
Motivation and Incentives for Distance Faculty

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Abstract

Colleges continue to offer growing numbers of courses and programs of study through distance education technologies. Yet despite this growth, relatively little is known about what inspires faculty to teach with a technology-mediated approach. The current study was designed as an exploration into the incentives that faculty perceive as motivating. The analysis of over one hundred articles lead to the conclusion that faculty generally teach in distance education programs for the same reasons (incentives) they teach traditional courses; for intrinsic rewards. The study identified self-satisfaction, flexible scheduling and wider audience as the intrinsic rewards and stipends, decreased workload, release time and new technology as the extrinsic motivators. A profile of the distance educator was developed to assist administration assigned the task of motivating faculty toward distance delivery.

Introduction

At the millennium, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges estimated that one-third of all colleges and universities would be closing within ten years. Peter Drucker, a management theorist, recently predicted that higher education institutions as we know them today, will be relics in a matter of a few short years (Lenzer, 1997). The message was to change or die. The source of the change is digital technology and distance education. Whether faculty see distance education as a positive pedagogical venue or not, they tend to recognize the fiscal value of distance delivery in higher education.

In addition to the need for change, is the need to work within new budgetary constraints being set forth by legislatures across the nation. These budget cuts are threatening to derail many traditional programs in higher education, forcing colleges and universities to look to faculty for cost saving distance delivery alternatives. Distance delivery has proven to be a means of recouping lost revenue, but without willing faculty, the programs are destined for collapse. If distance education is not only to sustain itself but to grow in upcoming years, it is imperative for administrators to understand the motivation that entices faculty to transition to alternative delivery modes. A number of authors have taken on the task of investigating incentives which translate into the distance learning paradigm (Betts, 1998; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, & Marx, 1999; Willis, 1994; Wilson, 1998). The success of any future distance education program is hinged on enticing faculty to move their courses to distant formats.

Purpose of this Study

The current study was undertaken for two reasons: first to establish a profile of today's distance educator and second to identify motivators that entice faculty to teach at a distance. Over one hundred articles were reviewed. The following is a synopsis of those articles.

Literature Review

While colleges around the globe offer growing numbers of courses through distance technologies, few studies have clearly delineated the motivators that propel faculty to teach at a distance. On-campus faculty excel in pedagogical activities due mainly to their desire for intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and watching students succeed (Betts, 1998). The question then becomes, do faculty receive these same intrinsic rewards from distance teaching? And are the rewards sufficient to motivate additional faculty to move to alternative delivery methods?

Before academic leaders can begin enticing faculty to transform their lectures to electronic format, it is important for administrators to have a general picture of their faculty. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education illustrates that 52 percent are male and 38 percent are senior faculty. Not surprisingly, 54 percent are tenured and 82 percent are full-time faculty. The academic disciplines most often utilizing distance education are business, commerce, agriculture, and education. Although these facts offer a limited picture of the today's distant faculty, they give little assistance in determining the motivators that persuade faculty into the distance arena. The next step in this study was to identify both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that might be used by administrators to augment their current programs.

Intrinsic motivators

In a recent study, Miller and Husman (1999) asked faculty to rank a series of intrinsic motivators, those that are internal and individual to each instructor, that were most important in their desire to teach at a distance. The results indicated that while faculty appreciate stipends and reduced teaching loads, the items that ranked highest were those related to self-satisfaction. McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, & Waugh (1999) concurred with this finding and listed a series of intrinsic motivators. Their list included such things as flexible working conditions, ability to reach new audiences, and the opportunity to enhance technical skills while planning and delivering online courses. Table 1 offers an overview of the intrinsic motivators that were identified throughout the literature and their frequency.

Table 1. Intrinsic motivators and frequencies.

Motivator	*Frequency (# of times item appeared in the 102 articles)
Self-satisfaction	90
Flexible schedule	81
Wider audience	79
Intellectual challenge	51
Flexible location	48
Ability to use new technology	46
Ability to develop new ideas	39
Sense of empowerment	38
Responsibility	38

Although the list of motivators is lengthy, only three of the variables were consistently addressed

in the literature and are statistically significant to this study: self satisfaction, flexible scheduling, and wider audience. The remaining motivators appeared in less than half of the articles and illustrated limited influence in motivating faculty.

Given the fact that the research strongly supports these three factors, administrators might question how best to access these motivators with today's faculty. Rose & Collison (1997) propose that colleges provide forums for distance instructors to detail their successes. Round tables and mentoring programs allow seasoned faculty to share their skills with novices and to enhance personal self-satisfaction. Additionally, by allowing faculty to be in complete control of their virtual classrooms, within the realm of "best practices", instructors gain a sense of self-satisfaction (Stockeband & Althoff, 1997).

Distance education faculty often site flexible scheduling as one of the core motivators for transitioning their classes to the virtual world. This incentive offers a sense of empowerment that is impossible to achieve within the brick and mortar campus. Student services, registration, and even the community calendar often dictates on-campus schedules and instructors are expected to conform. Distance learning allows that same calendar to be molded and revised to correspond to the needs of the individual students and faculty.

Flexible scheduling also allows a wider audience of potential learners to access instruction. Technology-mediated instruction can be accessed 24/7 from nearly any location, opening the potential for working students, parents of young children, and those with disabilities to reach their educational goals. Moore (2001) relates that the advent of interactive media and flexible scheduling has also brought forth a new generation of distance faculty who are now able to teach while pursuing other interests.

Finally, the literature (Moore, 1995; Brown, 1999) indicates that reaching a wider audience is a strong motivator for transitioning coursework to electronic formats. Faculty, often apprehensive that a class may be cancelled due to lack of enrollment, are seeking ways to cast a "wider net". Marketing of classes to rural areas of the United States and internationally increases the chance that classes will have a continual source of students. Additionally, institutions of higher education are being rewarded with a steady stream of new revenue.

Extrinsic motivators

While a number of intrinsic rewards appear to positively influence faculty participation in distance learning, it is important to note that a recurring list of extrinsic motivators was also extrapolated from the literature. Table 2 provides an overview of those findings.

Table 2. Extrinsic rewards and frequencies

Motivator	*Frequency (# of times item appeared in the 102 articles)
Monetary stipends	98
Decreased workload	95
Release time to develop and teach	86
New technology for personal use	51

If the literature is correct, then the assumption might be made that encouraging faculty through stipends, reduced class loads, and new technology might be enough to increase the number of faculty willing to move to a distant format, but at what cost to the institution? Stipends, the most requested extrinsic reward, are frequently addressed in the literature but not supported by over half of the nation's colleges. A recent survey by the National Education Association (NEA) reports that 63 percent of America's college instructors develop and teach distance courses with no financial remuneration. The report goes on to state that even though development time is greatly increased in distance education, most colleges see that as a part of the standard faculty workload. Although monetary rewards are uncommon, Brown (1999) and Betts (1998) point out that many colleges are offering development support through other means. Distributed Learning departments are providing instructional and graphic design support while Instructional Technology staffs often assist with technical questions.

The literature points out that less rigorous workloads is the second most requested extrinsic reward but due to budget restraints, few colleges have responded to this request. Workload in this case is defined as the number of courses taught per semester. The NEA report indicated that 84 percent of today's higher education faculty have similar teaching loads regardless of the delivery mechanism. Consistent teaching loads are perhaps the case because today's colleges are faced with the task of closing the ever-widening gap between income and expenses.

Workload was also addressed from the perspective of class size. Class size policies are widely diverse and have a direct tie to the budget. Although numerous studies (Bower, 2001; McKenzie, Mims, Bennett & Waugh, 2002) present the incentive of smaller class sizes, colleges are reluctant to limit registrations. Faculty, on the other hand, question the quality of instruction with class loads exceeding twenty-five students. Draves (2000) suggests that class size policies remain consistent between online and traditional, while Miller (2000) suggests a sliding scale of stipends for faculty who teach courses in excess of twenty-five students. The question of class size remains unanswered and a topic of heavy controversy throughout the academic world. Administrators seeking new cadres of distant faculty should address this concern with faculty and determine an equitable solution. Without stringent policies in place, faculty are hesitant to transition to distance delivery.

The third most popular incentive was that of release time for course development. McKenzie, Mims, Bennett & Waugh's (2001) research shows that development time for distance courses is nearly double that of traditional. Although this is the case, colleges nationwide are balking at release time and instead are providing teams of designers and technical support staff to assist with the development. The additional monies needed for this support strategy have proven to be less than the cost of the release time and benefits both traditional and distant faculty (Marriott, 2003).

It is no surprise that one of the largest monetary items on a college budget is technology. The need for constant upgrades and new hardware can have negative connotations for fiscal responsibility. What appears to be current technology to one instructor may be "old hat" to another. New technologies such as personal laptop computers, and PDA's are frequent requests. While colleges are rushing to keep up with the ever-changing office machines and classroom technologies, portable technology is finding its way into the offices and classrooms. Distance faculty, in particular, want laptops with Internet connections, allowing them to teach 24/7 from any location.

Dillon (1989) and Dillon and Walsh (1998) add to the literature on this subject by stating that faculty who are comfortable with technology may lack the pedagogical skills that marry the

technology to the content. Training is needed to support the instructional transition from instructor-centered to student-centered. Likewise, training is needed to assure that the technology is secondary to the content. Teaching at a distance is not for every faculty but it should not be relegated to those with high levels of computer literacy. Providing faculty with personal technologies removes the fear of computer-mediated instruction. Providing the technical and instructional design support capitalizes on the delivery of the requested extrinsic rewards.

Summary

Colleges continue to offer growing numbers of courses and programs of study through distance education technologies. Yet despite this growth, relatively little is known about what inspires faculty to teach with a technology-mediated approach. The current study was designed as an exploration into the incentives that faculty perceive as motivating.

The analysis of over one hundred articles lead to the conclusion that faculty generally teach in distance education programs for the same reasons (incentives) they teach traditional courses; for intrinsic rewards. The study identified self-satisfaction, flexible scheduling and wider audience as the intrinsic rewards and stipends, decreased workload, release time and new technology as the extrinsic motivators.

Furthermore, the study found that community college faculty tend to see distance delivery of education as a part of their job. Those same faculty view distance teaching as an integral part of the college culture, whereby they teach remote students as a part of their teaching obligations and professionalism.

This article has summarized the work of many authors and researchers in an attempt to develop a valuable profile of the distance educator. Realizing what motivates faculty to teach in distant formats provides clues as to how to increase the number of courses offered to students in rural areas, on a 24/7 rotation, and to those seeking specialized instruction. Regardless of the reward system, distance education has provided the opportunity for literally thousands of students to receive instruction who prior to technology-mediated instruction would have been overlooked.

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