

Chapter 21

Financing Distance Education in a Time of Economic Challenge

Elizabeth Moore Rhodes

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Willie Ennis III

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Mindy Crain-Dorough

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Michael D. Richardson

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Tak C. Chan

Kennesaw State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines marketing messages that may persuade older adult learners to enroll in online higher education programs. It builds on a theoretical framework of the factors in adults' decisions to enroll in higher education programs. A demographic shift has been occurring that will influence the population targeted for academic online educational opportunities. Baby Boomers are becoming older adults, defined as those over the age of 60, and it is projected that these individuals will remain in educational, social service, managerial, and customer service positions past the traditional age of retirement. Yet marketing strategies used by institutions of higher education may be neglecting this population, who will require additional educational opportunities to obtain credentials needed for workplace opportunities (Willis, 2006; Stokes, 2006). In addition, older adult learners do not have time to devote to long educational experiences and must move through the system as quickly as possible, often attending only part time to accommodate work and family needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Internationalization and globalization trends are leading to a growth both of transnational Higher Education (HE) and distance learning (Naidoo, 2003). Countries (or states, provinces, territories and regions within countries) have different arrangements for recognizing, accrediting or licensing different types of technology as well as different arrangements for indigenous and international providers (Kwiek, 2001). These arrangements are reflected in legislation and in the responsibilities of different agencies (Bates, 2005). Technology, when properly used, should assist higher education administrators in saving time ordinarily consumed in routine tasks, and thus provide additional time for vital educational functions, teaching and learning (Roblyer & Doering, 2009). Before technology can significantly impact instruction, faculty development must be improved (Antonelli, Geuni & Steinmueller, 2000). Some researchers speculate that lack of faculty development is probably the greatest deterrent to increased technology implementation (Bates, 2000; Bell & Bell, 2003; Berge & Muilenburg, 2001; Davies, 1998; Fletcher, 2004; Garrison, Kanuka & Hawes, 2002; O'Toole & Absalom, 2003).

It is estimated that, in the United States alone, there are already more than 3,000 specialized institutions dedicated to online training (Allen & Seaman, 2006). Thirty-three states in the US have a statewide virtual university; and 85 percent of the community colleges offered distance education courses in 2002 (Adams & Eveland, 2007). Efficiency and effectiveness in administrative and instructional practice may not be sufficient unless institutions have a comprehensive and systematic plan which clearly establishes goals, alternative funding methods, costs, benefits, responsibilities, and schedules for the implementation of the technology (Bloom, 2005; Bok, 2003). Without systematic and knowledgeable planning, instructional efficiency is not likely to improve the application and utilization of technology for

distance learning projects (Brey, 2006). Technical capabilities continue to increase, costs continue to decline, and humans continue to improve their abilities to utilize new technology tools, creating a new era in the administrative and instructional applications of technology (Geiger, 2004). Therefore, selection, evaluation, funding and implementation of technology applications are critical to higher education administrators (Davis & Roblyer, 2005).

Higher education administrators must find the financial resources to acquire, support and develop distance learning opportunities for all students (Russell, Tekleselassie, Turnbull, Arthur & Burnham, 2008). Technology acquisition can be perilous for both the administrator and for the institution (Ehrmann, 1999). Poor technology choice, often without faculty input, coupled with less than adequate funding can lead to disaster, disgruntled faculty and openly hostile clients (Hawkes & Cambre, 2000). Distance learning students have a multiplicity of options when selecting a program of study and will accept nothing less than appropriate technology (Salmi, 2000).

WHAT IS DISTANCE LEARNING?

Distance education is not a new concept, but it is rapidly diversifying and morphing into new and challenging alternatives (Casey, 2008). Distance learning is a student-centered instructional format that permits users access to academic offerings without regular campus attendance (Pituch & Lee, 2006). Course objectives of a Distance Learning course are the same as for the on-campus course, the difference being the type of delivery and technology that creates communication opportunities in real time (synchronous) and through delayed (asynchronous) online delivery formats (Gilbert, Morton & Rowley, 2007).

Several factors have contributed to the rapid growth of distance learning, but perhaps the most influential has been social changes due to the lack of face-to-face interaction (Maguire, 2005). Over

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