

8. GRANT EVALUATION AND ADMINISTRATION

In order to properly evaluate the project, OSU will contract with an independent evaluation agency.

Goal 8A. An independent evaluation will be conducted to determine whether the funding helped OSU Distance and Continuing Education meet the project goals.

In January 2000, Oregon State University (OSU) contacted the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) about externally evaluating a recently-awarded a Congressionally Directed Grant with oversight from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education.

In March 2000, NCHEMS developed a formal evaluation plan for the OSU Distance Education Project. The plan was presented to the Director of Distance Education, Dr. Mark Merickel and approved. The evaluation plan included a series of questions that were based on the OSU proposal. These questions were intended to critically examine the following areas:

- Policy and institutional response to the project,
- Faculty responses to changing pedagogy, working in teams, and working with software, and
- Student responses to the new courses.

Based on the grant proposal, a full evaluation plan was drafted and finalized (see Appendix A). The first site visit of the grant was October 9 and 12, 2000, near the beginning of the second full year of the grant. Because Oregon State is on the quarter system with its fall term beginning near the end of September it made little sense to visit the campus for a site visit just to complete it before the end of the fiscal year. Rather it made more sense to wait to talk with faculty who had been working on courses over the summer. They would then be able to complete their work and get settled during the fall term prior to being interviewed. Twenty people met with the evaluator during the two-day visit. In addition, the evaluator reviewed documents and the Oregon State University website (www.orst.edu). This document contains the results from the first evaluation report for the grant.

The project evaluation was formative. That is, the evaluation data are intended to facilitate improvement of the DCE unit and DE course development process for the university. This first formal site evaluation was intended to determine how DCE is progressing after one year toward the goals of the grant. The focus of the site visit interviews was the progress that had been made on the FIPSE grant objectives.

By October 2000, several changes had happened at OSU regarding the administration of this project. First, early in the calendar year, the original principal investigator left the university. His successor, Dr. Mark Merickel, was chosen some months later and started work as the Director of Distance Education in May 2000. As might be expected, this staff change caused a delay in implementation of the grant. Shortly after the new principal investigator was appointed, the director met with the evaluator (Dr. Karen Paulson) to review the draft evaluation plan.

Second, key positions that had been vacant over the first nine months of OSU receiving the grant had been filled including the Dean of Distance and Continuing Education and the Associate Director of Distance Education. The new Director of Distance Education worked with the OSU distance education advisory team to determine how the project would be administrated and function. The principal investigator's goal is for Distance Education to move into the mainstream of the institutional operations and culture. He has the support of both the Dean of Distance and Continuing Education, the Provost, and the President of the University.

Third, new structures have been created melding parts of Distance and Continuing Education and Information Services' Communication Media Center (CMC). The change at this point is relatively minor but appears to be setting the stage for this DCE move into the mainstream of the institution. Instead of CMC focusing solely on on-campus instruction, it also now contracts with DCE to support their instructional development efforts.

Fourth, a rhetorical change is that although the title of the awarded grant is "Creating a Distance Education Alliance" the concept of a formal alliance has been amended. Instead, Distance Education is working with other campus units to develop a comprehensive course development strategy that will incorporate technological adaptations into the curriculum. The goal is to create an integrated system that will allow for strategic development of key courses using technological and instructional support from the university.

The project will be evaluated twice more. The second and third site evaluations by NCHEMS will take place in 2001 and 2002.

Goal 8B. An accountant will be hired to facilitate the accounting of the funds received from the Federal allocation.

An accountant was hired at a .70 FTE to facilitate the accounting of the federally allocated funds. The accountant will manage both the general accounting operations of DCE and the accounting, budgeting, and reporting of fiscal information relating to this project.

Goal 8C. The dean of Distance and Continuing Education, the director of Distance Education, and the director of Continuing Education will provide leadership for the funding allocation. The director of Distance Education will be funded at .1 FTE for contributions to the administration of the funding allocation.

Over the first nine months of the grant period, the Acting Dean of Distance Education, Dr. Sandra Woods and the Director of Continuing Education, Barbara Moon served as Principal Investigators and project directors. The current Dean of Distance and Continuing Education, Dr. Bill McCaughan and the Director of Distance Education, Dr. Mark Merickel were hired by the unit after OSU received the Congressionally Directed Grant. Dr. McCaughan and Dr. Merickel assumed the leadership and Principal Investigator roles for this grant in May 2000. Dr. Merickel is now the primary contact for the grant. Dr. Merickel is currently funded at .1 FTE for contributions to the administration of the grant.