

Fact Sheet

November 10, 2006

Rising enrollment in distance education programs

- Nearly 3.2 million students enrolled in at least one online course during the fall of 2005.
- The number of students taking one or more courses online grew 39 percent in 2005, which is more than twice the growth of any other year.
- Nearly two-thirds of all colleges offering face-to-face courses also offer online courses and a majority of institutions identify distance education as a critical long-term strategy.

Distance education increases student access

- Almost all institutions with distance learning programs use the Internet as the main mode of instruction, allowing students to access their classes from any computer.
- Distance courses offer accessibility to some students who otherwise would not have access to higher education opportunities, including students with disabilities, adult learners and international students.
- Based on a 2005 study of foreign markets for distance learning, Hezel Associates estimates the global distance learning market will exceed \$69 billion by 2015.
- Following recommendations by the Distance Education Demonstration Program, lawmakers eased restrictions on financial aid and rules limiting distance enrollment to 50 percent in the 2005 Higher Education Act Reauthorization, to improve student access to higher education through distance learning.

Spotlight on accountability in higher education

- Policy makers push colleges and universities to demonstrate more accountability with the rising cost of postsecondary education and uncertainties about what colleges contribute to the bottom line of student development.
- The increased demand by higher education for more state and federal aid leads to growing pressure on institutions to justify financial support with outcomes assessments.

Quality in distance education

- Compared to traditional, face-to-face programs, distance education programs confront distinctive evaluation obstacles and are under continuous pressure to demonstrate value.
- With a rising number of students enrolled in distance learning courses, educational institutions turn to benchmarking as a method of quality assessment.
- In June 2005, Hezel Associates released the results of a national survey of 67 institutions of higher education, finding that 54 percent of respondents use benchmarking to measure their institutions' distance learning programs against those at similar institutions. However, the study found few similarities among responding individuals in the types of data benchmarked and the types of institutions used for comparison.

IQAT defines quality

- IQAT is a comprehensive database of peer-reported information geared specifically toward postsecondary distance education.
- It is a web-based tool used to track and benchmark institutional data systematically across time and among peer institutions.
- Providing the groundwork necessary for distance education programs to evaluate outcomes and development, and measure up to other schools, IQAT is a strategic tool for measuring quality and promoting growth in distance education.

