

This We Believe About Distance Learning in Business Education

Policy Statement 65

Business education today serves learners in traditional classrooms, in corporate settings, and at remote sites. Learners in these educational environments encounter numerous alternative delivery methods. They are being educated through distance learning that uses Web-based delivery, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, and electronic networking.

As business educators, **We Believe That** distance learning provides access to educational resources for a larger and more diverse population of learners than in the past. In addition, it enables schools to offer courses and other educational experiences that otherwise could not be offered. For example, distance learning provides an opportunity for greater infusion of global business concepts into every level of instruction. Thus, **We Believe That** business educators must continue to learn about distance learning and investigate appropriate applications for their programs.

Quality

We Believe That the quality of business education programs must be maintained.

Business educators should assume the responsibility for determining appropriate uses of distance learning to enhance program quality and facilitate learning. The competitive marketplace impels business educators to devise programs and offerings that attract learners while maintaining the quality and integrity of those programs.

All stakeholders can work together to develop appropriate program expectations, course objectives, course content, and learner outcomes. Stakeholders may include learners, parents, teachers, administrators, and employers.

We Believe That an effective and coordinated distance learning program is a valuable component of the business education curriculum.

Challenges

Distance learning creates a positive educational context that significantly alters the level of interaction among the stakeholders and offers several challenges to business educators.

The use of distance learning will continue to expand as a result of increased technological innovations and competitive forces in the educational marketplace. Business educators will have opportunities to use alternative delivery methods as a result of that expansion. The challenge to business educators is

to evaluate the merits and applications of each alternative method. Thus, **We Believe That** business educators should have a voice in the planning, design, selection, and implementation of distance learning to be used in the business education program.

All stakeholders must be cognizant of the investment in time, money, and effort required to provide the infrastructure for quality distance learning. Distance learning requires technical support and continuous review to ensure a viable program.

Business educators have a responsibility to take advantage of professional development activities offered in the uses and applications of distance learning. In addition, teacher education programs should offer preservice and in-service training in the development of distance learning courses and systems.

Distance learning will require a change in the interaction between instructors and learners and will place greater demands on their time. It will provide additional course opportunities, enrichment activities, and global connectivity.

Business educators must understand the legal and ethical ramifications of distance learning. Legal issues arising from distance learning may include the use of copyrighted properties, contractual agreements, and rights to ownership. Ethical issues arising from distance learning may include the uses of recorded instruction and Web sites. Local guidelines may govern legal and ethical uses of resources in distance learning.

Therefore, **We Believe That** a significant challenge to business education is to make distance learning as meaningful, interesting, valuable, and interactive as face-to-face learning.

Assessment

We Believe That the assessment of a distance learning program encompasses the system used, learner competencies, course standards, and teacher effectiveness. When developed and delivered well, technology does not impede instruction and learning.

Quality materials, creative teachers, and periodic assessment of learning are critical components of a quality distance learning environment. Effective use of teaching materials and equipment, appropriate learner assessments, and feedback from various assessment measures of program quality are essential.

We Believe That assessment of distance learning must include evaluation of the program for its effectiveness and success in promoting learning; it must not be solely a response to economic factors.

Summary

We Believe That business educators need to be mindful of the considerations for choosing distance learning as a delivery system and to remember that all courses and all students do not necessarily benefit from distance learning programs. To determine if distance learning is an appropriate delivery system for their programs, business educators might consider the following questions:

- How can knowledge and skills be acquired effectively through distance learning?
- What can and should business education offer learners through distance education to enable them to develop the competencies they need?
- What business education courses are appropriate in the distance learning milieu?
- How are economic efficiency and learning effectiveness balanced in the distance learning environment?

We Believe That distance learning can address the interests of educationally neglected populations, promote individual autonomy, and broaden the inclusiveness of the constituencies business education serves.