Is Distance Ed Shrinking the Alumni Donor Pool?

In 2002, DER profiled the work of David Schejbal and Fay Lesht, then both of the Univeristy of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, about their work studying the likelihood of distance education students becoming philanthropic donors to their universities. At the time, the concern was that these alumni would feel less connected to their institutions and therefore be less likely to make a donation. Therefore, the worry was that efforts to grow an institution's distance education program may be causing a long-term erosion of the university's donor pool.

In the time since Schejbal and Lesht's work, very little has been added to the understanding of the giving behaviors of non-traditional alumni. This is until the work recently completed by Fred Hurst, vice president for extended programs and dean of distance learning for Northern Arizona University. As part of the work for his doctoral dissertation, Hurst surveyed nearly 1,300 alumni of NAU, both non-traditional students who attended classes off campus (either by distance learning or in a classroom) and traditional alumni who attended classes on campus. The findings give greater clarity to the understanding of how and why non-traditional alumni give.

Traditional vs. non-traditional donors

"This is pretty much seminal research," Hurst says, explaining that there has been little research done to understand the giving patterns of non-traditional alumni. This is a potentially serious knowledge gap for an institution

With non-traditional alumni, the desire to give is there; universities just need to find ways to channel the interest.

like NAU, which boasts a student body that is one-third off-campus, meaning that a significant number of its alumni may not conform to the giving patterns of traditional students. Many universities are in similar circumstances. It is important, Hurst says, to compare these non-traditional students to "those who have social memories of Old Main with the snow falling."

Hurst set out to test several issues, posed in the research as hypotheses. The issues included:
- Relationship between traditional and non-traditional alumni and amount of giving
- Relationship between traditional and non-traditional alumni and frequency of giving
- Relationship between traditional and non-traditional alumni and participation in university events
- Relationship between traditional and non-traditional alumni, age at graduation, and giving
- Relationship between traditional and non-traditional alumni and giving interests.

The two populations in Hurst's study started out surprisingly equivalent. He found no significant difference in their age at graduation, nor in their level of involvement or affiliation with the university or their participation in sporting, alumni, academic, and miscellaneous events. Additionally, the two populations did not differ significantly in their frequency of donation to the university. This finding may come as a surprise to many, as it did to Hurst. "The original hypothesis was wrong; [I] thought that [non-traditional students] would give less because they were less connected. But they didn't seem to be less involved or affiliated," he says.

Cover...from page 1

What do they want to fund?

Where the two populations did differ was in their interests in giving.

Students who took most of their classes off-campus had a lower level of interest in giving to support such functions as:

- scholarships for on-campus, traditional-age students
- students studying in the alumni's field of study
- funding for new faculty to teach on campus
- new buildings or renovations to existing buildings on campus in the alumnus's area of study
- funding for on-campus research
- annual fund and unrestricted giving.

Non-traditional alumni did not differ significantly from traditional alumni in the priority they gave to:

- scholarships for non-traditional age students
- scholarships for students from the area where the alumni live
- funding for new faculty to teach off campus in the alumnus's area
- faculty for a new building or renovations to an existing building in the alumnus's town to make education more available
- funding to support field research in the alumnus's town
- funding for academic programs of interest to the alumnus
- funding to support athletics
- contributions to the alumni association.

What does this mean for fundraisers?

This research has some interesting implications for fundraising professionals who work with non-traditional alumni. The most interesting findings are the lack of significant difference between traditional and non-traditional alumni in the amount or frequency of giving, combined with the decreased interest among non-traditional alumni in giving to on-campus initiatives.

The combination of these two factors may indicate that non-traditional alumni are more interested in giving to campus-wide initiatives and specific appeals. They may also be interested in funding initiatives that traditional, on-campus alumni are less interested in funding.

"Everyone needs to know that the non-traditional alumnus is just as

Common Questions

DER asked Fred Hurst, *"What advice do you have for institutions who may only be beginning to develop their fundraising efforts?"*

"The new philosophy of fundraising is to find someone who has a connection with the university to [serve as] fundraiser," says Hurst. "The [most] effective way of getting to a donor is to find someone with the ability to give, then cultivate that person."

Hurst evokes a quote to the effect that it takes just as much energy to raise $50,000 as $50 million. The lesson is to spend more energy on the larger donors that may make the biggest difference.

This is not to neglect the power of the alumni annual fund, the typical recipient of the donations from smaller donors. Hurst suggests that universities think of this fund as one whose purpose is to cultivate future donors rather than one designed to accumulate a large amount of money out of smaller donations.

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the birds-eye view

The Second Revolution in Education is Here: Consequences and Implications for Educators

By Gary W. Matkin, Ph.D.

In this issue, Distance Education Report *is pleased to welcome a new contributor, Dr. Gary W. Matkin, dean of continuing education at the University of California, Irvine. Dr. Matkin is also Principal Investigator for grants funded by the Hewlett and Boeing Foundations dedicated to creating and promoting Open Courseware. Prior to becoming dean of continuing education at UC, Irvine, Matkin was associate dean of University Extension at the University of California, Berkeley. From his uniquely informed perspective, Dr. Matkin will offer a broad, and occasionally controversial view of the causes and effects of current issues in distance education—along with practical advice for the overwhelmed administrator.*

Western tradition traces formal higher education back to Socrates, whose methods were based on spoken exchanges between the teacher and the student, or between student and student. Plato's dialogues, in which Socrates is a character, illustrate the method. We realize that Socrates was illiterate – he could not read or write. We know of his teachings only because Plato wrote them down, an action that Socrates criticized as destructive to the learning process, because it eliminated the spontaneity of exchanges between minds. Thus Socrates, the founder of formal education, also became the first critic of the introduction of technology into the teaching and learning process.

The pattern of traditional education has always been challenged by technology, and the reaction of traditionalists against new technology has been a recurrent theme in education.

However, there have been only two technological advances that have had a truly revolutionary impact on education.

The First Revolution

The first revolution was created by the printed word, with the invention of movable type and the Gutenberg printing press around 1439. Curiously, between the invention of the Gutenberg press and 1994, when online and technology-assisted education began to catch on, technology had no significant effect on higher distance education, despite tremendous advances. There was radio, and later television, but today few would consider either of these technologies particularly important in the general history of higher education in the U.S.

The Second Revolution

The second revolution was created by the digitization of words and images — a revolution that most of us have experienced from its beginnings.

What evidence is there for thinking that Internet technology has prompted a true revolution, and only the second one in education?

First, the printed book completely permeated higher education, as the Internet is doing today. The printed book significantly altered the day-to-day behavior of faculty and students. One does not have to go far to see the second revolution in action today. Look at the prominence of Google searches by undergraduates in research papers, or the proliferation of laptops in library study rooms and lecture halls. The Internet technological revolution actually started by supporting classroom-based residential instruction. However, totally online distance

education soon followed. The widespread adoption by U.S. universities, including mainstream universities, of distance education conducted entirely online is documented each year in the Sloan C report.

Consequences and Implications

To survive the revolution, distance educators must exhibit all of the entrepreneurial and organizational skills, flexibility, and pragmatism that have characterized distance education throughout its history. They should be aware of, track, and respond to the consequences of the second revolution. Among these consequences:

1. Pockets of faculty resistance

Despite the widespread use of new technology, there remains in most institutions, pockets of deep concern over the changes to the traditional practices that the revolution is evoking. Of course, the introduction of new technologies always raises a hew and cry from traditional-bound educators whose concern about "quality" in education is often guided by an element of self-interest – it is hard to change and to discover advantages of new technologies that one doesn't understand and hasn't mastered. Resistance surfaces in the form of academic senate policies or collective bargaining agreements that seek to limit the use of new technologies. Distance educators need to identify this and work steadily to overcome the resistance.

2. Diffuse, uncontrolled adoption

As new technologies become available, early adopters will begin using them and will become strong

Managing Expectations and Working with Difficult Students Online

By Susan Ko, PhD

Whether a course is delivered in a traditional face-to-face format or online, managing student expectations is an essential element affecting success and satisfaction for both students and instructor. In online classes, managing student expectations takes on even more importance as the complexities of running a class are compounded by issues related to teaching and learning at a distance. Many problems can be prevented by careful preparation of registration and course materials. It's also best to be aware that sometimes the "difficult" student is merely one who is confused by ambiguous signals and directions from the instructor or bewildered by a poorly organized online class!

Spell it out

Online, the instructor's role needs to be clarified in regard to what students can expect in the areas of teaching, facilitation and feedback. For example, does the instructor intend to post formal lecture material or provide commentary as she interacts with students in the discussion area? And how often will the instructor access the classroom—everyday, four times weekly, or every day except Sunday?

Directions about the use of communication channels and protocols are crucial in the absence of all or most face-to-face meetings. For example, will the instructor hold "office hours" via real-time chat by appointment only or is she readily available via instant message a good part of every day?

Assessment of participation needs to be spelled out rather than assumed. For example, what is expected of students in forming an "adequate" response to a discussion question and how are they expected to interact with their peers?

How to get expectations across

• **Start at the beginning** Before a class starts, expectations for online students can best be embedded in registration materials, student orientations, online classroom demos, or the posting of course descriptions and class syllabi. If an institution does not supply orientation materials, then the instructor is wise to take this upon herself in the days leading up to the course start

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No matter how well organized and how superbly you communicate, it may be that you will encounter a student with whom it is difficult to work.

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date. Not only should the syllabus be available to students when they log in—email messages should be sent to welcome and orient students as soon as possible before the first day of class.

• **Use the syllabus** The online syllabus is a major tool to orient students to the expectations for performance on the part of both students and their instructor. The online syllabus, as described in my book, *Teaching Online: A Practical Guide*) can best be thought of in its threefold aspect—as contract, as map and as schedule. As contract, the syllabus establishes the responsibilities of students, grading criteria, and policies. As map, it explains how and where each aspect of the course will occur, and lays out the sequence of course activities. As schedule, it provides a detailed guide to the week-by-week readings, activities, due dates, and other details of the course.

While the syllabus should be able to serve as an inclusive reference

document for the course, supporting documents can spell out more detailed instructions as needed.

• **Forms of address** From the very first day, the instructor is setting expectations through his or her way of addressing students—is the text announcement or the audio clip welcome message formal or informal in nature? (Call me Professor X or just Joe?) How does the instructor facilitate the first conversations in the discussion area? Does he just post a message and ask students to post in turn, never returning to repost or comment?

• **Assignments: Clarity rules** In regard to specific assignments, logically ordered instructions along with simple rubrics can clarify the necessary steps and illuminate the criteria for successfully completing an assignment. Small details can make life easier for both instructors and students and avoid misunderstandings—when you say that paper is due by noon on Friday, is that US Eastern standard time or Central time? What do you mean when you tell students to use only "scholarly resources"? (They may want to know whether Time magazine and Wikipedia fall into that category.)

When it doesn't work

Nonetheless, no matter how well organized and how superbly you communicate, it may be that you will encounter a student with whom it is difficult to work. Some of these difficulties may not be particularly negative--just hard to know how to handle. For example, a "quiet" student online may present more of a problem than one who is quiet in a traditional classroom and gets credit for atten-

marketing

Online Education Enrollments Increasing, So Why Not Your Budget?

This is a critical time for you to seize the type of opportunity that only comes along in education every few decades.

By Keith Bourne – CEO/Founder, Adaptive Campus, LLC; he is the former marketing director for Sloan–C

In the past few months, states across the union have cut their funding to public colleges and universities by as much as 24%. For institutions that rely heavily on this funding, this meant the end to most expansion or new initiatives. Yet, higher education is one of the few fields in the U.S. right now that is actually experiencing growth. According to the Sloan Consortium, online education is the fastest growing area, growing by 12.9%, compared to the 1.2% growth rate of overall higher education.

When you experience budget cuts, it is tempting to simply cut activity across the board. But consider that budgets are likely to continue to decrease; this is a trend we have seen for years. At some point, you will either have to shrink with them, possibly out of existence, or you can proactively pursue the best opportunities in the marketplace with the funding that you do have.

Consider online education a solution to your budget problems, rather than yet another cost. And allocate 20-30% of your budget for marketing, as the for-profits do, so that you can achieve the type of growth that will actually make this whole effort worthwhile.

Keep in mind, marketing dollars are not just a cost, they are an investment with an associated return. And the return in the online education field can be high if done correctly.

Hire a consultant

Do not be afraid to hire a profes-sional to help you establish your marketing effort. The fact that development consultants are hired on a contract basis gives you greater flexibility to allow your efforts to expand and contract with whatever business environment you find yourself in. Professional marketers also bring a new perspective and years of experience in

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avoiding mistakes that may have costs you might not realize.

During the hiring process, make sure the professional is utilizing cost-effective activities appropriate to your budget and market, rather than just spending based on a one-size-fits-all advertising approach.

Last, make sure that they are training you or others on your staff in the process, which provides you with even more flexibility to bring the effort in-house when you have reached that stage.

Whether you have a limited budget or not, there are many ways in which you can improve the return on the marketing dollars you do spend. For example, online advertising is still showing itself to be the most cost effective for online programs. There are also many free tools and programs accessible via the search engine that can help you conduct low-cost marketing research. (Join us on February 24 for a presentation on other cost-effective techniques. Go to *www.magnapubs.com* to register).

Four reasons why you should not only resist the urge to cut your marketing budget but actually increase it:

1. **Online education is still booming.** Many online programs are seeing the typical increases in enrollments and applications that coincide with the deterioration of the economy. Unlike most companies on Wall Street, that are facing double digit declines in sales, the online education industry is experiencing double digit increases. Apollo Group, parent company of the University of Phoenix, just announced that their year over year enrollments grew by 18% in their last quarter (September-November 2008). This is clearly the time to invest in this field.

2. **Do it for the greater good.** Perhaps you feel that education should not be a "business" with so much attention to the bottom line. But while it is difficult to predict whether some schools will actually start to go out of business, it does seem certain that if you do not find alternative means for funding, the positive impact you could have had on your community and your ability to achieve your mission as a public institution will diminish. In other words, unless you pay attention to the business side of education and pursue opportunities when they present themselves, you will not be able to attend to the things that matter most.

3. **Marketing is cheaper right now, relatively speaking.** Most industries are cutting ad budgets because there is

dance. If participation through posting in a discussion forum constitutes a major portion of the grade, some way must be found to encourage the "quiet" student in the online classroom.

The disruptive student

Disruptive students, in any teaching and learning environment, are a challenge to manage, but they can be particularly so online. And, it may take longer for an instructor to realize that a student is actually being disruptive online since online communications can be ambiguous and one always wants to give students the benefit of the doubt. In those cases in which a student is openly abusive to the instructor or other students, it is essential for the instructor to immediately refer the issue to administrative authority. But there are many more disruptive students who, if skill-

fully handled by instructors at the start of such behavior, can be forestalled from reaching the extremes.

Posting a code of conduct in the class can certainly help set the tone for the class, but there are a few other general techniques that seem to be effective:

• Assume a tone of formality when handling a problem—formality in online classrooms signifies seriousness and firmness, especially when contrasting with an otherwise more casual instructor tone.
• If the student has made his or her issue publicly known by posting something inappropriate in the class forum, handle the issue by using both private email communications and a public clarification. The latter should not address the disruptive student but the class as a whole by calmly reminding the students about the course requirements, restating objec-

tives or purpose, referring students to resources for solving problems, as the case may require. Meanwhile, a private email to the student can allow for whatever personal communication seems appropriate.
• Do not allow yourself to argue on the level of the student or get too caught up into one student's drama. Remember that the other students are equally deserving of your attention.

For more information about managing expectations and working with difficult students, see Ko and Rossen, Teaching Online: A Practical Guide, 2nd edition, (Routledge, 2008).

Susan Ko will also present an online seminar with more detailed information on managing expectations and working with difficult students online on March 12, 2009 at noon, CST. For more information or to register, go to www.magnapubs.com. ●

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less business in their area. Lower demand for marketing channels means a lower cost for those that can still utilize these services. It also means that you are competing with fewer advertisements, which should allow a carefully crafted campaign to have a higher potential to break through the clutter.

4. There is room for price increases.
A common issue faced by institutions is the issue of pricing. Many public institutions actually do not bring in enough money from a student to cover the costs associated with that student. In this scenario, launching new programs that would otherwise have been a good opportunity actually becomes more of a

burden. This is an especially difficult situation if you have no flexibility with pricing.

The time has come for you to start using these massive budget cuts as justification to alter any restrictions you have on pricing. If necessary, launch the online program as a new pilot program with a separate pricing structure from your other programs. This may restrict the sort of funding that can be provided to these programs, but the reality is that there is still a lot of room for price increases compared to what students are paying at other institutions, especially in the for-profit world.

A thorough market assessment is warranted for any program that has not had one in the past couple years. Fred Snow, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at Compass Knowledge,

comments about market assessment results they have conducted, "We always find that a higher price can be justified. Many institutions are hesitant to raise prices, for fear that this will lower enrollments. But we never find that to be an issue."

This is a critical time for you to seize the type of opportunity that only comes along in education every few decades. Take advantage of online education while it still is an opportunity, rather than a necessity.

Keith Bourne is the founder and CEO of Adaptive Campus, LLC. He contributes to the Marketing in Education blog at www.marketingineducation.org, *which focuses on a variety of marketing-related issues in education. Keith is the former marketing director for Sloan-C.* ●

advocates for a particular technology without understanding the enterprise-wide implications. Having taken the time and effort to learn a new technology, early adopters resist alternatives. Thus, many institutions support two or more course management systems rather than face a battle with one or more faculty groups. Distance educators should seek to offer a centralized system that considers institutional goals and enterprise-wide service with the understanding that, with patience, a rational, considered, and cost-effective approach will win the day and gain credibility for their organizations.

3. Staying abreast of research (or, technology isn't everything)

Advances in new technologies have led educators to reconsider the learning process. Now, however, learning is being reconsidered independent of technology, particularly in younger students. Long the domain of cognitive scientists and recorded in academic journals rarely considered by educators, research in teaching and learning is rapidly shifting into application and experimental trial. Distance educators need to stay abreast of this research and its application and to incorporate research findings into their course design and delivery practices.

4. Concern over distance learning standards

Most resistance to online learning technologies will come as attacks on the quality of the teaching and learning process, especially as compared to traditional classroom instruction. It is therefore important that distance educators adopt strong institutional standards that define quality in both the traditional measure of educational quality and in the delivery methods being employed. These standards should be tied to accreditation standards, published, and where possible, put forward for institutional adoption. Distance educators should stay "ahead of the curve" of this issue, preempting the inevitable criticisms that will come.

5. The importance of doing something.

Take some practical actions to symbolize and support your role.
- Become a clearinghouse for information and the use of new technology. Create forums for discussion.
- Create and maintain an institutional inventory of new instructional technologies and the faculty members who are using them.
- Develop a process by which new technologies can be evaluated, tested, and adopted (or replicated.) The process should be supported by stated criteria of evaluation.

- Pay attention to distance learning standards—adopt them, publish them, defend them.
- Stay current with learning research and its experimental application.

Whatever barriers exist to the implementation of new, effective instructional technology are destined to be swept away by the "technological imperative." The historical context demonstrates that effective technologies will win out over tradition, particularly in the U.S. where pragmatism and market forces are much more powerful than in other countries. The second revolution challenges distance educators as never before, but also presents wonderful opportunities for new institutional roles and service. But it is increasingly clear that the second revolution has succeeded, and is producing many of the benefits it has promised (and there are many more to come), with few of the negatives (though definitely a few) that its detractors have predicted.

This is my first opinion column for the Distance Education Report *and expresses my understanding of a significant change in higher education and an opinion about its implications. In subsequent columns I'll strive to be concise, historical, and sometimes, controversial, in the hopes of sparking dialogue with my readers. Please feel free to send me your reactions at* gmatkin@uci.edu. ●

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willing to give to the institution," says Hurst. The key, he says, is "keeping in mind the interests of the non-traditional alumnus. It points to using different language, [emphasizing] general institutional goals, not on-campus goals."

Hurst suggests that his research might lay the foundation for other

investigations. He urges other researchers to replicate the research to confirm his findings, then extend them. He sees a need for a multi-institutional study comparing the giving habits of alumni across 10 to 20 institutions, and additional research comparing public and private institutions.

Institutions should also conduct their own internal studies tracking the

effectiveness of new language and approaches in addressing their non-traditional alumni and getting them involved in campaigns targeted specifically to their interests.

With non-traditional alumni, the desire to give is there; universities just need to find ways to channel the interest. ●

Using Surveys to Improve Courses, Programs, and Instruction, Part 4

By Patti Shank, PhD, CPT

This month, I'll discuss some special considerations to take when using email to collect survey data.

Advantages and disadvantages of email surveys

The biggest advantage of using email to deliver surveys is that the process is very simple. It only relies on the questions you develop and the recipients' ability to send and receive email. Almost everyone taking an online course has email, and email surveys can be delivered very quickly and at little or no cost.

Remember though, ease of distribution can—and too often does—lead to reduced planning and thought about design and implementation of surveys. Furthermore, reduced planning and thought may lead to data that is of little value.

It's easy to send your students an email survey, but it's also easy for them to overlook it. If you're using an email program such as Outlook, you know how easy it is to "lose" emails in a full inbox: out of sight, out of mind. Because most students, like the rest of us, get tons of email, it's also easy for them to skip over the email if they don't perceive it to be important as they're examining their inbox.

Email that you send to students can end up in spam filters by mistake, so some of your students might never receive the survey you send. If you send email to a student email account (such as *student.name@educational_institution.edu*) at the end of the semester, students may not be reading email in that account until the next semester starts. You may, therefore, need to send post-semester surveys to each student's "normal" (home or work) email address.

If you use HTML forms in your email survey (so you can format the survey as you desire plus include radio buttons, checkboxes, text boxes, and so on), students who haven't set up their email to receive HTML emails may see an unformatted mess. Using HTML forms inside email is risky.

All of these disadvantages may be enough to sway you from using email as a survey delivery medium. But the biggest disadvantage, in my view, is that email surveys are almost always very simplistic because they most likely will not contain any logic.

Survey logic allows you to input "go here if…" rules into your surveys. So if you ask questions about the extra credit assignment options you provided, for example, and the respondent didn't use any of the extra credit options, the survey will skip over any remaining questions about the extra credit options and take him or her to the next applicable question.

You can write logic into the text of your email survey questions, as the following example shows:

> 8. Did you make use of the extra
>   credit assignment options?
>   a. Yes
>   b. No (skip to question 10)

But adding logic to the question (8b) makes the survey question more confusing and time consuming. Some who select answer "b" will answer question 9 anyway, and that information will be confusing when you analyze responses. (I am dealing with this problem, personally, right now.) The more logic you add in this manner, the more confusion is likely to occur. In Web-based surveys, this logic is typically programmed in behind the scenes so the questions that the respondent sees are automatically based on answers to previous questions and the respondent doesn't have to figure out where to go next.

One last, but critical, disadvantage to using email surveys is that respondents may or may not feel that their answers are anonymous, especially if respondents are emailing their answers directly back to you. If the responses are not anonymous, you are very likely to get either no response or responses with less-than-honest information.

Making email surveys work better

Start your email survey with a description of the rationale for the survey and a short explanation of how you have used the data in the past to improve your course and instruction. Keep the survey short, and write clear questions (see previous articles for important tips).

Do everything you can to provide anonymity, and explain in the survey directions how this will be achieved. This is especially true if you are sending surveys while the semester is in progress in order to improve the course and instruction right now (a good idea). Students can send their answers to a third party, such as a graduate assistant or office administrator, who can strip identifying information and give you the data only. One faculty member I know asks her students to use remailers, which allow people to send email anonymously. Google "anonymous email" or "email remailer" to find out more about these services. Some are portals for sending spam, so check them out carefully before using.

Patti Shank, PhD, CPT, is a widely recognized information and instructional designer and writer and author, who helps others build valuable information and instruction. She can be reached through her website: www.learningpeaks.com. ●