

Distance Learning and Telecourses in Community Colleges

Diane Hirshberg

User Services Coordinator

The introduction of telecommunications into education has made it possible for schools and colleges to reach students who otherwise could not attend classes. The popularity and use of distance learning is increasing both because of its convenience and because the effectiveness of this method of instruction is becoming increasingly obvious. Rural schools can use distance learning to teach students for whom a commute is too great, while urban schools can accommodate students whose schedules prevent them from taking courses during the school day.

Telecommunications also allows colleges to reach individuals who wish to learn in the workplace or at other noncampus locations.

The materials reviewed in this column reflect some of the recent literature in the ERIC database on distance learning and telecourses in community colleges. ERIC documents can be viewed on microfiche at over 800 libraries worldwide. In addition, most may be ordered on microfiche or in paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service by calling (800) 443-ERIC. For a list of libraries in your area that house ERIC microfiche collections, an EDRS order form, or for more information about our products and services, please contact the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges at (213) 825-3931.

Blanchard, William. *Telecourse Effectiveness: A Research-Review Update*. Unpublished manuscript, 1989. 7 pp. (ED 320 554)

This review of the research literature on the effectiveness of telecourses covers the period from summer 1986 through fall 1989. The major findings are as follows: (a) in general, based on course grades or pre- and post-test measurements of learning, student opinion, and faculty opinion, telecourses have been found to be as effective as conventional, face-to-face courses; (b) telecourses are superior to correspondence courses; (c) although telecourses do not allow the frequent and spontaneous interaction with faculty and other students that is possible in conventional classrooms, their utilization has facilitated major improvements in the convenience of access; and (d) when well produced, telecourses impose a discipline and organizational rigor on instructors that is not required in the looser structure of the conventional classroom. It is concluded that the major issue with telecourses is not whether they are as effective as face-to-face

courses per se, but whether telecourses are skillfully planned and delivered, with the same attention to pedagogical and organizational issues that is essential in planning and delivering a conventional course.

Bunting, Larry. "Distance Learning via Satellite Begins with Analysis of the Users." Paper from the Proceedings of Selected Paper Presentations at the Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1990. 6 pp. (ED 323 920)

A study of administrators, teachers, and students at 19 community colleges was conducted to better understand the individual groups served by satellite technology in distance education programs. Along with demographic information, the following issues were investigated: (a) learning styles most commonly used at each institution, (b) levels of knowledge about alternative delivery systems, (c) attitudes toward educational technology, (d) attitudes toward the use of communications satellites, (e) the level of administrative support to be expected, (f) faculty attitudes toward educational technology in relation to their teaching styles and in relation to their curricula, (g) student attitudes toward educational technology in relation to their major curricula, (h) faculty attitudes toward communications satellites in relation to their disciplines, and (i) student attitudes toward communications satellites in relation to their major curricula. Recommendations include purchasing a satellite dish to demonstrate the benefits of satellite use to downlink sites, launching public relations campaigns to inform potential users about the technology, communicating with schools currently using satellite systems to gather accurate cost data, determining which curricula are best suited to the introduction of satellite technology, conducting staff development programs to support technology integration, and informing faculty of educational technology facilities and services available at their schools.

Burruss, Beth Grobman (Comp.). *Resources for Telecourses: A Reference List. Updated.* Cupertino, CA: De Anza College, 1990. 18 pp. (ED 325 103)

Divided into nine sections, this reference guide provides sources of information on the dissemination and practice of distance education, access to programs and agencies concerned with distance learning and telecourses, and bibliographic citations for evaluation studies that have researched the

effectiveness of telecourses as instructional tools. The first section mentions the large groups that have a major nationwide influence on telecourses. The second section contains titles of books that list telecourses and videotape series that can be made into telecourses. Producers and distributors who have telecourses or series that can be adapted to the telecourse format are listed in section three. Sections four through seven list newsletters, journals, a journal article, and books on distance education and telecourse technologies and provides a journal article on the topic. Section eight cites evaluation studies and research papers, while section nine lists associations and conferences that cover distance education, learning resources, instructional technology, and telecourses. Although many of the resources are primarily concerned with the adult education and the community college level, at least one report (from New York State) focuses on distance education at the elementary and secondary levels.

Kabat, Ellen J., and Friedel, Janice N. *The Eastern Iowa Community College District's (EICCD) Televised Interactive Education (TIE) Evaluation Report, 1989-1990*. Bettendorf, Iowa: Eastern Iowa Community College District, 1990. 65 pp. (ED 327 167)

The purpose of this report is to provide both formative and summative results concerning the 1990 academic year operation of the Eastern Iowa Community College District's (EICCD) Televised Interactive Education (TIE) system. The TIE system is composed of a two-way microwave connection whereby two colleges and one university are able to produce and transmit a live video and audio signal from their interactive television classrooms, thus allowing instructors and students at distant sites to interact actively. Six main measures are reported: (a) system use, which identifies the major uses of the system in hours for EICCD instruction, for other local college usage, and for administrative uses; (b) class enrollments, which notes the number of students enrolled in TIE classes both on site and at remote sites; (c) average grade per site, which examines final grades for each TIE class and grade point averages; (d) student evaluation of the TIE system, completed at midterm and end of term; (e) evaluation of students who withdrew from TIE classes; and (f) instructor evaluation. Also included are recommendations arising from the study regarding the technical aspects of the system, staff development, and necessary support systems. The appendices include all evaluation forms used in the study as well as a telephone survey.

Livieratos, Barbara B. *Findings from the Fiscal Year 1990 Survey of Telecourse Students. Research Report Number 68.* Columbia, MD: Howard Community College, 1990. 29 pp. (ED 327 256)

During each semester of fiscal year (FY) 1990, a survey was conducted of enrollees in telecourses at Howard Community College. The purpose of the study was to assist program planners in understanding the motivations, enrollment and viewing patterns, demographics, and goals of students who enroll in telecourses. Survey responses were obtained from 53% of the 731 students enrolled in telecourses in FY 1990, although not all classes were surveyed and no efforts were made to obtain a random sample. When relevant, comparisons were made with survey responses from FY 1989. Study findings included the following: (a) a majority of respondents to the telecourse survey were female (73%), under age 30 (57%), white (82%), or employed full-time (73%); (b) over half of telecourse enrollees each semester were new to the concept of telecourses, and over half were taking other courses at the time; (c) 52% of the respondents indicated that their primary goal in taking a telecourse was to earn credits to transfer to a four-year institution; (d) 96% had a videocassette recorder at home, and 56% used it to record classes; (e) 64% said they would be interested in using a modem to communicate with their on-campus instructor; (f) a majority of enrollees expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the courses and indicated they would enroll in another telecourse; and (g) as was true in FY 1989, the "presentation of material" category received the lowest overall satisfaction rating by respondents.

Virginia State Department of Community Colleges. *Report of the VCCS Task Force on Educational Telecommunications.* Richmond, VA: Author, 1989. 31 pp. (ED 312 018)

The Task Force on Educational Telecommunications was formed to develop a statewide approach to educational telecommunications (e.g., public, cable, and satellite television; audio and video tapes; teleconferencing; and computer conferencing) for the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). The task force assumed that the instruction should have the same academic rigor and quality as traditional course offerings; that the systemwide approach should take into account diversity among individual colleges; and that the goals of media-based instruction should be to increase educational access, while increasing efficiency and reducing the costs of course delivery. The task force identified several key instructional and faculty issues, including equity of

course availability, flexibility without compromise of academic quality and integrity, planning and evaluation, balance in resource allocation, interaction between teacher and learner, faculty employment, instructional quality, staff support, and instructional management. In light of its findings, the group adopted the following recommendations: (a) that the VCCS adopt as goals ensuring the availability of a minimal core of offerings to all colleges, enhancing existing educational offerings through a coordinated system of educational telecommunications, and providing adequate campus and systemwide networked computational and telecommunications resources for the origination and reception of these course offerings; (b) that the VCCS develop and implement a statewide system of educational telecommunications called the "Extended Learning Telecommunications Network"; (c) that the State Board establish a special task force to implement the network, develop plans for increasing library collections and student/faculty access to them through technology, implement a comprehensive faculty development program, and ensure equal faculty access to the telecommunications network; and (d) that an ongoing committee structure be developed to maintain the network. A budget for the network and a report on a roundtable on educational telecommunications are appended.

Washington State Board for Community College Education. *Video Telecommunications in Washington Community Colleges: A Descriptive Study of the Current Activities and Future Plans. Operations Report No. 90-1.* Olympia, WA: Author, 1990. 56 pp. (ED 320 640)

In 1990, a study was conducted of telecommunications in Washington State community colleges. The study focused on the quality of telecourses, current telecourse offerings, current and future plans for community college use of teleconferences, and innovations in telecommunications beyond telecourses. Data were gathered from four sources: administrative records in the state's student management information system, a survey of 1,185 students enrolled in video and telecourses at 11 of the 15 colleges offering telecourses in fall 1989, a survey of deans of instruction to determine the colleges' motives for offering or not offering telecourses, and a review of the literature on telecourses. Study findings, based on survey responses from 480 students and all of the deans of instruction, included the following: (a) 16 community colleges offered from 2 to 50 telecourses each year, enrolling a total of 366 full-time equivalent students in 1988-89; (b) 70% of the students took

telecourses in preference to regular classes; (c) telecourse students were slightly older than other community college students, 64% were female, and the racial/ethnic background of the students responding was similar to that of the state population; (d) students gave high ratings to the quality of the telecourses, with 90% indicating that telecourses were an effective way to learn and that they would recommend telecourses to their friends; (e) 12 colleges were planning to initiate or expand telecourse offerings in the next 3 years; and (f) 15 colleges used national video-teleconference networks for faculty/staff in-service training, business training, and community groups. Appendixes include the two survey instruments and a 37-item bibliography.

Please help us keep the ERIC database current and comprehensive by submitting your written works to the Clearinghouse for review for inclusion in the ERIC system. Send two copies of each manuscript to the attention of the Acquisitions Coordinator, ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, University of California, Los Angeles, 8118 Math-Sciences Building, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024.