

CHAPTER SEVEN

REQUEST FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: DISTANCE EDUCATION

The University of Southern Indiana, in furthering its mission of outreach to the region and underserved students, seeks approval to offer existing distance education programs and [courses](#) as well as approval to continue academic development and offerings of courses and programs via distance education. The University has previously sought and obtained approval from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) to offer a handful of degree programs within the College of Nursing and Health Professions. According to the ICHE, an institution must seek Commission approval when 50 percent or more of a degree program is offered via distance education. Distance education delivery of nursing and health professions programs and supporting courses satisfies the educational needs of working students and responds to the increasing need to prepare more students for careers in high demand health care fields.

Students in six programs offered by the College of Nursing and Health Professions are served primarily by distance education. The College offers a baccalaureate degree in radiologic and imaging sciences and baccalaureate degrees in nursing and health services. The College also offers master's degree programs in nursing, health administration, and occupational therapy. Each of the six programs has previously been approved for distance education by the ICHE and those ICHE applications with detailed enrollment projections, staffing, and support documentation are presented in the appendix.

Factors Leading to the Proposed Change

Since the University began tracking enrollment trends in distance education courses, there has been increased growth primarily due to two factors. One key factor was the ICHE's encouragement and approval to offer degree programs via distance education, and the other factor was the evolution of technology from the previous satellite broadcasting or two-way videoconferencing methods that required students to congregate at specific remote locations to the current web-based systems that allow students to learn anytime and anywhere with high speed Internet connections. For example, in 1996 students enrolled in satellite-delivered courses would have been required to attend the live class lectures via satellite by traveling to a nearby location that possessed satellite downlink equipment operated by the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System. While these downlink locations are housed primarily in universities, high schools, and libraries around the state, the course required the student to travel to the remote location and participate in the class sessions in a synchronous mode. Today, Web-based video streaming, the Blackboard course management system, and the Macromedia Breeze live-meeting software allow students and instructors to meet and collaborate both synchronously and asynchronously wherever they have Web browsers

and Internet connections. The following table shows the enrollment total headcount growth in distance education classes.

USI Enrollment Growth in Distance Education				
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
1996-97	126	150	62	338
1997-98	283	388	105	776
1998-99	470	389	356	1,215
1999-00	661	903	502	2,066
2000-01	1,074	1,051	539	2,664
2001-02	1,440	1,467	647	3,554
2002-03	1,819	2,332	807	4,958
2003-04	2,467	2,586	876	5,929
2004-05	2,444	2,874	1,428	6,746
2005-06	2,867	2,942	1,688	7,477

The number of students taking courses exclusively via distance education has grown steadily as courses have become available in the distance education format. The following table of unduplicated enrollments reflects that trend.

Unduplicated Enrollments Students in Distance Education Courses Only				
	Fall	Spring	Combined Summer	Academic Year Totals
1996-97	16	63	46	42
1997-98	90	135	84	132
1998-99	129	127	184	152
1999-00	141	206	229	204
2000-01	273	242	310	321
2001-02	405	337	334	426
2002-03	426	471	446	503
2003-04	532	541	553	642
2004-05	595	643	752	723
2005-06	638	711	NA	NA

In the fall 2005 semester, the full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment represented by distance education was 596 students. A majority or 514 FTEs were generated by the College of Nursing and Health Professions.

In the mid-to-late 1990s, the University became actively involved in a new statewide higher education consortium, the Indiana Partnership for Distance Education, under the auspices of the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunications System, the state agency that supplied the satellite technology for televised educational delivery. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education endorsed the development and articulation of core courses among the institutions in this new partnership; and those resulting courses would be offered via distance education in an effort to cultivate new distance programs.

Subsequently, the ICHE approved funding for the IPSE course and module grant program that provided grants for the development of new distance education courses and content.

The consortium develops a collaborative online catalogue of distance learning courses and programs in Indiana and publishes it as the [Indiana College Network](#). The University maintains an active presence in the statewide partnership group with representation at all management levels including the board of directors, the management committee, the working group, and various standing committees such as video scheduling, faculty services, and copyright committees.

Approvals Obtained to Implement the Proposed Change

As distance education courses and programs are proposed at the University, each is reviewed prior to development to assure that the distance education offering will meet the needs of students and will be a quality offering according to the best practices for electronic degree programs and distance education guidelines of the regional accrediting bodies, including the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The same guidelines are also instrumental as the foundation for the [Indiana Partnership for Statewide Education's](#) "Guiding Principles" document for offering courses and programs at a distance. The University's director of distance education served on the statewide task force to craft the "Guiding Principles" and the need to assure quality as part of an internal review process is evidenced in the University's Distance Education Course Application form presented in the appendix.

Individual distance education courses are subject to multi-level preliminary review as part of the application process. A faculty member who desires to offer a distance learning course completes an application that requests the instructor to consider factors such as the potential audience for the course, library services for students, how to interact with students, fostering an online learning community, as well as issues of compensation and copyright. The application must be approved by the department chair and dean and is subsequently reviewed by a standing University Distance Education Advisory Committee. The committee may recommend changes, approval, or deny the course application. Alternatively, specialized funding has been available to offer two-week intensive summer training programs for distance education faculty. Courses that have been accepted for development during the intensive training programs have been approved for distance education delivery. The application requires the instructor to consider and submit a narrative addressing a variety of distance education issues and student support factors detailed below.

- **Market Analysis (Need, Audience, and Demand)** - demonstration that there is a strong and sustainable market for the offering, including:
 - Evidence that the proposed course or module fulfills a particular **need** that is not presently met through other similar programs. What students will take the course; and how does it fit into a program of study?
 - A description of the potential audience for the course or module, including an estimate of the size of the target population as well as a projection of

the number of learners who will likely enroll in the offering each year.
Will it be offered to both on- and off-campus students?

- Evidence of **market demand** for the specific offering. The distinction between need and demand is subtle, but very important for long-term sustainability. The fact that the target audience (or the general population) has a need to know or may benefit from the proposed offering (**need**) does not guarantee that the audience will actually want and be willing to pay for it (**demand**).
 - Indication of other Indiana institutions that currently offer this course via distance learning. How would this course be different?
 - Evidence that the proposed audience can be reached with a modest, targeted marketing effort.
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- **Instructional Design and Delivery Plan** - an explanation of how the planned structure, learning materials and activities, pedagogical approach, and delivery technologies mutually support and reinforce the learning objectives for the course/module, including:
 - A description of the overall structure of the course or module.
 - A description of the types of online learning materials and activities that will be developed, including a rationale for the delivery technologies selected.
 - A description of the planned instructional techniques and strategies along with an explanation of how they, in conjunction with the online content, will foster achievement of the instructional goals.
 - A description of the types of formal and informal opportunities for interaction and collaboration among students and between student(s) and the instructor.
 - An explanation of how the course design and materials serve the particular educational needs and learning style(s) of the target audience.
 - List of any copyrighted materials (slides, films, photos, music, books, pictures, etc.) to be used in the course with an explanation of how compliance with rules of fair use in the classroom and copyright law will be assured. Written authorization for all copyrighted works used must be on file in the DE Learning Center office (FA41).
 - Ways of addressing student retention challenges (use of early warning benchmarks, assessment of student learning styles, sustaining student-instructor contact, facilitating student-student contact, etc.) are to be suggested.

 - **Institutional Capacity and Commitment** - evidence of strong and broad institutional support, such as specific explanations of how the institution's own resources will be committed to the project, descriptions of the importance of this course or module to institutional outreach efforts or curriculum development, and assurance that the module will continue to be made available and supported.

- **Utilization Potential** - potential for all or part of the proposed course or module to be used in multiple educational contexts in addition to the primary context as evidenced by one or more of the following:
 - An explanation of how the offering fits into other credit or noncredit programs within the applicant's department, college, or institution, or within the consortium of Indiana institutions.
 - Commitment from another institution, organization, or business to offer or recommend the course or module to its members.
 - Willingness to submit the individual learning objects from the course or module to the [MERLOT](#) (Multimedia Educational Resource For Learning and Online Teaching) repository.

- **Marketing Plan** - the proposal sets forth a well-developed plan for targeting information about the course to the prospective audience in a manner likely to result in significant utilization. There will be a particular need to explain this aspect of the project in detail, as the target audience may represent a population not yet addressed by a department's or USI's marketing strategy.

- **Evaluation Plan**
 - Explain how the course will be evaluated, how information gathered in the evaluation process will offer evidence of the effectiveness of the teaching/learning strategies employed, and how the evaluation results will be disseminated to provide guidance to others. (A copy of evaluation results will be placed in the course file in the DE Learning Center.)
 - In addition to the standard University course evaluation instrument, what other means of course evaluation will be employed, if any?

- **Use of Library Resources**
 - What are the library needs for the course?
 - Will distance learning students need to access online library reserve materials, utilize online databases, or otherwise make use of library holdings?

- **Staff Support Needs**
 - What type of staff support will be needed to develop and deliver this course via distance learning? Detail any additional demands on departmental clerical staff, computing services, broadcast, video or Internet technical support.

The approval process for a distance education program originates with the department and dean and is submitted to the University Academic Planning Council and the Board of Trustees prior to submitting an application for distance education to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. If approved by the ICHE, any existing or new courses in a distance education program are automatically approved for distance education delivery and do not need to go through the individual course application process. If approved by the ICHE, distance learning programs may also need the

approval of regional and field accrediting bodies. As previously mentioned, all six of the existing distance education programs offered by the College of Nursing and Health Professions have been approved by the ICHE.

Impact of Distance Education on Challenges Identified by the Commission

In September 1996, the Higher Learning Commission identified seven concerns to be addressed by USI as a part of its reaccreditation process. One way the University has been able to address some of these concerns stems from its use of Distance Education (DE). While DE does not serve as a remedy for any of the concerns, it does form a vital component of the way the University has been able to respond in a timely, meaningful way to HLC concerns.

Distance Education has specifically contributed to the way we:

- Ensure that learning resources in the library match the University's growth
Since 1996, access to online materials has been substantially increased and made available beyond the campus to meet the needs of an increased student body and an increased distance education student body. Remote access is available for most databases, many electronic books, and various e-reserve materials. The library's Web site also provides specific support to classes with library assignments through its online research guides for specific academic disciplines. Moreover, three positions have been added to the library staff; a reference services librarian, a serials librarian, and a distance learning librarian. These positions have increased the University's ability to provide learning resources.
- Address the part-time temporary to full-time faculty ratio
Distance Education has enabled the University to hire experts in the professional communities to teach specialized areas within specific programs and to deliver cutting edge education without having to travel to campus. This allows professionals greater flexibility in scheduling time to deliver instructional content and communicate with students. For example, the College of Nursing and Health Professions has been able to employ individuals currently working in specialized areas of human resources, quality improvement, and nursing administration.
- Increase diversity of its employees and student body
The University has been particularly concerned about the diversity of its faculty and students, although its diversity in many ways mirrors the diversity within the Tri-State area. DE has contributed to the University's efforts to increase diversity. In some instances, faculty hired to teach DE courses have been extended tenure track or renewable contracts. Furthermore, DE delivery has extended the University's ability to attract a more diverse student body in terms of age, ethnicity, and location. For example, since the implementation of DE, the College of Nursing and Health Professions has increased its diversity.

Consequently, USI's distance education programs are an integral component of our plan to meet the needs of the region, and they have been instrumental in providing the University with concrete ways to address the concerns identified by the 1996 reaccreditation site team.

Implementing and Sustaining Distance Education

Each of the distance education programs offered at USI, whether undergraduate or graduate, is developed, taught, and supported by experienced and appropriately credentialed faculty members. During the 2004-2005 academic year, 52 instructors (including full-time and adjunct) taught 331 sections of 140 distance education courses in the programs approved by the ICHE for distance education delivery. All of these faculty members had met the minimum academic requirements for holding faculty appointments within the departments in which they taught.

Beyond the required academic preparation for the disciplines in which they teach, USI faculty members, as well as related staff, benefit from several opportunities for training in the use of technology, particularly with respect to teaching in an online environment. Some examples include:

- **Institute for Online Teaching and Learning**: This program is designed to provide faculty with instruction in the development of online courses. Selected faculty members attend a two-week training session in the summer during which the online course development process begins. Online courses are fully developed and delivered within the following academic year, and upon completion participants share their experiences and training with others in their schools and departments.
- **Spring/Fall Preview**: This collaborative effort among several University administrative departments provides a comprehensive listing of various professional development and training events for faculty. Departments include the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, Instructional Technology Services (ITS), Rice Library, Office of Grants and Sponsored Research, Human Resources, Extended Services, and the Computer Center.
- **Blackboard Instructor Certificate Series**: This series of 11 modules centers on various tools and features of the Blackboard course management software. Faculty may attend eight of the 11 modules to receive a certificate.
- **Nursing and Health Professions Technology Update**: A half-day program organized by the College of Nursing and Health Professions' Technology Team appraises NHP faculty of the newest developments related to instructional technology and online resources available on campus.
- **One-on-One Training**: Individualized sessions with Instructional Technology Services staff for NHP Technology Team staff members address a specific faculty member's questions or needs related to online instruction.

In addition to these opportunities, faculty may participate in periodic hardware and software product demonstrations led by ITS staff as well as the "2nd Wednesday @ Noon" programs, a series of hour-long informational and training sessions devoted to issues related to online teaching and learning sponsored by the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System (IHETS).

Qualified personnel provide support to faculty members as well as their distance education students. This support at the institutional level includes the staff in the Distance Education Office, the Instructional Technology Services Office, Rice Library, Institutional Research, the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, and Grants and Sponsored Research. Distance education programs are developed and taught by the faculty within each discipline. These programs are managed by each originating academic department and not by the University's Distance Education Office.

Student feedback about teaching effectiveness in distance education courses is collected through a formal process by the Office of Academic Affairs. Formal student evaluation of instruction in distance education courses is conducted through end-of-term course evaluations offered online. In addition to evaluation of instruction, these instruments include items that address technology elements related to course delivery. Assisting the Office of Academic Affairs in data collection are the offices of Institutional Research and Instructional Technology Services. Instructors are also encouraged to collect formative evaluation data from their students during the term.

Student learning outcomes are assessed by teaching faculty, departments, colleges, and the University in a number of ways including grades, student feedback given through the evaluation of teaching surveys, examination of retention rates, exit interviews, alumni tracking surveys, and feedback from field instructors, clinical supervisors, and employers. Every indication from each of these data sources has been that the distance education programs offered by USI have been very successful. As an example, 100 percent of the students enrolled in the University's Master of Science in Nursing program, which is offered entirely via distance education, passed the advanced nursing practice certification examination for the past seven years. The National average for this examination is 85 percent.

Primary accountability and leadership for the development, delivery, and maintenance of programs currently being offered via distance education lie within the University's academic structure. This involves the departments (including faculty, chairs, and program directors), the colleges, and the Office of Vice President for Academic Affairs. Additionally, programs in nursing, health professions, and social work are also accountable to their respective professional accrediting bodies.

In addition to the centralized distance education support offered by the Distance Education Office and Instructional Technology Services, there is a "Technology Team" in place for the College of Nursing and Health Professions to directly support faculty and students in the distance education programs. This team consists of the director of the Charles E. Day Learning Resource Center, a Computer and Internet Services coordinator, a Computer Support technician, and a coordinator of Instructional Broadcasting. These staff members provide front-line support to distance education students and faculty with activities such as technical troubleshooting, online examination support, production of videostreamed lectures, faculty software training, and maintenance of the Learning Resource Center.

The University provides [learning resources](#) and support services to its distance education students in a number of ways, and access to these resources and services is generally provided by means that do not require in-person contact with the provider. The Distance Education Office maintains a Web site which gives information and support to those enrolled in DE courses. It also provides a staff of skilled personnel, accessible by e-mail and telephone (including a toll-free telephone number), which offer both instructional and technical support to these students. This support includes distance education coordinators, a local coordinator for the Indiana College Network (ICN), and a help desk specifically designated to answer questions and resolve problems related to the Blackboard course management system. Students enrolled in one of the six distance education programs offered by the College of Nursing and Health Professions also have access to the technical support provided by the College's Technology Team.

Distance education students may participate in academic advisement by e-mail and telephone, and they may register for classes online. Out-of-state students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses pay in-state tuition plus a \$10 per credit hour fee.

Textbooks required for coursework may be purchased online from the University Bookstore's Web site. The library provides a variety of services to support distance education, such as a designated librarian responsible for distance learning library services, a section of the library's Web site devoted specifically to such services, toll-free telephone and electronic access to reference services, online book renewal, remote access to full-text electronic resources (including books, journals, and reserve materials), and online instruction and instructional support. The University's Academic Skills Office provides some instructional resources for distance education students, including its [Online Writing Laboratory](#) (OWL) which students may use to revise papers.

The financial support the University has provided for distance education over the years has not only sustained these efforts but has permitted steady expansion. The current FY05-06 budget for centralized distance education support totals approximately \$90,000, including nearly \$13,000 for recurring equipment costs. Additionally, the University has budgeted approximately \$70,000 in FY05-06 for the Blackboard™ course management software and the Macromedia Breeze communication software. Although these software packages are used heavily by distance education instructors and students, they are also available for use in all courses offered by the University. In addition to the financial support for centralized distance education services provided by the University through its distance education budget, direct financial support is also provided through the budgets of the College of Nursing and Health Professions and the Social Work Department in the Bower-Suhrheinrich College of Education and Human Services.

Distance education faculty and administration also actively seek external funding to support distance education. Since 1997, USI has made 30 applications for grant funding through the Faculty Development Grant Program of the Indiana Partnership for Statewide Education/Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System. Of those, 14 (47 percent) were funded, generating \$183,209 for USI distance education module/course

development. In 2002, USI also secured a \$52,000 grant from SBC/Ameritech to support the Institute for Online Teaching and Learning.

The University sought and received approval from the Indiana Commission for Higher education to offer the following seven programs via distance education on the dates listed below:

Bachelor of Science in Health Services	2/24/1998
Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program	2/24/1998
Bachelor of Science in Radiologic and Imaging Sciences	12/13/2000
Master of Science in Health Administration	12/13/2000
Master of Science in Nursing	12/13/2000
Master of Science in Occupational Therapy	12/13/2000
Master of Social Work	9/17/2004

The University has no immediate plans to offer additional graduate or undergraduate programs via distance education; however, departmental and college discussions regarding potential distance education program development are part of the academic planning process.

Evaluating Distance Education

In an effort to monitor and sustain quality distance education offerings, the University has implemented a distance education feedback component for its end-of-course evaluations beginning with the spring 2003 semester. After two years of collecting student feedback regarding distance education, data shows that students consistently rate they are in agreement with items of best practices. The following table shows results from 196 students who completed the spring 2005 feedback forms. The scale is 1 to 5 with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree.”

Distance Education Course Evaluation Items Spring 2005 Semester	Mean Score
The organization of online course materials (such as syllabus, objectives, assignments, other documents) made it easy for me to utilize these resources.	4.38
The use of multimedia resources (audio/video files, photos, graphics, or PowerPoint presentations) enriched my learning experience.	4.17
I found course objectives and assignments to be clearly stated and easily understood.	4.21
I felt connected to the instructor and other students in this course.	3.86
This course required active participation to achieve learning objectives.	4.27
This course challenged me to achieve learning objectives.	4.27
This course set high standards for excellence.	4.26
All required materials for this course were available and accessible to meet my learning needs.	4.27
My instructor used effective communication strategies to keep me informed about the course and facilitate learning.	4.23

Additionally, the University annually [surveys](#) all its students regarding the use of technologies supporting the learning process. Eighty-one percent of the 493 distance education students who responded to the spring 2005 campus-wide technology survey reported they primarily access their online coursework from home, and 71 percent reported they use a high speed Internet connection. Eighty-seven percent reported they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the Blackboard course management system. Seventy-five percent of respondents found the online Rice Library databases helpful to very helpful.

The programs currently using distance education methods have extensive evaluation plans to assess student learning as mandated by accreditation requirements. For example, assessment of student learning in the current distance education programs is a component of the master evaluation plan for both the undergraduate (RN-BSN) and graduate nursing programs. Specific assessments include monitoring of the student scores achieved with the use of online testing as compared to classroom testing. Pass rates for nursing licensure and advance practice nursing certification exams are also monitored. Employer evaluations are compiled on an annual basis and provide feedback on the effectiveness of new USI graduates in the work environment. Student and alumni surveys are also used to obtain data about the effectiveness of the education program and resources. Over the last five years, aggregate evaluation results demonstrate that distance education is an effective and flexible means of providing education to the students in the undergraduate and graduate nursing programs. Employers report that 100 percent of the students from the RN-BSN program meet or exceed their expectations in the work environment. In the nursing graduate program, 100 percent of the students have passed the certification exam upon the first attempt. Assessment results clearly identify the effectiveness of distance education as a viable educational option for the adult learner.

The University's efforts to evaluate distance education programs is methodical, ongoing, and in keeping with the best practices for distance education evaluation. Institutional support remains strong as evidenced in this assessment document. Students, community partners, and the employers in the region recognize the value of our distance education programs. For these reasons, the University requests a change in its education offering for the delivery of distance education programs.

The Indiana Commission for Higher Education Distance Education Program Proposal appears in the appendix.