



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# International Review of Economics Education

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/iree](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/iree)



## Is distance learning really a substitute for on-site learning? Perceptions of faculty who teach undergraduate economics using both formats

Timothy Wunder<sup>a,\*</sup>, Dawn Richards Elliott<sup>b</sup>, Scott England<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Texas at Arlington, , Arlington, TX 76017, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Economics, Texas Christian University, TCU Box 298510, Fort Worth, TX 76129, United States

<sup>c</sup> Colorado Public Utilities Commission, 1560 Broadway, Suite 250, Denver, CO 80202, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 14 October 2013

#### JEL classification:

A20

A22

#### Keywords:

Distance learning

Economics education

Faculty perspectives on distance learning

### ABSTRACT

This study draws from the divergent conclusions found in distance learning studies in general compared to those done within economics. Most studies of distance learning report no difference in learning outcomes compared to in class instruction. This is challenged by controlled studies within economics which report a negative difference in distance learning. Economics faculties who have taught the same undergraduate courses using both methods were surveyed. They perceive a learning advantage in onsite learning but not in learning outcomes. What explains this anomaly and what does it suggest about the growing use of distance learning in higher education? The survey suggests that differences in learning outcomes may reflect differences in evaluative techniques. This implies that distance and onsite learning are not perfect substitutes and suggests that learning tradeoffs must be managed. One example relates to faculty training on the importance of standardizing evaluative techniques.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business defines distance learning (abbreviated DL) as “any learning system where teaching behaviors are separated from learning behaviors,” (AACSB, 1999, p. 2). The United Nations conceptualize Distance Learning or Open Learning as an

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [tim.wunder@uta.edu](mailto:tim.wunder@uta.edu) (T. Wunder).

education system where “all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone who is removed in time and space from the learner,” (UNESCO, 2002, p. 8). By contrast in the more traditional onsite learning system (abbreviated IC for in class) both teaching and learning behaviors occur in the same time and space. As a result of innovations in the telecommunications sector course content is now easily replicated and delivered through different media. Today IC competes with DL and if growth trends continue onsite learning may one day lose its hegemony. Students value the flexibility of DL classes and although they understand the tradeoff associated with the losses in real-time interaction with faculty, they believe that they are not disadvantaged by DL. Instead students have faith that they are better able to either learn more or earn a higher grade in DL<sup>1</sup> (House et al., 2007; Hannay and Newvine, 2006; O'Malley, 1999). The response by institutions suggests a similar faith by university leaders. This view that DL does not confer a learning outcome disadvantage is supported by more than 355 studies but in recent years these have been challenged by economists who caution that the scholarly support for DL as a substitute for IC may reflect methodological errors.

Insights on the sources of this divergence are sought in this study by questioning economic faculty about their perceptions on learning outcomes using standard survey methods. The survey targeted instructors who teach the same undergraduate economics courses using both DL and IC at traditional universities. By surveying these instructors survey results can either reinforce or dispute the claims made in economic studies. If those surveyed generally perceive no differences in learning outcomes this indicates:

- (1) Existing economic studies are either wrong or solely applicable to the specific institution/faculty where the study took place; or
- (2) Economics instructors either deliberately or inadvertently structure their classes in ways that create an illusion of identical learning outcomes.

These possibilities imply very different things for the role and uses of DL in higher education and both implications are considered in this study.

## 2. The case for distance learning in higher education: trends and challenges summarized

Distance learning is one of the fastest growing methods of instruction in higher education and one that has caught the attention of development advocates around the globe. Until recently most DL classes were offered by non-traditional educational institutions such as the University of Phoenix in the US and Open University in the UK.

Theoretically DL promises to deliver the same learning outcomes as IC by unbundling the teaching and learning aspects of an instructional process. In order to achieve parity in outcomes an optimization of teaching methods must be achieved since in a DL system teaching and learning take place in separate spaces (Dykman and Davis, 2008). Technological innovations, falling IC enrollments, and concerns about learning outcomes have all contributed to the rise in DL. The electronic transmission of information is inexpensive and in many service sectors, such as financial services, this has resulted in lower delivery costs thereby encouraging widespread access. Many expect the same cost savings in education services however such savings have yet to materialize (Taylor et al., 2001; Rumble, 2001). Yet even without such savings DL enrollment has exploded and DL is no longer a niche market served mainly by specialized institutions. For example in the late 1990s 750,000 US college students were enrolled in at least one DL class; by 2002 this number was 1.6 million and by 2010 6.1 million (Moore, 2000; Allen and Seaman, 2011). Today 31% of US college students are enrolled in at least one DL class compared to 20.4% in 2008 and the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business reports that almost 40% of the business schools in 11 countries had implemented a distance learning system by the late 1990s. Females dominate DL classes, accounting for about two-thirds of students enrolled for the 2002–2003 and 2007–2008 academic years. Community Colleges seem even more willing to implement DL courses as enrollment for these classes doubled from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 (Miller, 2010).

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted this final student ‘belief’ is not statistically significant in some of the studies.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/357514>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/357514>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)