

Chapter 16

The Effect of Online Distance Education on LIS Programs: The Experience at North Carolina Central University

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ABSTRACT

Distance education is experiencing rapid growth in academic institutions. Faculty and students accept Distance Education (DE) as an alternative to classroom instruction. In this chapter, the authors discuss emerging issues concerning DE and how they have affected traditional education in the LIS school. Regardless of the form of education delivered, the essential purposes of instruction remain unchanged: disseminating knowledge and providing quality education for students.

INTRODUCTION

There have probably been no bigger recent developments in higher education than online education and the rise of proprietary schools. Proprietary schools have had a long history in the United States. Equally long is the history of colleges and universities offering distance education. These were originally extension classes offered off-

campus. Advances in technology changed that model. Extension classes have become DE offered online. Not many years ago, LaSalle Extension University and the downtown John Marshall schools of law were the best-known examples of the latter. Today we have Kaplan, the University of Phoenix, DeVry, Capella, and many other for-profit institutions. Responding to the trend that they began, the traditional residential colleges and universities are following suit.

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Distance education began in the 19th century as correspondence education, with class material delivered by the Postal Service. Over the decades, television and video supplemented material received by mail. Currently, online synchronous (videoconferencing) and asynchronous (web/internet based) methods have been widely adopted. An article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Parry, 2009) heralds the growth possibilities of distance education and discusses the financial rewards of distance education courses in times of financial difficulties. This article also quotes H. Lambert, an Associate Provost at Colorado State, who commented: “continuing education operations at public institutions are under high pressure to generate cash surpluses for monies lost from state budget cuts. It seems to be happening nationwide”.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN LIBRARY SCHOOLS

In 1888, Melvil Dewey asked the state university at Albany to offer correspondence study courses for special and small library staffs. Correspondence study used land transportation to deliver instruction and provide interaction between learner and instructor, but this arrangement was never well received among the professional community. Florida State was among the first schools to extend their program, with faculty traveling to 37 counties, beginning in 1947. Indiana University offered courses via television in the 1970s, the University of South Carolina used satellite communications in the 1980s, and the University of Illinois offered courses via the Internet in the 1990s. Emporia State was the first to offer interactive courses onsite. The University of Arizona became the first to partner with a cable provider. As new technologies and techniques have become available to students, LIS educators have been among the first to use them to reach out with high quality instruction (Barron, 2002, p.3).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending an LIS Program Online

The Committee on Accreditation of the American Library Association had accredited 58 library schools in 2010. Among them, 33% offered fully online programs, 45% offered face-to-face classes and selected online courses, 23% offered online courses with some required face-to-face courses, and 47% offered distance courses using satellite, other broadcast methods, or face-to-face courses offered off-campus (ALA, 2011).

The number of online programs is increasing dramatically coupled with more accessible internet technology and additional sophisticated teaching methods. Library schools that offer Library Information Science (LIS) distance education programs bring added avenues for study to individuals who are going to pursue their library education careers. Older students, women, and full time employees were more likely to take DE classes (Harris & Gibson, 2006). A survey of LIS distance education program graduates (Wilde & Epperson, 2006) revealed that the majority of LIS DE program students were over the age of 40; 74% were working in libraries while pursuing their master’s degree. The primary reasons for them to choose distance education were unwillingness to relocate and unwillingness or inability to leave their current positions to attend library school.

Distance education allows individuals to learn at their convenience. Web-based courses give learners an opportunity to keep their pace of learning manageable. DE also eliminates the cost and time of commuting to a campus. The total cost of an online course is therefore usually lower than an equivalent seated course. Distance education develops educationally responsible students, as they are required to accomplish coursework without direct supervision, and they tend to explore the technology that is available in the virtual classroom while simultaneously learning a professional curriculum. The online learning experience improves their technology

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