subunit.

- ◆ Subunit commitment to distance education varies.

- ◆ Faculty at all levels receive intrinsic rewards for distance education efforts.

- ◆ In general, junior faculty are not encouraged to engage in distance education development and/or instruction.

Study participants pointed out online distance education brings in an alternative revenue source for the institution and its subunits, similar to Slaughter and Rhoades' (2004) idea of academic capitalism. Yet, Priest and St. John's (2006) notion that revenue is sought in support of mission is also relevant because a highly unusual online tuition revenue rule helps some of the subunits stay afloat so they can serve students.

The rule stipulates subunits can directly receive 75% of the tuition revenue from online enrollment of their for-credit courses for students who are not enrolled in on-campus courses during that same semester, with the other 25% going directly to the General Fund. Normally, the institution's academic units do not receive any direct tuition earnings. One administrator emphasized 80% of his/her subunit's budget comes from this alternative revenue source. Administrators also indicated they have discretion with how the money is used in their subunit (e.g., bonus dollars for faculty developing distance education courses, conference travel, facilities improvements, etc.) due to the institution's decentralized model.

Examination of institution and subunit policy documents revealed a lack of written distance education policy for faculty reward. Only two of the subunits had policies specifying blended or online teaching, and only one specified that faculty research on one's own teaching counts toward promotion and tenure. These were absent from the institution's overall faculty reward policies as well. It is important to note that the institution's faculty members are not in a union; rather, faculty reward policies (or structures), especially in regard to distance education, generally vary by subunit. Other examples of variation for distance efforts include overload pay, money for a new computer, a little extra weight in the promotion and tenure process, recognition in the department newsletter, increased recognition and respect across campus due to distance teaching and development initiatives, a pat on the back, and so on.

A senior support staff member who is very involved with the institution's distance education initiatives, and who interacts regularly with top administrators and chairs and deans at the subunit level, shared his/her insight regarding subunit commitment to distance education:

At the local level, it's going to depend on a lot on chairs and deans and what they want to incentivize to their faculty. We have chairs and deans who think very programmatically; they align all their internal processes, policies and practices to support their strategic intents. Then we have others who don't do anything to change the local operating environment or local culture, so distance education reward is highly differential at the policy level. It is not well-supported, but you find pockets inside the institution where it's highly supported.

Faculty participants at all levels indicated they receive a variety of intrinsic rewards for distance teaching and/or development; for example, a sense of faculty renewal, increased involvement in interesting pedagogical discussions centered on the topic, and flexibility in regard to their schedules. Study participants highlighted informal rewards as well, such as the institution's distance education awards program for innovative faculty, and support for a weekly brownbag session about instructional technology where faculty can showcase their work with technology as part of their teaching.

Participants were also asked to comment on how junior faculty members were impacted by teaching a distance education course. Eighty-percent of the replies indicated a lack of support for distance teaching and development by junior faculty. One subunit administrator advanced the following:

It is a real question in terms of a trade off, especially for junior faculty. Is it worth the extra investment to get into some of these distance education activities that will suck up a lot more time in the beginning when there is no additional payoff? And the payoff doesn't come from the tenure process. I don't think the rewards structure is there yet, and that is a challenge for all of us.

Other participants emphasized the increased amount of time it takes compared to traditional efforts, its lack of value in the promotion and tenure process, how it takes time away from research, and that it is difficult to connect one's distance teaching to research. All but one of the junior faculty members stressed just how unclear it is in their subunit as to how exactly distance education efforts count in the promotion and tenure process.

What is important to consider is if commitment to distance education is strong, reward policies and practices will likely reflect this commitment. Second, if distance education revenue is vital to a subunit, subunit culture may dictate distance education-specific reward for faculty efforts because of the reliance on the revenue. Lastly, subunits wanting discretion with how the online revenue is used can merely be the reason for the absence of written policy.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Exploration of how the institution translates its values regarding distance education resulted in the emergence of conceptual themes that, for example, expand Slaughter and Rhoades' (2004) and Priest and St. John's (2006) notions about how the public good has evolved as institutions have become modernized. Table 1 aligns the data analysis with the previously discussed theoretical perspectives, and presents grounded theory components that provide higher education administrators with a deeper theoretical understanding of translating value into reward policies and practices for faculty distance education efforts.

### *Institution's Priorities, Mission, and Distance Education*

Sixty-six percent of the study participants identified the transition of land grant to \*\*\*\*\* Grant as the institution's top priority. Five participants, however, implied a more clear definition is needed. Since study findings indicated participants view distance education as an important means for helping the institution meet its global mission, it is suggested institutions clearly define distance education's role in meeting core goals.

Under the umbrella of the new vision framework, the institution selected specific focus areas and key strategies for advancing the commitments of its strategic imperatives. Strangely, neither blended nor online education is mentioned among the many focus areas and key strategies identified, although numerous subunits offer blended and online learning, with some indicating they bring in tremendous amounts of revenue from online enrollments. Rather, the inclusion of the "use of technology" and "enhanced technology capability and support across units" are identified as key strategies that possibly imply distance education. Interestingly, only three study participants identified the new framework as an institutional priority, and none of them were administrators; rather, all three were support staff. This suggests the importance of the framework principles have not been stressed enough to, or are not understood by administrators and faculty at the subunit level.

Table 1.

## Theory Reconstruction

<b>Emergent Categories: Emergent Themes From Extant Text Analysis and Transcript Analysis</b>	<b>Theoretical Perspective Element</b>	<b>Grounded Theory Component</b>
Institution's Priorities and Mission: ***** Grant and New Strategic Framework	Market-like activity (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004); Seeking revenue in support of mission (Priest & St. John, 2006)	Institutional commitment to DE clearly conveyed to public and subunits
Institution's Mission: DE increases student access and provides flexibility for students	Institution attending to student needs (Olcott & Wright, 1995)	Making explicit the importance of DE for students in connection to mission
Institution's Commitment to DE: 75% Online Tuition Rule	Market-like activity (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004); Seeking revenue in support of mission (Priest & St. John, 2006)	Financial commitment; benefits of decentralized budget process
Subunit Missions: DE is not explicit, and lack of familiarity by subunit members	Seeking revenue in support of mission (Priest & St. John, 2006); Benefits of innovation (DE) made clear (Roger's Innovation Theory, 1983)	Re-examination of subunit mission statements; DE's role made explicit; creation if no MS exists
Faculty DE Training and Support: Clear dissemination of support provided by institution and subunit (internal support)	Institutional support of DE faculty (Olcott & Wright, 1995)	Utilization of existing support departments; clear dissemination of DE support departments' roles; clear dissemination of support provided by subunit
Institution's Faculty Reward: Decentralized model means relative subunit autonomy	Institutional support of DE faculty (Olcott & Wright, 1995)	Differentiation of reward implementation due to decentralization
Subunit Faculty Reward (Extrinsic), Promotion and Tenure, Junior Faculty: Subunit culture dictates reward	Administrators' roles with reward and subunit cultures (Olcott & Wright, 1995)	Formal and informal reward structures made clear to faculty
Subunit Faculty Reward (Intrinsic): Valued by faculty teaching via distance	Diffusion process of communication (Roger's Innovation Theory, 1983)	Discussions focusing on intrinsic rewards of DE efforts by faculty

But even if land grant institutions consider distance education a mere tool for generating revenue and serving the



public (as some interview participants implied), its importance to domestic and global objectives cannot be ignored. Currently, distance education is not explicitly stated in this institution's mission statement, but the use of innovative means for delivering education to a modern society is suggested. Therefore, in order to better translate the value of distance education to constituents, institutions could explicitly include language in their vision frameworks conveying its importance to meeting institutional goals.

### *Benefit to Students*

The notion of distance education benefiting student schedules is certainly not new to the distance education literature (Larreamey-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006); however, this study directly connected it to an institution's mission, that of being a global institution. When asked about mission, study participants emphasized how distance education increases access and provides flexibility for students, thus staying close to the land grant mission. Although Olcott and Wright's (1995) previously discussed model recognizes the importance of institutions attending to distance education student needs, it fails to connect this to the goals of institutional mission, a means of conveying institutional values. Again, it is suggested that vision frameworks clearly convey distance education's value, even if an institution has no intention to include it in its overall mission statement.

### *Commitment to Distance Education*

There was widespread agreement among participants about distance education's connection to the land grant mission and the public good, including its use as an outreach tool. This implies although distance education may not be viewed by participants as an institutional priority, it is considered to be integral to the core land grant (now \*\*\*\*\*) mission. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) argued the notion of public good has been somewhat replaced by an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime as colleges and universities integrate into the new economy. Thus, although the revenue aspect of distance education enrollments lends credence to their theory, the data from the study demonstrates faculty, administrators and support staff see "serving the public" as a higher priority for the institution.

The online tuition rule, therefore, clearly expresses the institution's financial commitment to subunits' online education initiatives, while at the same time showcases the numerous benefits of the decentralized budget process that currently exists -- through the varied uses of online tuition in subunits and the discretion allowed with how the revenue is used. If feasible, similar commitments can be made by other institutions to their respective subunits.

### *Distance Education Faculty Training and Support*

The literature demonstrates faculty want proper training and technology support for distance education efforts (Olcott & Wright, 1995; Schifter, 2005; Wolcott, 2003). Olcott and Wright's frequently referenced model, for example, emphasizes institutional support for immediate faculty concerns related to distance education, including training and release time for preparation. The institution does provide numerous training opportunities for faculty developing and teaching online and/or blended courses, as well as campus-wide and in-house support for technology initiatives and management. But as study participants indicated, subunit training and support efforts are desired as well. In fact, several of the subunits have already employed methods in this direction. One subunit maintains two online course coordinators, and has a Chair who is very supportive of all faculty distance education initiatives. Another makes use of one coordinator, whereas a different subunit hired their second in-house technology support person.

In general, support staff members championed the five-department support model, and pointed out how cost effective it is. This is key because cost effectiveness ultimately allows for the 75% online tuition revenue subunits receive. In addition, several faculty members expressed great satisfaction with some of the support departments. Concern was expressed, however, that the lack of a central distance education office can cause confusion regarding where to go for support. Clear dissemination of support departments' roles is therefore recommended, as is training and support at both the institutional and subunit level (if budgets allow). This certainly does not negate the benefits of experienced distance education faculty mentors in subunits, a practice institutions can exercise.

### *Institution's Faculty Reward Structure: Distance Education Efforts*

Examination of institution and subunit policy documents revealed a lack of written distance education policy for faculty reward. Study data also indicated distance education course development and/or instruction's weight in the promotion and tenure process varied across subunits. This differentiation of reward implementation, due to

the institution's decentralized model, suggests there is variation in how distance education's value is translated into faculty reward policy and practice. Although Olcott and Wright's (1995) research led them to suggest the need for renewed institutional commitment to faculty, at a decentralized, land grant institution, commitment to distance education is mainly dependent on subunit culture and its connection to the mission of the subunit.

Seasoned administrators interviewed for the study argued faculty distance efforts count very little in the promotion and tenure process, if at all. This implies little translation of its value by the overall institution, mainly because of its status as a research institution. When asked about its applicability in subunit promotion and tenure processes, only three participants confirmed faculty distance education efforts count. What became evident was junior and associate level faculty members were concerned about how very little efforts really count. It was also pointed out that two of the subunits have distance education teaching and/or development mandates, and yet another two have ad hoc mandates for faculty participation in distance education. In fact, faculty from these two subunits expressed extreme frustration with the mandates' ad hoc nature. Clear criteria for promotion and tenure is therefore, strongly suggested so ambiguity is removed.

### *Intrinsic Rewards*

At the core of Roger's (1983) diffusion process of communication, human interaction affects the transfer of new ideas. If we apply this to distance education, the transfer of new ideas could come in the form of faculty discussions emphasizing the intrinsic rewards associated with distance efforts. Conversations that cut across disciplines, like those occurring at learning community meetings or instructional brownbag sessions expand the ability to increase faculty awareness and interest in distance education. This can be quite beneficial for subunits that experience faculty resistance to distance education, but want or need additional faculty members who can teach and/or develop these types of courses. Discussions emphasizing distance teaching's flexibility, the noted intrinsic value of learning to teach distance education, excitement surrounding the challenge of learning to teach it, and the many more intrinsic rewards participants commented about, are highly suggested -- both in subunits and across university and college campuses.

### *Recommendations for Policy and Practice*

The reconstruction of theoretical perspectives discussed in this article resulted in the components shown in Table 1 that led toward a grounded theory of how higher education institutions can translate the value of distance education into faculty reward. The grounded theory suggests the value of distance education can be better translated if decision makers clearly convey distance education's connection to the institutional mission and subunit missions. Moreover, effective policy and practice for distance education faculty reward should incorporate faculty interests. The following recommendations are suggested:

1. Institutions of higher education can clearly convey their commitment to traditional and distance education, both to the public and units across campus, in mission statements and strategic frameworks. This can demonstrate commitment to educational offerings, and help to ensure distance education is identified as one of the educational initiatives for meeting institutional goals and missions.
2. Administrators from institutions of higher education that offer distance education courses and programs, and have outreach goals, can explicitly make clear in mission statements the importance of distance education to these goals. This can demonstrate institutions are attending to students' needs of access and flexibility in the form of outreach for both domestic and global communities.
3. Financial commitment to distance education by an institution can be expressed to academic subunits. If subunits are asked to offer distance education, but do not receive financial commitment from the institution, subunit commitment to distance education, as a result, may be minimal.
4. Deans and department chairs can arrange for academic subunit mission statements to be re-examined annually to make sure they align with the current goals of the subunit, and that of the overall institution. Ideally, if distance education is utilized to meet any of these goals, explicit expressions of its value can strengthen the purpose of the mission statement for stakeholders.
5. Faculty training and support have been found to be vital to the success of both traditional and distance education initiatives. Clear dissemination of training and support roles can reduce confusion for faculty members seeking assistance. Institutional training and support departments can also work together, drawing on the strengths of each department to train and provide support for distance education faculty at institutions lacking a central distance education office.
6. If the culture of an institution is that of decentralization and academic subunit autonomy, institutional support of both traditional and distance education faculty reward can still be clearly conveyed in institutional policies and guidelines. Evidence of institutional commitment to faculty reward for distance efforts can influence subunit commitment and clear criteria for faculty reward.

7. Distance education's applicability in promotion and tenure can be in writing, regardless of subunit culture. Vague promotion and tenure criteria produce anxiety and uncertainty, especially for junior faculty. Clear dissemination of formal and informal reward structures can reduce subunit friction, demonstrate administrator support of faculty, and move distance education toward equality with traditional education if it is an objective.
8. Discussions on the intrinsic rewards associated with faculty distance education efforts can be encouraged at both the institutional and academic subunit levels. Showcasing the numerous intrinsic benefits of efforts in this area can increase faculty interest and participation, and increase faculty satisfaction.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

It was expected the findings from this study would inform and improve policy development and practice. The findings indeed suggest decision makers have to transform their ways of thinking of faculty reward for distance education efforts. As Gappa, Austin and Trice (2007) argued, it is important to find ways to ensure faculty members are supported in their work and valued by their institutions. Administrators can therefore use this study to analyze processes of policy development at their respective institutions, including at the academic subunit level, to determine if they need to increase engagement and discussion among stakeholders to allow issues to emerge and to arrive at some sort of consensus. The relationship between distance education policy and institutional missions and core strategies can also be examined further to determine the impact of differing policies (or lack thereof) as distance education offerings continue to increase. Mission statements play a major role in communicating what an institution is to the outside community, parents, and prospective students; they should be clear, concise, and fully supported by administrators, faculty, and staff.

In addition, the deeper theoretical understanding of reward policy and practice for faculty distance education efforts that was derived from this study can form a basis for further investigations in this area. The research can also provide a framework for additional studies that can be repeated at other sites in order to increase case study research on distance education faculty and associated issues from the perspective of internal stakeholders.

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