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**Statistical Analysis Report**

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**Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Reports**

## **Distance Education Instruction By Postsecondary Faculty and Staff: Fall 1998**

### **Executive Summary**

The complete report is available at  
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## Executive Summary

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Distance education availability, course offerings, and enrollments increased rapidly during the 1990s (Lewis et al. 1999). The proliferation of distance education offerings at the nation's degree-granting institutions has sparked considerable public debate, with vocal proponents (Turoff 1999) and detractors (Young 2000). However, the extent to which instructional faculty and staff are involved in distance education has not been extensively explored (Phipps and Merisotis 1999).

This report begins to address some of the questions about the role of faculty in distance education in fall 1998 using the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:99). In NSOPF:99, instructional faculty and staff at 2- and 4-year degree-granting institutions were asked questions about a wide range of issues.

The analysis in this report focuses on whether instructional faculty and staff—that is, respondents who reported teaching one or more classes for credit whether or not they were considered by the institution to have faculty status<sup>1</sup>—indicated teaching at least one distance class. This report uses two items from the NSOPF:99 faculty questionnaire to determine whether respondents taught any distance classes. First, for each of up to five for-credit classes, respondents were asked to indicate whether the class was taught “through a distance education program.”<sup>2</sup> In this report, respondents answering

“yes” for any of their classes are described as having taught at least one “distance education class.” Second, for each of the same for-credit classes, respondents were asked to indicate the primary medium used to teach the class: face-to-face, computer, TV-based, or other. Respondents indicating that any of their classes were taught using any primary medium other than face-to-face communication are described as having taught at least one “non-face-to-face class.” Each of these two variables provides a measure of participation in distance education. When results apply to both measures, the term “distance class” is used.

Although the NSOPF:99 faculty questionnaire lacked detailed questions about modes of technology, training, and instructional practices in individual distance education courses, the data permit description of national patterns of faculty involvement in distance education. The findings also describe the relationship of participation in distance education to other aspects of faculty work, such as workload and student interaction. The results presented here also serve as a baseline for studies of trends in faculty participation in distance education using future data collections. The report first presents the proportion of faculty who taught distance classes and the relationship of faculty and institutional characteristics to teaching distance classes. Then, instructional faculty and staff who taught distance classes are compared with those who did not in terms of workload and compensation, interactions with students, classroom and student practices, and job satisfaction. Most of the analyses for this report were conducted separately for full- and part-time respondents.

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<sup>1</sup>For brevity, the term “faculty” is often used in this report, although it includes staff teaching for-credit classes who do not have faculty status.

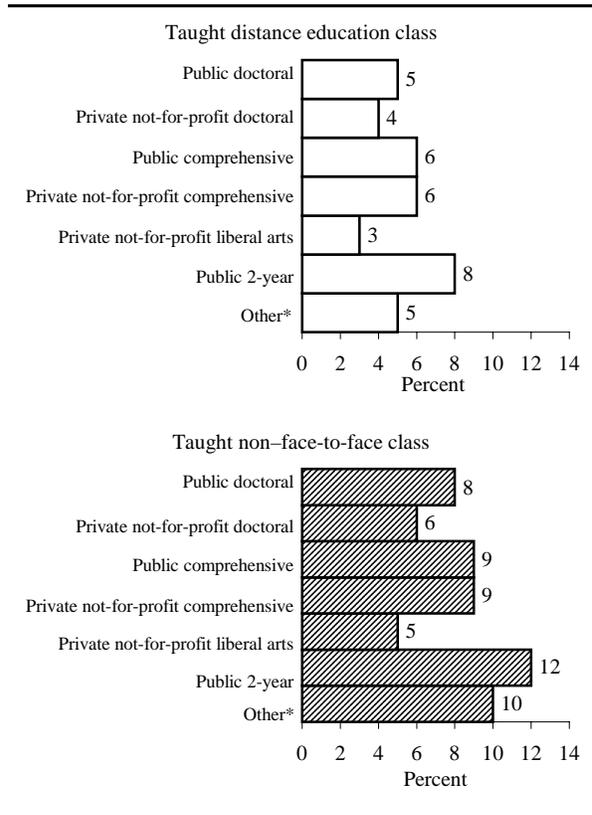
<sup>2</sup>The term “distance education program” was not defined for respondents.

## Instructional Faculty and Staff Teaching For-Credit Distance Classes

Across the nation, about 6 percent of instructional faculty and staff who reported teaching one or more for-credit classes indicated that they taught at least one distance education class in fall 1998. Nine percent reported teaching at least one class primarily in a non-face-to-face mode—using a computer, TV-based, or other non-face-to-face medium. Those who taught distance education classes were considerably more likely than those who did not teach distance education classes to have also indicated that they taught non-face-to-face classes. Nevertheless, among those who did not teach distance education classes, about 6 percent indicated that they taught at least one class using a primarily non-face-to-face medium. Of those who did teach distance education classes, about one-third (36 percent) indicated that they taught only classes that used primarily face-to-face instruction (that is, identified their distance education classes as using primarily face-to-face instruction). This could occur when most of the students in a given class meet in a traditional classroom, but some students elect to take the same class via distance education.

Few demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity), conditions of employment (e.g., full- or part-time status, academic rank, tenure status), or aspects of education and experience (e.g., highest degree attained, years in current job) were associated with either dimension of participation in distance education. Only institution type was associated both with teaching distance education classes and with teaching non-face-to-face classes: faculty at public 2-year institutions were more likely than those at private doctoral or liberal arts institutions to teach either type of distance class (figure A). For example, faculty at public 2-

Figure A.—Percentage of instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions who taught distance classes, by institutional type: Fall 1998



\*Includes public liberal arts, private not-for-profit 2-year, and other specialized institutions.

NOTE: Includes all instructional faculty and staff at Title IV degree-granting institutions with at least some instructional duties for credit. Distance education classes refer to any identified as being taught through a distance education program. Non-face-to-face classes are those taught with a computer, TV-based, or other non-face-to-face primary medium. See the glossary in appendix A for details.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998–99 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:99), Data Analysis System.

year institutions were more likely than their counterparts at private doctoral institutions to teach at least one non-face-to-face class (12 versus 6 percent).

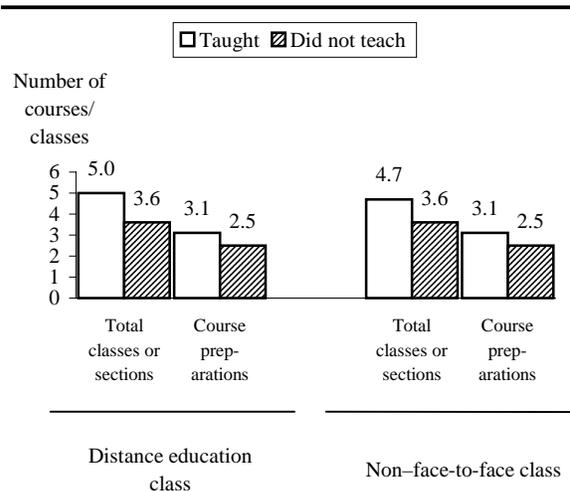
## Workload and Compensation

Is distance education offered *in addition* to regular course offerings, or does it replace other

classes? Faculty interest groups have suggested that faculty workload may increase as distance education proliferates. In particular, some have concluded that distance education offerings require a disproportionate investment of time and effort on the part of faculty members, even when compared with classroom courses of comparable size, content, and credit (American Association of University Professors 1999; American Council on Education 2000; University of Illinois Teaching at a Distance Seminar 1999). While these data cannot address student-faculty ratios at the departmental or institutional level, and cannot examine causal relationships, several measures of the teaching load at the faculty level are available to provide a snapshot of the activities of those faculty who do and do not teach distance classes.

Overall, the teaching load was somewhat higher for instructional faculty and staff teaching distance classes than for those not doing so. On average, full-time faculty reporting participation in distance education taught at least one class or section more in fall 1998 than those not teaching either distance education classes or non-face-to-face classes (figure B). The difference appeared to be due to their teaching more for-credit classes or sections, rather than more noncredit classes or sections. Faculty teaching distance classes also averaged about 3.1 unique course preparations, compared with about 2.5 preparations for their colleagues not teaching distance classes. These relationships were also found for part-time faculty and when controlling for other characteristics such as institution type, teaching discipline, and level of classroom instruction. However, the average class size for faculty who taught distance classes was comparable to the average class size for those faculty who did not, and the percentage of total work time spent on teaching activities was also similar for faculty who taught distance classes (62 percent) and those who did not (60 percent).

Figure B.—Average teaching load of full-time instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions, by participation in distance classes: Fall 1998



NOTE: Includes all instructional faculty and staff at Title IV degree-granting institutions with at least some instructional duties for credit. Distance education classes refer to any identified as being taught through a distance education program. Non-face-to-face classes are those taught with a computer, TV-based, or other non-face-to-face primary medium. See the glossary in appendix A for details.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998–99 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:99), Data Analysis System.

Incorporating distance education into faculty schedules as part of regular teaching loads, as overloads, or on a class-by-class basis has implications for the compensation faculty receive for their work (Lynch and Corry 1998). Despite the difference in workload, the basic salary instructional faculty and staff received from their institution for calendar year 1998 was similar regardless of participation in distance education. This analysis also looked at additional income faculty received from the institution, such as money received for summer sessions, overloads, or coaching, for that year. Full-time faculty who taught classes offered through distance education programs earned about \$1,700 more in additional institutional income (beyond their basic salary) than those who did not teach such classes; how-

ever, compensation for those who taught non-face-to-face classes was comparable to compensation for their colleagues who taught only face-to-face classes. Part-time faculty who taught either type of distance class were similar in the additional income they received.

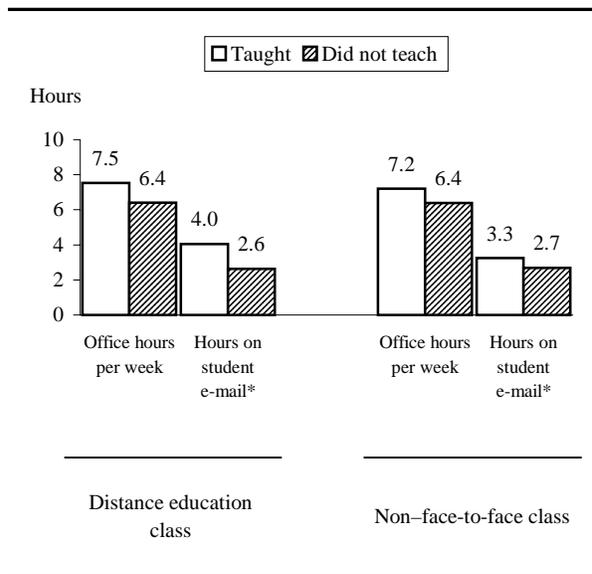
### Student-Faculty Interaction

Both proponents and critics of distance education stress that personal interaction is crucial to the learning process, but disagree over whether the kind of interaction the distance education student experiences is of comparable educational value to that experienced by the on-campus student (Gladieux and Swail 1999; Sherron and Boettcher 1997). NSOPF:99 included a few indicators of faculty availability to or interaction with students, including both traditional means (office hours and student contact hours) and a more novel one (e-mail communication).

Based on the evidence available for these types of contact, those faculty who participated in distance education appeared to interact with students, or be available to them, more than their nondistance counterparts in fall 1998. Full-time faculty teaching distance classes held slightly more office hours per week than their peers who did not teach distance education classes or non-face-to-face classes (figure C).

And because they taught more for-credit classes, while average class size was comparable, faculty teaching distance classes had more student contact hours per week than those not teaching such classes. Furthermore, full-time faculty who taught distance classes were more likely than other faculty to communicate with their students via e-mail.

Figure C.—Average office hours and hours spent on student e-mail per week for full-time instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions, by participation in distance classes: Fall 1998



\*For those who said they communicated with students via e-mail.

NOTE: Includes all instructional faculty and staff at Title IV degree-granting institutions with at least some instructional duties for credit. Distance education classes refer to any identified as being taught through a distance education program. Non-face-to-face classes are those taught with a computer, TV-based, or other non-face-to-face primary medium. See the glossary in appendix A for details.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998–99 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:99), Data Analysis System.

Among those exchanging e-mail with students, distance education faculty reported exchanging e-mail with a higher percentage of their students, and spending more time each week in this activity, than their nondistance colleagues. For example, full-time instructional faculty and staff who taught any distance education classes spent about an hour and a half more each week responding to student e-mail than their counterparts teaching only traditional classes. Many of these differences were found for part-time faculty as well.

## Other Findings

There is some evidence that faculty teaching distance classes are more “wired” than their counterparts not teaching such classes. Internet access and the quality of institutional computing resources were associated with whether faculty taught any non–face-to-face classes. As described above, those faculty who taught distance classes exchanged more e-mail with their students. They were also more likely to use class-specific Web sites. These results are consistent with the expansion of modes of distance education that take advantage of recent developments in advanced telecommunications (Phipps and Merisotis 2000; Turoff 1999; University of Illinois Teaching at a Distance Seminar 1999).

Relatively few differences were found between faculty teaching distance classes and their colleagues not doing so in terms of other factors explored in this study. For example, there were few differences in the use of various assessment practices, and in job satisfaction and opinions about the institutional climate in which faculty members worked. In fact, despite carrying larger teaching loads, faculty who taught any distance classes were just as likely, and in some cases *more* likely, to indicate that they were very satisfied with their workload, compared with faculty teaching only traditional classes.