

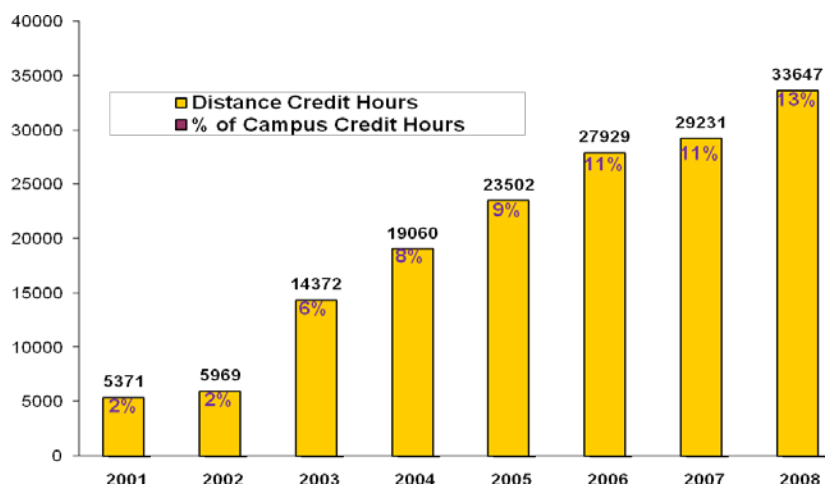
# Distance Learning Task Force Report

In 2007-08 the VCAA appointed a Distance Learning Task Force of faculty and staff, led by Elaine Blakemore, Chair of Psychology, to explore strategic directions for IPFW's credit-bearing distance learning programs. (Distance classes include online, DVD, and TV formats.) The task force used institutional data from Fall 2003-Spring 2007, surveys of faculty and students; interviews with department chairs and with online faculty teaching courses with high student success rates, and published literature on the topic of distance learning.

## As of Spring 2009

- 3200 online learners
- 5592 distance enrollments
- 15,442 credit hours, 12.5% of total campus credit hours
- 88 faculty taught 156 sections (123 courses) in 29 departments
- 31% are 100 level courses, 33% are 200 level, 19% are 300, 5% graduate
- Distance students are learning in 20 different states and 7 countries

## Growth of distance credit hours from 2001 - 2008



## Strategic Directions for Distance Learning

- Develop a broad range of online offerings in general education and upper division courses
- Consider certificates that meet community/employer need

## Here's what the task force found out

- Distance learners tend to be slightly older than those who study solely on campus. The average age of students taking only face-to-face classes is 25.93 years, while the average age of students taking distance classes only is 28.31 years.
- Early drops, Ds, Fs, and Ws are higher in distance classes than in face-to-face classes. 83% of students who begin face-to-face classes successfully complete them (earn C or higher) compared to 68% of distance learning students. Online classes appear to have a somewhat higher success rate than other distance classes (DVD and TV).
- Comparison of online and face-to-face courses where the same instructor taught the same course in the same semester in both formats showed that 78% of the face-to-face students successfully completed these courses as compared to about 70% of the online students.
- Students consistently say that online courses are more difficult and require more self-direction. Thus, the courses may be suited to some students more than others.



- Faculty reported that the development of online courses was time consuming, and that they generally believed that teaching online was more labor-intensive than teaching face-to-face.
- Departments' involvement in DL has been driven largely by faculty interest, DCS incentives and encouragement, and student interest. Few departments have a plan for the use of online courses or program development.

### Recommendations for Teaching Online

These effective practices emerged from a combination of interviews with 15 IPFW online faculty with low DWF rates for their online courses and published literature on the topic.

- Contemporary online courses are not equivalent to independent study courses. Effective online courses create regular interaction between students and instructors, and among students.
- Instructors should make their expectations for the course clear early and often regarding assignments, when students can expect feedback and responses from the instructor, how often they need to be online, and similar issues.



*"I have taken both internet courses and DVD courses. I have turned in assignments and done homework in Japan, Taiwan, and the United Arab Republic. This has turned out to be an incredibly convenient way to achieve an education."*  
Rick Taylor is finishing a BGS degree

- Instructors should respond to students via email, chat, phone in a timely manner (a reasonable expectation is within 24 hours during the work week).
- Instructors should seek out and inform their students about relevant resources (e.g., ask the department's subject librarian what services the library might provide for distance education students).
- The size of an online class should support the instructional objectives and teaching strategies selected by the department for the course, with input from the instructor or faculty member teaching the course.
- Departments should develop evaluations (and norms) that are comparable to the evaluations used for face-to-face classes. Online evaluations should also include criteria that are particularly relevant to the online medium (e.g., responsiveness of the instructor, organization of the course materials, ease of negotiating the web site, the use of chatrooms, blogs, and threaded discussions).

### Resources for Teaching Online

- Follow the seven principles of good undergraduate education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, 1996). Teaching, Learning and Technology Group Website: <http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html>.
- Consider developing and modifying online courses using the guidelines of the Quality Matters rubric at [http://www.ipfw.edu/celt/grants/PDFs/qualitystandards\\_rubric.pdf](http://www.ipfw.edu/celt/grants/PDFs/qualitystandards_rubric.pdf).
- Consider taking the Quality Matters Peer Review training (<http://www.qualitymatters.org/Training.htm>) and become a course design reviewer, or have your online course reviewed by colleagues who have undergone this training. A small stipend is offered to reviewers and to faculty having a course reviewed. Contact CELT to find out more.
- CELT offers complete design consulting services and will work with any faculty member teaching at distance to develop or modify a course. Contact CELT at 1-6354.

**To read the Distance Learning Task Force Report go to**  
<http://www.ipfw.edu/dlearning/decco/taskforce.shtml>