

Distance Education UpClose

Published by the Office of Distance Education at New Mexico State University

Digital Pathways Day Two

Strategic approach focuses on planning, awareness, support, and coordination

Developing a strategic plan to further distance education for American Indian students and communities was the chief addenda item for the second day of *Digital Pathways: Best Practices in Distance Education for American Indians*, March 18–19, 2004. Distinguished leaders and scholars from American Indian communities across New Mexico, the Southwest, and the United States collaborated to develop an approach to distance education that emphasized planning, building awareness and support, and coordinating efforts between institutions and tribal governments.

NMSU's Office of Distance Education and NMSU's American Indian Program worked with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's *Anytime, Anyplace Learning* Program to host over 100 participants from nearly 70 American Indian, government, and education organizations. The first day of the conference focused on collecting information on best practices in distance education for Native Americans (profiled in the April 2004 UpClose Archive on the ODE homepage at <http://distance.nmsu.edu>).

The goal of the second day's strategic planning session was to develop a plan to support successful delivery of distance education to American Indian communities. Facilitated by Gerald Sherman, Oglala Lakota tribal member representing Beartooth Development Consulting, the participatory strategic planning process consisted of:

- 1) Developing a vision,
- 2) Identifying challenges and obstacles,
- 3) Formulating strategic directions, and
- 4) Planning implementation.

Developing a vision. Participants began by establishing context for the strategic planning process through sharing experiences in distance learning and American Indian higher education. Presentations from Thursday's Digital Pathways proceedings also formed part of the context for the strategic plan. Participants brainstormed distance education wants and organized them into seven topics: best practices, resources, options for distance education

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Call for Proposals

2004 NMSU Distance Education Conference: Collaborating for New Possibilities

The Office of Distance Education at New Mexico State University invites you to submit a proposal to the **2004 NMSU Distance Education Conference: Collaborating for New Possibilities**, to be held at the campus of New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, October 14-15, 2004.

Please visit the conference website at <http://distance.nmsu.edu/decon04/> for details.

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NMSU Events

ICT Training Services

May 5 – **WebCT 4.1 Upgrade**
May 7 – **WebCT 4.1 Upgrade**
May 10 – **WebCT 4.1 Upgrade**
May 11 – **WebCT 4.1 Upgrade**
May 19 – **WebCT in a Day**

Visit the Faculty area of the DE site [<http://www.nmsu.edu/distance>] and click the *Professional Development* link for these and other events.

National & International Events

May 5-7 – **Off-Campus Library Services**, Scottsdale, Arizona
May 6-7 – **Quality Learning: Making IT Click**, Winipeg, Manitoba Canada
May 9-14 – **NetWorld+Interop 2004**, Las Vegas, Nevada
May 12-14 – **GTC West 2004 18th Annual Government Technology Conference**, Sacramento, California
May 12-14 – **Online Educa Madrid – International Conference for European and Latin American E-Learning Experts**, Madrid, Spain
May 16-19 – **CUMREC 2004**, San Antonio, Texas
May 18-20 – **IMTC Forum 2004**, San Jose, California
May 21-27 – **ASTD 2004 International Conference and Expo**, Washington, D.C.

For more events, information, and links, visit the *DE Clearinghouse Conference Database* [www1.uwex.edu/disted/conf/].

Enhance Your Course with Online Elements

Improving Learning Through Assessment

by Julia Parra & Bethany Bovard

Traditional Assessments

- multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and other objective quizzes and exams

Alternative Assessments

- essay exams
- portfolios
- projects
- discussions
- interviews

This is the third and final part of our series *Enhance your course with online elements*. Last issue, we showed you how to create and find digital content for your course. In this issue, we will focus on student assessment options.

Assessment is a valuable component of any course, and it plays a strong role in students' learning. Using a variety of appropriate assessment strategies is a key factor in motivating students and keeping them actively involved in learning activities. In the online environment, where attrition rates can be high, motivation and involvement can make a difference.

Assessment Strategies

In face-to-face classes, you probably already use several traditional assessment tools such as quizzes and exams. Additionally, you might be incorporating portfolio, discussion, and project assignments that provide self, peer, and performance assessment opportunities.

Both traditional and alternative assessment strategies can be translated into online assessment strategies. For instance, if you use WebCT, you can use the quiz tool to create multiple-choice, true-false, short answer, and other quiz types. If you don't use WebCT, there are numerous web-based tools to help create online quizzes, case studies, and other assessment tools. The resources on the right and below will help get you started.

Online Assessment Challenges

Basing students' grades on more than two exams scores and using a combination of traditional and alternative assessments addresses one of the top concerns of online instructors — cheating and plagiarism. While there is no easy way to ensure that the student enrolled is the person taking the quiz, assessing students' discussion participation and projects in addition to using quiz grades will mitigate the effects of potential cheating on quizzes. And, if you grade writing assignments, you can use software to prevent and detect plagiarism.

Online discussions and activities present another area of challenge as they can be difficult to assess. However, if communication and interaction are important for students to succeed in your online class, then establishing participation guidelines and assessment procedures is a good practice. There are examples of discussion participation rubrics in the Faculty section of distance.nmsu.edu that can help.

If you need help with online assessment strategies or tools, contact us at 646.3524 to schedule an appointment with the Office of Distance Education Faculty Assistance Program.

Assessment Tools

- Hot Potatoes - [www.halfbakedsoftware.com/hot_pot.php] free quiz building software that helps you create interactive, multiple-choice, short answer, matching, and other quiz types.
- Quandary [www.halfbakedsoftware.com/quandary.php] - free interactive case study building software.
- Turnitin [www.turnitin.com/static/home.html] software programs that will help prevent plagiarism and improve peer review skills.

Digital Resources

General Assessment Resources

AAHE Assessment Forum

[www.aahe.org/initiatives/assessment.htm] Articles, conference information, and workshops on assessment

North Carolina State University Assessment Resources Collection

[www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm] Discussion groups, research, articles, handbooks, and other information about assessment

Online Assessment Resources

Distance Education Clearinghouse

[www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/irahe/] Research, editorials, and news related to distance education assessment and evaluation

University of Maryland University College

[www.uwex.edu/disted/evaluation.html] The Institute for Research and Assessment in Higher Education has resources on assessment and evaluation for face-to-face and online classes.

Ferl First

[ferl.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?page=189] Focused on technology and higher education, this site has a wonderful section on assessment

Learning Opportunities

ICT Training Services

[ict.nmsu.edu] ICT holds several workshops on the WebCT quiz tool and Respondus each semester.

Teaching Academy

[teaching.nmsu.edu] Maintains a collection of books on assessment and evaluation tools, techniques, and practices.

RETA

[reta.nmsu.edu/reta_cd/online/calendar.html] Assessment & Evaluation online workshop, May 31–July 2.

For more resources, see the Faculty section of distance.nmsu.edu

DE Global News

Here's a sampling of recent news from the world of distance education from Daily News at Distance-Educator.com: [www.distance-educator.com/dnews/]

- Assessment as Feedback
- University Administrators Say Obtaining Faculty and Management Support is the Greatest Challenge of Distance Learning
- College Board Readies New SAT Test
- ERate Players Clash Over High-stakes Issues
- Increasing Competition and Impending Consolidation Characterize the E-Learning Market
- Harvard Business School Publishing Showcases ELearning Customer Deloitte Consulting at ELearning Summit; Case Study will Reveal Successful ELearning

Submissions

We welcome your ideas, comments and suggestions.

Contact us at the Office of Distance Education to submit your ideas to UpClose. Deadline for submission is the 15th of each month for distribution on the 1st. Email submissions to: distance@nmsu.edu, or send to: MSC 3WEC. Call 646.4699 for assistance.

About UpClose

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delivery, networking and collaboration, leadership, dissemination and promotion, and program assessment and evaluation.

To develop the vision for this strategic plan, participants answered the question: How do we develop and implement successful and collaborative distance learning programs for American Indians in New Mexico and the Southwest? The vision for a program that developed from this question was complex and covered topics ranging from technology needs to faculty development and support to outcomes assessment.

Identifying challenges and obstacles. Once a vision was spelled out, participants brainstormed existing or potential challenges and obstacles that could hinder development and implementation of distance education for American Indian students and communities. The challenges and obstacles identified fell into six categories: competing institutional priorities; student issues; limited resources; inadequate preparation and understanding (of students and communities) by educational institutes; unidentified needs in the areas of infrastructure, programming, cultural considerations; and trust issues between cooperating organizations.

Formulating strategic directions and implementation. Using the vision as a guide, participants next identified goals for the future to accomplish the strategic plan. These goals became the charges of three action committees that were formed by participants. The committees will address topics of planning; building awareness and support; and coordinating efforts through networking, partnerships, and collaboration between stakeholders. The development of these committees formally began the implementation stage of the participatory strategic planning process.

One outcome of Digital Pathways was a planned collaboration between NMSU's Office of Distance Education and American Indian Program and the New Mexico Tribal Higher Education Commission. This collaboration will seek funding for community learning centers in strategic Southwestern American Indian communities. These centers would increase access to technology and support American Indian students, an important objective of Digital Pathways.

Complete conference proceedings will be available June 1 on CD-ROM and at http://distance.nmsu.edu/digital_pathways/. For further information, contact the NMSU Office of Distance Education's Project Coordinator, Robbie Grant, at 505.646.4699 or email rogrant@nmsu.edu.

The Vice Provost's Corner



While collaboration to pool resources is always a wise policy, it becomes especially important during times of tightened budgets. With our institution and others facing budget challenges, we can do more for our students by forming partnerships with other organizations who also aim to widen and support educational opportunity. The **Digital Pathways** conference (see page 1) provided a valuable opportunity to further build relationships between stakeholders with the aim of creating a positive and proactive environment for educational innovation and implementation.

As a result of this effort, we were successful in creating partnerships that are already hard at work on new distance education ventures focused on American Indian communities. This, in turn, is helping the ODE to fulfill the university's land grant mission of expanding access through outreach. We'll keep you updated on our progress in upcoming issues of *UpClose*!

Carmen L. Gonzales, Vice Provost for Distance Education