Compensation Models in Distance Education

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Introduction

Why do faculty teach in distance education (DE) initiatives or programs? Although insufficient research has been done, it is believed by many faculty that teaching a DE course is more time consuming and challenging than traditional teaching. Given that distance education is a major topic in educational news media, at professional meetings, and national conventions, knowing what successfully motivates people to teach in new and innovative programs would be worthwhile before institutions launch a distance education initiative. Unfortunately, there has not been much research into this topic, or at least not much published.

Distance education causes the role faculty to change (Berge, 1998; Beaudoin, 1990, 1998). Both Berge and Beaudoin note that distance education moves education and faculty away from a faculty-centered approach to that of learner-centered. Indeed distance education emphasizes adult learning theory where the student is a true partner in the teaching and learning arena, unlike the traditional classroom that is more likely to be teacher oriented. Students are more self-directed, as life-long learners are, meaning distance education is more demanding on both the faculty and students. The student-centered model is a hallmark in adult education, but traditional undergraduate education has not been viewed as adult education. Most faculty and students clearly understand traditional methods of teaching and learning, since that is primarily what they have experienced since starting school. However, as Beaudoin (1998) points out, distance education means the faculty member is no longer the "font of knowledge" but rather the facilitator of and mentor for learning. This can be culture shock for some faculty.

Taylor and White (1991) surveyed the faculty of one Australian University regarding attitudes toward distance education. The faculty they surveyed placed a higher importance in the intrinsic rewards gained from the "art" of teaching rather than with research based activities, which is consistent with findings reported by Pierpoint and Hartnett (1988) who studied American off-campus programs. The responding faculty rated five factors most important to achieving personal job satisfaction: quality of interaction with students; working with motivated students; satisfaction from the art of teaching; feeling of personal achievement; and high level of student outcomes. From these responses, it is not surprising that faculty have a clear preference for interpersonal interaction which is the essence of traditional classroom teaching, and which is challenging to achieve in a distance education environment.

Olcott and Wright (1995) presented an institutional support framework to assist higher education institutions reduce barriers to faculty participation in distance education and provide support services to ensure student success. They noted several barriers to faculty participation that included distance education being considered inferior to traditional face-to-face teaching; a perception of inadequate compensation, training and incentives for faculty teaching in distance programs; and a lack of institutional support, including recognition toward promotion and tenure. Overall, Olcott and Wright posit that without an administrative infrastructure to support distance teaching faculty, the barriers will outweigh any incentives.

Wolcott (1997) reported findings of a study that examined the relationship between distance teaching and faculty reward systems. Overall, she reported findings similar to Olcott and Wright, but stressed issues of faculty culture. What emerged from her analysis of institutional context and dynamics is "an image of the faculty reward culture at research universities that is not accommodating to and rewarding of faculty work in distance education." (p. 15) As Olcott and Wright (1995) also noted, Wolcott reported distance education as being of marginal status, not valued as highly as scholarly activities, not highly related to promotion and tenure, and rewards being dependent

upon the academic unit's commitment to distance education. Again, without clearly articulated specific institutional support, faculty participation in distance education efforts will be compromised in research universities.

Unfortunately, distance education, beyond print-based correspondence courses, is only now mature and ubiquitous enough for traditional faculty to take it seriously. A recent Department of Education (1999) report, about distance education at postsecondary institutions during the 1997-98 academic year, shows that "one-third of the nation's 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions offered distance education courses during the 12-month 1997-98 academic year" (p. iii) and that "[t]he general pattern was for institutions to offer for-credit distance education courses more at the undergraduate level than graduate level." (p. iv) One way to assess how far DE has come into mainstream higher education is to understand how institutions of higher education are compensating faculty for participating in DE programs. This North American survey attempted to assess practices for faculty compensation and incentives for participating in distance education programs or initiatives.

Methodology

Queries were sent to 8 listservs (i.e., the National University Telecommunications Network, the Urban 13/21 Provosts, the University Continuing Education Association, the Texas Association for Educational Technology, the Texas Distance Learning Association, the Florida Distance Learning Association, the Instructional Technology Council, and the Distance Education Online Symposium) and the membership of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges asking for participation in a national survey regarding faculty compensation and incentives policy models for participation in distance education programs. A total of 212 individuals from 160 identified institutions responded to the query. This study was endorsed by Temple University in Philadelphia and the National University Telecommunications Network, and was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Temple University.

Findings

The respondents were asked for information defining the institutions from which they came and their institution's involvement with DE, other than print-based. Thirty-four respondents did not identify from what institution they came, and thirteen institutions had multiple respondents with different information due to position or point of view, like instructor or DE coordinator. The respondents were from

- two-year institutions (n=57, 27%)
- four-year institutions (n=120, 56%)
- primarily graduate education institutions (n=21, 10%)
- public institutions (n=168, 79%)
- private institutions (n=20, 10%)
- state-related institutions (n=44, 21%), and
- both public and state-related institutions (n=27, 13%).

The respondents were from 45 states, and from Puerto Rico, Mexico and Canadian provinces, specifically New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Quebec. Respondents indicated their institutions have been offering DE options for less than five years (n=83, 39%), between 5 and 10 years (n=43, 20%), more than 10 years (n=83, 39%), or did not respond to this item (n=3, 2%). Respondents were from institutions where the faculty were unionized (n=73, 34%), where participation in DE was applicable toward merit pay (N=79, 37%), and where participation was applicable toward promotion and tenure (n=90, 43%). According to respondents from institutions that have distance education participation as part of promotion and tenure (P&T) procedures, teaching a distance education course is treated just like any other teaching assignment, service or professional development, with a few exceptions. One respondent noted that DE teaching is counted toward P&T if part of regular reaching load, but not if considered overload teaching. Another person stated, "Evidence of good distance learning teaching is required; however, everyone understands that distance learning students evaluate teaching effectiveness half a point less than on campus students." And another respondent said, "It should be, but lack of education on the P&T committee means they discount the work or don't recognize the time, energy or value."

DE is managed via many models, according to the respondents. Table 1 presents the specific responses given. Several respondents were confused about the difference between separate administration and separate operation. Separate operation meant a DE program that was totally separate from the rest of the institution, like a for-profit entity or separate campus; while separate administration meant there was an office of distance education as part

of the regular institution. One hundred and one responses (48%) indicated mixed or combined models of administration, rather than just one. Other administrative models included having a Virtual University or College, being part of Outreach and Cooperative Extension Units, and supported by an instructional design center.

Table 1. Distance education administrative models

	# responses	% responses
Regular Departmental offerings	161	76%
Separate administration for Distance Education	70	33%
Distance Education separate operationally	44	21%
Distance Education part of Continuing Education	88	42%
Combined models	101	48%

Delivery methods used were wide and varied and are presented in Table 2. Web (WWW) based DE was selected most often, followed closely by Interactive or Instructional TV. Other specific methods indicated uses of videotape, CD-ROM, satellite-based and audiotape.

Table 2. Distance education delivery methods used

	# respondents	% respondents
Satellite	71	33%
ITV	172	81%
Videotape	136	64%
Audiotape	47	22%
CD-ROM	73	34%
WWW	200	94%
Other	61	29%

Specific DE management software was fairly limited in scope. Responses are found in Table 3. Most frequently development was done directly in HTML, meaning faculty or an instructional design team custom programmed each course. The most commonly used management software was WebCT, which has been on the market longer than most of the others. In addition, respondents mentioned using Web Course in a Box, Lotus LearningSpace, and EmbaNet, among others. Some respondents noted their institutions were outsourcing the management process completely through eCollege, eEducation, or Collegis.

Table 3. Distance Learning Course Management Tools

	# Responses	% Responses
WebCT	106	50%

FirstClass	17	8%
TopClass	20	9%
BlackBoard (CourseInfo)	51	24%
EmbaNet	5	2%
SERF	4	2%
Proprietary to institution	38	18%
FrontPage	57	27%
HTML	115	54%
Other	56	26%

The survey separated out issues of faculty compensation and incentives for developing a DE course from those for teaching a DE course. Respondents were asked to respond to whether any of seven options were used at their institution for faculty compensation or incentives for faculty developing and/or teaching a DE course.

Compensation for developing a DE course

Expenses paid for *developing* a DE course are listed in Table 4. The most "often" paid expense for faculty was ISP (i.e., Internet Service Provider) costs, while expenses indicated as almost "never" paid were graduate assistants and faculty overload pay.

Table 4. Expenses paid for developing a distance education course

Expenses paid:	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**	**Missing response**
Faculty release time	45 (21%)	102 (48%)	49 (23%)	16 (8%)
Faculty overload pay	47 (22%)	71 (33%)	80 (38%)	14 (7%)
Computer equipment purchased	61 (29%)	88 (41%)	51 (24%)	12 (6%)
Software purchased	72 (34%)	106 (50%)	24 (11%)	10 (5%)
ISP costs covered	84 (39%)	33 (16%)	79 (37%)	16 (8%)
Costs for campus service units covered	57 (27%)	83 (39%)	54 (25%)	18 (9%)
Graduate or Teaching Assistants	16 (7%)	98 (46%)	80 (38%)	18 (9%)

One question asked about special funds made available for faculty as compensation or an incentive. Table 5 provides the specific responses. Respondents noted that faculty travel was most "often" supported, national conference fees were "sometimes" supported, and a discretionary account for faculty use as needed without stipulations on usage was almost "never" supported. All of the supporting funding came from a central pool (46%), course tuition (39%), other sources like grants (37%), a DE technology fund (18%), or a student

technology fee (13%).

Table 5. Special funding opportunities for distance education faculty

Special Funds for Faculty	Often	Sometimes	Never	Missing
Faculty travel	48 (22%)	112 (53%)	38 (18%)	14 (7%)
National conference fees	27 (13%)	131 (61%)	38 (18%)	16 (8%)
A discretionary account for faculty use as needed without stipulations on usage	11 (5%)	39 (18%)	190 (66%)	22 (11%)

Respondents were asked specifically about faculty overload pay for developing a DE course. Five respondents (2%) indicated that overload pay is never used at their institution. Others indicated that the minimum overload pay for developing a DE course ranged from $0 - $5,000, with an average minimum overload pay of $1,885. The maximum overload pay ranged from $700 - $15,000, with an average maximum overload pay of $4,097. In some cases the overload pay was based on special calculations relating to credit unit/hour or percentage of base salary. The overall overload pay range according to respondents from 2-year schools was $750 - $2,040 per course, with some schools paying hourly rates or by a salary schedule, or the same as adjunct course payment. Overload pay range for 4-year schools was $0 - $15,000 per course, with some indicating a percentage of annual salary or union contract stipulations governing the overload amount. Differences in overload pay depended on school, department policies, faculty rank or level (e.g., full, associate, or assistant professor, instructor, adjunct or on contract), and/or union contract terms.

Compensation for teaching a DE course

Expenses paid for *teaching* a DE course are presented in Table 6. The most "often" paid expense was ISP costs, while expenses identified as almost "never" paid were teaching assistants and ISP costs.

Table 6. Expenses paid for teaching a distance education course

Expenses paid:	Often	Sometimes	Never	Missing response
Faculty release time	27 (13%)	98 (46%)	68 (32%)	190 (9%)
Faculty overload pay	55 (26%)	75 (35%)	67 (31%)	15 (8%)
Computer equipment purchased	47 (22%)	93 (44%)	52 (24%)	20 (10%)
Software purchased	56 (26%)	111 (52%)	24 (11%)	21 (11%)
ISP costs covered	71 (33%)	33 (15%)	80 (38%)	183 (14%)
Costs for campus service units covered	61 (29%)	59 (28%)	58 (27%)	34 (16%)
Graduate or Teaching Assistants	13 (6%)	86 (40%)	83 (39%)	30 (15%)

Responses to the question about special funding opportunities are found in Table 7. Special funding was available most "often" for faculty travel , "sometimes" for national conference fees, and "never" for a discretionary account for faculty use. Funding for support of teaching were reported to come from course tuition (45%), a central pool (38%), other sources like grants (30%), a DE technology fund (16%), or a student

technology fee (11%).

Table 7. Special funding opportunities for distance education faculty

Special Funds for Faculty	Often	Sometimes	Never	Missing
Faculty travel	35 (16%)	104 (49%)	46 (22%)	27 (13%)
National conference fees	22 (10%)	108 (51%)	54 (25%)	28 (14%)
A discretionary account for faculty use as needed without stipulations on usage	11 (5%)	34 (16%)	132 (62%)	35 (17%)

Specifically regarding faculty overload pay for teaching a DE course, five respondents (2%) indicated that overload pay is never used at their institution. Others indicated that the minimum overload pay for teaching a DE course ranged from $0 - $5,000, with an average minimum overload pay of $1,876. The maximum overload pay ranged from $1,200 - $8,000, with an average maximum overload pay of $3,341. As with developing a course, overload pay was sometimes based on special calculations relating to credit unit/hour or percentage of base salary. The overall range of overload pay for a 2-year school was $250 - $3,000 with the same stipulations as for developing a course; while the overall range for a 4-year school was $0 - $8,000, with the same terms as for developing a course. As for overload pay for developing a DE course, differences in teaching overload pay depended on university, school, or department policies, faculty rank or level (e.g., full, associate, or assistant professor, instructor, adjunct or on contract), and/or union contract terms.

The last section of the survey asked questions about student related issues. Respondents were asked if there were maximum or minimum enrollment figures for a DE course to run. One hundred and forty-one respondents (66%) indicated their institutions do have a minimum registration level. The minimum ranged from 1-30 students, with an average of 10 students required for a course. One hundred and thirty respondents (61%) indicated their institutions have a maximum enrollment level for DE courses. The maximum ranged form 12 to 900 with a mean of 47 students. It should be pointed out that only four respondents indicated that their institutions have maximum numbers over 100 - two indicated 125 students, one indicated 200+ students, and one from Mexico indicated 900 students. If you exclude these extreme maximums, the range is 12 - 65 students with a mean of 26 students per class.

Differences were found by comparing responses between groupings of years of experience with distance education (e.g., <5 years, 5-10 years, and >10 years). More institutions with 10+ years experience with DE had DE coupled with Continuing Education than those with 5-10 years experience or less than 5 years. In addition, institutions with 10+ years experience used satellite and videotape delivery more often, paid for faculty release time for DE teaching, and paid for a DE teaching assistant. Institutions with less than 5 years experience used audiotape delivery the least, were more apt to never pay for development release time, less likely to pay for a graduate assistant during development or during teaching, more likely to pay for conference fees during development or teaching, and less likely to have students exempted from fees.

Discussion

Practices of faculty incentives and compensation practices for participation in distance education vary on many issues. According to these respondents, institutions compensate faculty more to develop distance learning courses than to teach them, in spite of anecdotes from faculty that teaching a DE course requires a lot more time and energy than traditional face-to-face courses. Also, a teaching assistant was paid for least "often" and most "never."

Of interest is the comparison between the differences of the non-compensation items and practices for faculty developing versus teaching a DE course. The most often paid expense for developing and teaching a DE course was the ISP cost for accessing Internet systems, and the least often paid expense was for faculty release time and a graduate assistant. Paying for ISP costs may be relatively inexpensive. There are models for ISP coverage, from the institution becoming the ISP to negotiating reduced rates with a commercial ISP for faculty and students. Faculty access to the Internet when developing and/or teaching an Internet-based course is essential, so paying

for this cost shows the institution's support for distance education.

Faculty release time and graduate assistant costs are different. Faculty release time often depends on access to replacement faculty, and may more often depends on funding sources. When there is no replacement available, faculty are sometimes paid overload for developing or teaching a DE course, but again this depends on availability of funds. Two-year institutions are not likely to have access to graduate assistants, but four-year institutions are. Academic departments have guidelines that govern when a teaching assistant is assigned to a course, most often having to do with the number of students enrolled in the course. The average of DE students, after adjusting for extreme outlying responses, was 26, which is probably too low for most institution's TA assignment policies that govern traditional face-to-face classes. Unfortunately, policies that govern traditional classes do not easily apply to DE courses. As stated previously, teaching a DE course appears to be more demanding, which may be why 39 of these institutions had DE enrollments between 20 - 30 students. Sixteen respondents noted maximum enrollments of less than 20 students and only 23 had enrollment maximums of over 30 students.

Many faculty assert that teaching a DE course is more demanding on their time than traditional face-to-face courses. While there are several issues that lead to this idea, much of this concern comes from increased interaction (e.g., faculty-student and student-student) as a result of a communications mediated course. In a web-based DE course, there is the potential to be always in session, translating into "taking more time" for faculty. In addition, for faculty and students who are not used to receiving large numbers of e-mail a day, just handling the communications side of a distance course can be demanding. The answer may well be that faculty teaching a distance course for the first time will experience new challenges that may be time consuming, not unlike teaching a new course. Relan and Gillani (in Kahn, 1997) describe web-based instruction as a "repertoire of cognitively oriented instructional strategies implemented within a constructivist and collaborative learning environment..." (p.43). Students have more control over their learning. For many faculty, who have spent their entire educational careers within the traditional environment, the DE environment requires learning and embracing new teaching methods, which again takes time to master. Given the fact that more institutions are moving toward offering distance courses for many reasons including accreditation demands, a systematic evaluation is needed on whether DE is truly more time intensive.

From this study, there are no standards for faculty compensation or incentives, which can range from a stipend to course release time, with or without tangible incentives (e.g., a new computer or laptop, travel funds, or access to a teaching assistant). Two models of approaching faculty compensation or incentives seem to exist. First, where development and teaching a DE course is expected and part of the culture, compensation is regular pay and incentives are not needed. Faculty teach in this environment clearly knowing that distance education is part of their professional career, but these environments are few. Second, where development and teaching a DE course is encouraged and supported by administration, but not expected, campus culture (whether public or private, unionized faculty) and precedence may provide answers to differences. Culture and history may be key, but they are beyond the scope of the survey to assess.

Distance education within mainstream higher education requires faculty participation, meaning the barriers to faculty participation must be reduced. One of the major barriers reported in the literature has been inadequate compensation. For mainstream faculty to embrace distance education, given it appears to be more time consuming and moves away from the teacher-centered model, universities and colleges must provide adequate support. This study demonstrates that faculty compensation and incentives are marginally greater for developing a DE course than for teaching one.

There are a number of questions that surfaced from this study. Since no clear patterns of faculty compensation and incentive models for participating in DE programs arose, one question to answer is which methods work in public versus private institutions and/or 2-year versus 4-year institutions. In addition, this study asked primarily about distance delivery methods that become outdated with each passing day. Enhanced streaming video and broadband delivery will change the face of DE once again, as web-based interactive communication changed paper-based correspondence courses. How are institutions managing distance education and compensating faculty in the new streaming environments? Lastly, how are institutions of higher education preparing the faculty of the future to teach in the educational environment of the future? If doctoral students are experiencing teaching in a mediated world, the issues of adequate compensation and incentives may not be as important. What is clear is that the distance education environment is changing dynamically. For institutions to be successful in the newly forming educational environment, they must be equally dynamic in supporting faculty and program development.

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