Distance Students Focus Group

Spring 2002

Twelve UWG students who took distance courses this semester were polled by personal interview and email.

1. Residence

Students in the focus group come from Paulding, Henry County, Dallas, Douglasville, Lilburn in Gwinnett County, Clayton County, College Park, Adel (66 miles from Albany), McDonough, Bremen and Newnan. These students would be traveling from 15 to 194 miles to the UWG campus.

2. Previous distance course experience

- One student had taken three courses through WebCT and Epic Learning. She enjoyed the WebCT medium, but felt that Epic Learning was not user friendly.
- Five students took their first distance courses this semester.
- Another student has taken five distance courses.
- The student from Newnan has taken three GSAMS courses.
- The student from Adel Georgia has taken four GSAMS courses.
- Three students were taking their second courses through WebCT.

3. Will students take a distance learning course again?

One student replied that she would like to take additional courses via distance means, but that were no other courses offered via distance that she needed. She felt that more courses should be offered in distance format. One student was graduating this semester and therefore will not be taking any more courses. All other students expressed enthusiasm for taking future distance courses.

4. Are students taking distance courses in order to obtain a degree or certification?

Students indicated that they are taking distance courses to obtain graduate and undergraduate degrees or add-on certification. Most who were polled were seeking their Masters of Education or Specialist degree.

5. Reasons for taking distance courses

- "The commute to Valdosta from Albany is awful (almost 100 miles). This is much closer and the program is better than the one at Valdosta State University."
- "...it makes it easier for me to take more classes if I take a distance class."
- Students' reasons for taking distance courses are GSAMS sites proximity to home, flexibility for persons working full-time, time saving, cost, convenience, compatible schedule and distance from home to the UWG campus.

6. Experience with Admissions and getting enrolled at UWG

- "Admissions and enrollment was a little aggravating because I was a transfer student. I had registered in advance for Fall at my previous school, but I decided to work that semester instead and dropped all of my classes. UWG had a copy of my transcript that still listed those courses that I had dropped, so they wouldn’t completely process my application until they received a new transcript with grades for those classes. I kept trying to tell them that the transcript they had was the final transcript, but they wouldn’t listen to me for months."
- "I needed to be quickly admitted in order to be given a provisional certificate by the State Dept. of Education. Based on courses I took for an add-on in 1978-79, I was readmitted and was able to begin my program of study. Wonderful to work with people who understood the urgency and worked with me."
- One student reported problems and delay in being admitted to the Education Specialist Program.
The other students expressed positive and "easy" experiences and no problems. They appreciated the online application and simple process.

7. Experience with registration and the Registrar’s office

"My first semester I registered through Banweb, and it was an excellent experience. It’s so much easier to be able to do things myself rather than relying on someone else to make decisions for me. Recently I had to register in the College of Business due to major restrictions, and that was also a pleasant experience. Not only was Wanda very helpful, but I was able to keep up on which classes were open and which were closed through Banweb, so I was up-to-date when it was time for me to register. However, I did not like having to wait until 8:30 when Wanda got there when I could have registered at midnight on Banweb. Couldn’t someone come up with some way to check prerequisites through Banweb so that it could see that by the time I actually take the 3000 level classes I will have achieved major status? As for the Registrar’s office, the few times I have been there, the staff has been very efficient and friendly."

"As to the Registrar's Office, I have been frustrated with the "extra" fees grad. students are required to pay, even with only 6 hrs. There should be a process that students living further than 60 miles from campus can be exempt from paying the health/activity/athletic fees since it is too far to drive to take advantage of the services provided."

"They were very helpful when I ran into a schedule problem. The only problem was that they waited 3 weeks to tell me that I was enrolled in the wrong class. I had to late add and catch up on three weeks of work."

"I registered on-line and had no problems what-so-ever. It was extremely convenient and I loved being able to register when I have the time!!"

"Registering for classes can be difficult, if it's a popular class. I like being able to register from home on Banweb, but I had some trouble with Banweb while registering for summer and fall classes a few weeks ago. Banweb kept saying it was backing-up and for me to try again later, so I finally had to drive to the school and register in person to make sure I would be able to take the classes I needed."

"When I can get through it is fine."

The other students appreciated BanWeb and described the Registrar as helpful and "super nice".

8. Who do students contact when they need support for a distance learning course? Instructor, DDEC, or other students?

Students contact ITS, their professor, Epic Learning, other students, the GSAMS site facilitator and DDEC. The majority of students contact their professor about concerns and then the Distance and Distributed Education Center help line.

9. Level of satisfaction with help from your instructor and from DDEC.

"My instructor was always helpful, but she always gave me the impression that I was bothering her. I never used DDEC for help."

"My instructor was extremely helpful and understanding when attachments didn't arrive and quickly responded by webtc to let us know we should try again."

"The instructor usually solves whatever problem I'm having with the distance learning class. DDEC has provided me with sufficient support, too."

"I was satisfied each time."

Other students reported high levels of satisfaction in regards to help from both their instructor and DDEC. Most students described their professors as "very helpful".

10. GSAMS courses

Majority remote class sites. One student came to campus and used a remote site.

Students mostly reported being able to hear and see the professor well.

Students were generally able to see materials presented by instructors.

Students were able to talk to professor as often as needed.
Students reported that the professors pay attention to both host site and remote sites equally.

Student comments about GSAMS:

- "I do feel left out of discussion before and after class, but that's part of the deal with being off campus"
- "...sometimes in the beginning of the course, the instructor forgot her microphone, but we were able to let her know we couldn't hear."
- The professors "...are always patient for the remote sites when we buzz in."
- "Some of the pages displayed on the smart board were hard to read, but our instructor usually posted the pages before or after class."
- "Be sure all sites are connected at least 20 minutes before class or allow 20 minutes after class when you could still talk with the instructor or ask questions about assignments."
- "...at first I was a little reluctant to try to "buzz in" with comments because you usually had to interrupt the end of someone else's comments. I came to realize that this was anticipated and our instructor would acknowledge that our site would be next."
- "Maybe a signal that lets the teacher as well as all the students know that the session is about over. Perhaps this can happen about two minutes or so before sign off. Often everyone is caught frozen."
- "Just remind the campus site to ALWAYS use the mics when talking. Missed a lot of discussions when people forgot to pick up a mic."

11. Suggestions to improve distance programs and services for students

- "I would recommend a more rigorous orientation where students have to demonstrate their ability and understanding of using WebCT."
- Many students suggested expanding the distance program via GSAMS to various counties in Georgia.
- Students suggested that UWG offer more more programs and courses online.
- Other students had no suggestions for improvement.

12. Is it easy or difficult to get information and student services at UWG?

Students reported that it easy to fairly easy to access services for students and get information related to needs at UWG.

- "It's pretty easy. You just have to ask and someone is always there to answer any questions you might have."
- "I believe that it is easy to get help and services."
- "My biggest problem has been that of textbooks. Those that are closer seem to snatch the copies fastest."
- "I have not had a problem."

13. Satisfaction with the Distance and Distribution Education Center’s help desk.

- "Great!"
- "The help desk was very nice and helped solved my problem quickly."
- "Helpful."
- "They have always been real good about walking us through the problem."
- Many students did not use the DDEC help desk. Those that used the DDEC help desk had no complaints.

14. Satisfaction in general with UWG and services for students.

- "Except for the issue of extra fees being charged, I am very satisfied with UWG and what is offered to assist me in my Master's program."
- "I have been very satisfied with UWG and student services in general."
- "The media technology program that you have is good. Make the process for admission to the specialist less strenuous. A lot of media specialists here are getting degrees in areas that they will never use because the process is much simpler. There is a lot less hassle involved in admission and the program requirements."
"It was different at first and I felt ill at ease using webrtc but I am much more comfortable with it's use after this course. I will continue to take distance courses through the Newnan Site as often as they are available!!"

- "Overall, I've been very satisfied with UWG. When students are just starting here straight from high school, it's harder for them to obtain any important information. Some students may think they aren't required to ask for help, but that help is just supposed to come to them. When they get the hang of college, it becomes easier to get any questions answered because you find out who to talk to and where to go."
- "I have not had to request any services."
- Students reported being pleased with UWG and student services.