

4. STUDENT SERVICES

The demand for student services for distance education is not reduced because the students are not on-campus; instead it changes focus and delivery method.

Goal 4A. Develop policies for student services, and to help implement them for the students who are engaged in their studies from off-campus. Facilitation of joint admissions with community colleges and OSU, financial aid, advising, and other electronic and Web based services will be supplemented with this funding.

Student Services

Distance & Continuing Education has identified layers of student services that range from those that are essential, to those that are desired, to services that would be extraordinary. During the first year of the grant, DCE worked to improve, develop, and implement policies for the delivery of essential services, such as Admission, Financial Aid, and Registration. In addition, a variety of "desired" and "extraordinary" services have been implemented or improved. These include, but are not limited to, library access, bookstore access, student health services, E-News (an electronic newsletter), and student packets.

The DCE Website, <<http://statewide.orst.edu>> provides overall information for prospective and continuing students, with links to offices on campus. Program descriptions, advising guides, courses, and tips for distance students are just a few of the items available on the site and developed as a part of this project. From the website, students and prospective students may email questions to the DCE office, and receive replies within two business days. DCE now also provides a 1-800# that is widely used by distance students. Students are encouraged to use the number whenever they have a question or need to contact a professor, advisor, staff member, or administrative office on the campus.

Admission & Orientation. Dual admission agreements have been completed between Linn Benton Community College, Southwestern Oregon Community College, and Portland Community College. Agreements are in process with other Oregon community colleges. At this time, there are almost 800 students admitted through a dual admission program. An Assistant Director of Extended Education has been added to the staff of Admission & Orientation (A&O), partially funded by this project. Blake Vawter was hired to fill this position and is one of DCE's main contacts in A&O, in addition to the Director, Robert Bontrager, and the Associate Director, Jennifer Kuzepa. A&O has an excellent website where all prospective students may find information on admission requirements, how and when to apply, and links to other OSU resources. There is also an online application form and a printable application.

A sub-group from the main Beaver Orientation Team (BOT) worked together, beginning December 1999, to plan an orientation for distance students. Initial discussions, which revolved around content and delivery methods, evolved into decisions to provide orientation in different formats. The first on-site Orientation planning will take place during spring and summer 2000, and will be offered during CONNECT week, just prior to the fall 2000 term. Concurrently, planning is taking place for a web-based orientation, which is scheduled to be online Fall 2000. Funds from this project were used to cover the costs associated with the creation of the online orientation.

Registration. DCE worked closely with the Registrar's office to help move DCE policies and procedures into closer alignment with OSU policies and procedures. This has solved many student issues related to late course registration, course adds and/or drops, and tuition refunds. The two most positive, dramatic changes benefiting distance education students have been the requirement for all students to register by phone or web, and the ability of students who have not yet been officially admitted to obtain a "Quick Admit." Since fall 1999, all OSU students have been required to register for their courses either by touch-tone phone or online. Prior to fall 1999, DCE staff accepted registrations from distance students over the phone, which meant a great amount of staff time was spent filling out registration forms by hand. Relief from this duty has enabled DCE staff to support a growing number of students with the same number of staff.

The introduction of "Quick Admits" has provided distance students with a simple method of gaining access to registration, without going through the formal admission process. This allows students to take courses *prior to* admission, and has eased the frustration caused by the time delay involved in the formal admission process.

The Registrar's office is currently in the process of hiring a person for a newly created position, which will be funded, in part, from this Grant. This position will be responsible for designing streamlined registration procedures for distance students and dual admission students.

Financial Aid. Federal guidelines for Financial Aid and the OSU data management system (i.e., Banner) have caused numerous difficulties for distance students. The guidelines require students to be enrolled at least halftime and to be formally admitted to the institution. A majority of distance students are employed full-time and are attempting to complete a degree by taking a course or two each quarter (3-6 credits). Many times distance education students take advantage of the opportunity to use the Quick Admit process to take courses before they complete the admission application. The federal guidelines were developed to accommodate traditional, full-time students, and need to be updated for use by adult, part-time students.

At this time, DCE tuition rates are based on a set fee per credit hour (\$120 per undergraduate credit hour), whereas on-campus OSU tuition rates are on a sliding scale (1 credit = \$274, 12 credits = \$1,218 or 101.5/credit). The Banner system is not programmed to recognize DCE tuition rates. Therefore, the system assigns a “zero-billing” to distance student accounts, which makes those students unrecognizable to Financial Aid administrators when they query the system. In addition, the financial aid employee who was working with distance students retired, leaving the work distributed among fewer staff. Due to these problems, there were a considerable number of distance students who were dissatisfied with the service they received from Financial Aid during the 1999 – 2000 academic year, in spite of the considerable efforts of Rebecca Martinez, Associate Director of Financial Aid.

In order to resolve the student recognition issue in Banner, during year two of the project DCE will initiate the creation of a query in the Datawarehouse (from Banner) to identify distance students who have applied for financial aid. This system will be implemented Fall 2000. Students will also receive a higher level of service than in the past, due to the addition of a new Financial Aid Counselor, Leonard Walker, who is responsible for serving distance students.

Advising (*Part of Regional Advising and Outreach*)

Program advising guides for each of the project bachelor degree programs are available to students on the DCE Website or in printed form. The web addresses are:

Environmental Science

<http://statewide.orst.edu/degrees/bachelors/escurriculum.html>

General Agriculture

<http://statewide.orst.edu/degrees/bachelors/agcurriculum.html>

Liberal Studies

<http://statewide.orst.edu/degrees/bachelors/lscurriculum.html>

Natural Resources

<http://statewide.orst.edu/degrees/bachelors/nrcurriculum.html>

Students are encouraged to seek academic advising on a regular basis, usually at least once per term. Academic program advisers are available by email, phone, or occasionally on-site at community college campuses in Oregon. DCE Central Office staff provides initial advising to students who are not located in one of the areas served by an Area Adviser. Online, interactive, advising will be researched during the 2000 – 2001 academic year.

Library Access

In part, as a result of this project, distance education students are being provided with a high level of services through the OSU Valley Library, and the Distance Librarian. The Librarian, Jean Caspers, provided general orientation information for distance students, through printed materials, a Web page, and via DCE's electronic newsletter, "E-News". The OSU Distance Librarian was also an active participant in the course development process, working with the project course development team and ensuring that faculty did not limit their course requirements due to misinformation regarding the ability of students to access information. Subject Librarians were responsible for providing reference and instruction services to students, and Access Services provided direct delivery of materials. Distance students had complete access to the library's online catalog, and electronic databases with full text articles. They were also eligible to receive an OSU Library Card, an OUS Library Card and/or an ORBIS Library Card. These cards allow use of the OSU Library and fourteen other academic libraries in the northwest. Also available to students was a web-based tutorial on identification, retrieval, and evaluation of information. DCE published information on library services in the 1999-2000 Handbook, and on a card that was inserted in the course packets.

During the 1999 – 2000 academic year, the OSU Library filled 2,112 requests for delivery of materials, held eight library instruction sessions for faculty, and responded to sixty requests for reference assistance. The rise in number of delivery requests (1998-1999 requests was 1,835) has resulted in a cost to the library of \$8,448 (cost per delivery = approximately \$4.00/item). Access Services has approached DCE with the request for a "face up scanner" to lessen the time and financial costs of material delivery. This will be considered as a use for project Grant funds during the 2000 – 2001 academic year.

The Library expects services to distance students to continue expanding and DCE is working cooperatively with the OSU Library staff to insure that we continue to provide high quality student services to distance education students.

Bookstore Access

As a result of this project and cooperative planning with the OSU Bookstore, DCE students are able to use the Bookstore's web and phone ordering systems to full advantage. Distance Education students have access to "one-stop shopping" for books, material packets, and videos, and the ability to pay for their purchases with a credit card. These systems work especially well for students who are unable to come to the campus (e.g., distance education students).

Terry Smith, Textbook Manager, and Cheryl Sawtelle, Textbook Office Assistant, worked with DCE throughout the year to ensure that distance education students received superior service.

In December 1999, Larry Roper, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, initiated the "Student Affairs Statewide Conversations." DCE has participated in these monthly meetings with representatives of Student Affairs offices throughout the campus. Susan Poole, Student Health Services, is the chairperson, with other participants coming from Student Conduct & Mediation, Counseling and Psychological Services, Career Services, and Disability Services. The committee's work has been focused on which services are needed/desired by distance students, and how to provide those services. Efforts to identify and provide services will continue through the second year of this project.

Three student affairs offices on campus have been particularly helpful in establishing communication links to distance students. Student Health Services (SHS) has a highly informative Website, with information that is useful for students anywhere, and has also contributed articles to E-News. Career Services has established a section of their Website specifically for distance students that include an orientation to Beaver Recruiting, Beaver Recruiting, Interview Techniques, etc. Student Conduct & Mediation also has an informative Website that is linked to the DCE site.

E-News, DCE's electronic newsletter, helps to keep distance education students informed and connected. The newsletter is sent electronically twice a term and includes topics such as, "Tips for Distance Students," "Eight Good Reasons to Keep in Touch With Your Adviser," and "Start the Term on a Healthy Track." Subscriptions have grown to over 500 since the first issue was distributed on April 22, 1999. To view an issue or subscribe, go to:

<http://statewide.orst.edu/student-services/e-news.html>

One service that is provided to students in two formats is "Step by Step, A Guide to Getting Started" in distance education. The guide is available on the DCE Website and is sent to every prospective student who calls or emails the DCE office. Step by Step takes students through nine steps, from "Contact Us," to "Start Your Course!" See:

<http://statewide.orst.edu/stepbystep.html>

An online survey of student services was conducted from May 3, 1999 through June 9, 2000. The survey consisted of a total of eighteen questions, beginning with seven demographic/background questions and concluding with eleven questions asking respondents to rate the helpfulness of various student services. In response to the question, "When you think about taking classes from a distance, how important are the following student services to you?" participants

were asked to choose one of three responses, “Very Helpful,” “Somewhat Helpful,” or “Not Helpful” Out of the eleven services listed, the three top priority services were:

- Course Packets,
- Toll-Free Number, and
- Library Services.

DCE mails Course Packets to all registered students at the beginning of every term. Each packet includes a signed letter, a syllabus for each course in which the student is enrolled, a DCE handbook, information on contacting advisers, a term calendar, course evaluation forms, and some promotional material, such as an OSU static sticker or a pencil. Returning students begin calling about their packets as soon as they register, which confirms this service as a high priority.

Priority number two from the survey, the Toll-Free Number, is an affirmation of the importance students place on the ability to speak with a “real person” when they need help. The DCE central office staff extends a helpful, human touch to students who might otherwise feel as if they had been set adrift to find their own way through the maze of higher education. The value of an excellent staff cannot be overstated.

Online Survey Report: Student Services

During this reporting period, a survey was conducted on the DCE Website to begin learning how varied student services are valued by distance, and prospective distance, students. The survey primarily served as a pilot test for future DCE online surveys that will be used in the second and third years of this project.

Survey. The survey (the survey is no longer active) consisted of a total of 18 questions, beginning with 7 demographic/background questions and concluding with 11 questions asking respondents to rate the helpfulness of various student services. For the final 11 questions, survey participants were asked, “When you think about taking classes from a distance, how important are the following student services to you?” Survey respondents then rated each listed student service as “Very Helpful,” “Somewhat Helpful,” or “Not Helpful.” As incentive for their participation, respondents were able to enter a drawing for \$50 gift certificate to the OSU Bookstore.

The survey can be viewed at:

<http://statewide.orst.edu/survey>

A total of 122 participants responded to the survey, 117 of whom entered the drawing. Data from the survey indicated the majority of participants were female

(61%) and had not yet completed a bachelor's degree (57%). A large majority of participants (81%) were under 50 years of age, with a fairly even distribution between the three lowest age categories.

Table 7. Online Marketing Survey Demographics

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Education</u>
61% -- Female 39% -- Male	23% -- 18-24 yrs 27% -- 25-34 yrs 39% -- 35-49 yrs 11% -- 50-64 yrs 1% -- 65+ yrs	30% -- High School 27% -- Associate Degree 31% -- Bachelors Degree 10% -- Masters Degree 2% -- Doctorate Degree

The vast majority of survey respondents were from the United States (97%), with most residing in Oregon (74%). A small portion of survey participants were from the nearby states of Washington, Idaho, and California (8%), with the remaining (18%) coming from widely scattered states. Nearly half of participants (42%) had previously taken a distance course, but relatively few (23%) had taken a distance course from OSU.

Student Service Survey Results. Results of the student service portion of the survey indicated a strong preference for what is termed "traditional" service. A large majority of participants rated three services as "Very Helpful," receiving a course packet by mail (95%), having a toll-free number available (78%), and access to Library Services (77%). Other results are shown below.

Percentage of "Very Helpful" ratings for each student service:

Top Priority

- 95% -- Course Packet
- 78% -- Toll-Free Number
- 77% -- Library Services

Medium Priority (rated "Very Helpful" by half or more participants)

- 63% -- Online Tutoring
- 58% -- OSU E-News
- 53% -- Technical Assistance
- 50% -- Orientation for New Distance Students

Low Priority

- 44% -- Training in Taking Distance Courses

35% -- Career Services
31% -- Contact with Other Distance Students
12% -- Health Services

Conclusion

The results of the survey, though preliminary, do indicate some possible directions for improving services and the marketing of those services to DCE students and prospective students. The three services receiving the highest rankings, for example, will be given a higher priority in marketing and customer service planning. Hours for the toll-free number may be expanded, library services may be integrated more closely into distance education course work, and innovative improvements in course-related mailings will be considered during the second year of the project.