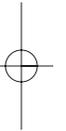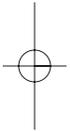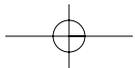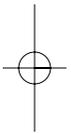# IV

POLICIES, ADMINISTRATION, AND MANAGEMENT
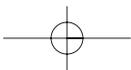
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Institutional Policy Issues

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Policy is defined as a written course of action, such as a statute, procedure, rule, or regulation, that is adopted to facilitate program development (King, Nugent, Eich, Mlinek, & Russell, 2000; King, Nugent, Russell, Eich, & Lacy, 2000b). Distance education policy is the written course of action adopted by institutions to facilitate the development of distance education programs.

Depending on the size of the organization, the leader may independently establish policies and then disseminate them to the organization. In larger institutions, policies are developed by committees of users and stakeholders. In universities, the curriculum committee may set policies for distance education. In schools, policies are often set by ad hoc committees of administrators and teachers and approved by the school board. In the private sector, policies are most often developed by staff and approved by executive teams.

This chapter will review previous work related to distance education policies, and will present a framework for the development of policies by educational organizations, especially K–12 institutions. Private organizations with distance education programs should find this information useful also.

IMPORTANCE OF POLICY

Policies provide a framework for the operation of distance education. They form a set of agreed-on rules that explain roles and responsibilities. Policies can be compared to laws of navigation, rules of the road, or language syntax. They provide a standard method of operation, such as "no-wake zone," "keep to the right," or "subject and verb must match." Policies give structure to unstructured events and are a natural step in the adoption of an innovation, such as distance education. The institutionalization of a new idea includes the development of rules and regulations (policies) for the use of the innovation (Rogers, 2003). One key indicator that distance education is moving into the mainstream is the increased emphasis on the need for policies to guide its effective growth.

Berge (1998) and Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) have proposed models for distance education policy. These models have been reported and evaluated a number of times in literature

(King, Nugent, Eich, et al., 2000; King, Nugent, Russell, et al., 2000; King, Lacy, McMillian, Bartels, & Fredilino, 1998), and seem to provide a useful framework for an investigation of distance education policy.

POLICY CATEGORIES

For this discussion, policies for distance education are divided into seven categories (King, Nugent, Eich, et al., 2000; King, Nugent, Russell, et al., 2000; Gellman-Danley & Fetzner, 1998). Key issues related to each of these seven categories are explained and then examples and sample policies are offered.

     Policy Area #1: Academic—The key issues in this area deal with academic calendars, accreditation of programs, course quality, course and program evaluation, Carnegie units, grading, admission, and curriculum review and approval processes.

     Policy Area #2: Fiscal, Geographic, Governance—The key issues in this area deal with tuition rates, special fees, full-time equivalencies, state-mandated regulations related to funding, service-area limitations, out-of-district versus in-district relationships, consortia agreements, contracts with collaborating organizations, board oversight, administration cost, and tuition disbursement.

     Policy Area #3: Faculty—The key issues in this area deal with compensation and workloads, design and development incentives, staff development, faculty support, faculty evaluation, intellectual freedom, and union contracts.

     Policy Area #4: Legal—The key issues in this area deal with intellectual property agreements, copyright, and faculty/student/institutional liability.

     Policy Area #5: Student—The key issues in this area deal with student support, academic advising, counseling, library services, student training, financial aid, testing and assessment, access to resources, equipment requirements, and privacy.

     Policy Area #6: Technical—The key issues in this area deal with system reliability, connectivity, technical support, hardware/software, and access.

     Policy Area #7: Philosophical—The key issues in this area deal with the acceptance of distance education based on a clear understanding of the approach, organizational values and mission, and visions statements.

Academic Policies

Academic issues are in many respects at the heart of why policies are critical. Academic issues deal with the overall integrity of the course. They deal with students, instruction, curriculum, and program. They probably have the longest and most widespread impact, as students take courses, earn diplomas, and move to other schools or higher education. Policies help insure that institutional integrity is maintained.

     A theme that is increasingly being applied to distance education policy development is referred to as an *integrated approach*. This approach advocates using the same procedures for distance education as for other academic issues. Instead of developing new structures and policies for distance education, the intent is to modify existing structures, regulations, rules, and policies to integrate a distance education approach. Flexibility is a necessary ingredient of an integrated approach. Teachers, administrators, and policy-makers should recognize that changes do not reflect a weakening, or that modification is not a threat to integrity. Rather, policy changes necessitated by the development of a distance education program merely demonstrate a natural process

and evolution of a school, district, or state to accommodate technology-based instruction. Watkins and Schlosser (2000) discuss Carnegie units and explain processes for demonstrating how distance education courses can be compared to traditional face-to-face classes in which "seat time" is measured.

First, once an institutional commitment to distance education is made, academic policies should be reviewed and distance education requirements should be integrated into regulations. Specifically, the following academic issues are examples of those to be considered:

- Course schedules and academic calendars, especially for synchronous learning experiences
- Event, course, and program approval and evaluation
- Student admission
- Grading and assessment of students
- Grade record-keeping and reporting
- Accreditation

Fiscal, Geographic, and Governance Policies

The central issue behind most fiscal, geographic, and governance (FGG) polices is one of ownership—ownership of the course, the student, and the curriculum. Ownership is defined in this context as the institution that has ultimate responsibility, and whose decisions are final.

Most of the time, the school offering the unit, course, or program has ownership, but, if a student is taking only one course as part of a locally offered diploma, in most respects the diploma-granting school is the responsible institution. Most often several policy statements need to be in place that relate to various situations in which courses are delivered or received.

With ownership comes the question of costs. Certainly the school offering a unit, course, or program has considerable expenses, but so does the receiving school and even the student. In sharing relationships the hope is that costs will average out over a period of time. In other words, if three schools enter into a relationship to share courses, and do so uniformly, the costs of offering and receiving courses will be fairly equal for the three schools. Conversely, if one school does most of the offering of units, courses, or programs then that school will have disproportionate expenses. Policies are needed to clarify how situations such as this are dealt with.

Other fiscal policies for schools offering instruction include those related to tuition, network fees, room and equipment expenses, administration of student files and records, and troubleshooting. Schools receiving courses have costs for room maintenance, library and media support, reception equipment, and student support. Technology fees are often levied to support distance education costs. If fees are implemented, policies need to be in place to determine who collects and distributes this money, and how expenditures are monitored.

Finally, agreements to regularly review costs and to share revenues are important. Often it is difficult to anticipate costs, so if agreements can be made in good faith to yearly or quarterly review expenses and income, it is easier to establish working consortia.

Geographic service areas are also difficult administrative issues. Traditionally, schools served clearly designated areas, such as districts, counties, or regions. With electronic distribution of instruction, these boundaries are invisible. Regulations that set particular geographic limits for schools may need to be clarified or altered when distance education programs are started.

Governance is closely related to finances and geography. What school board is responsible for courses delivered at a distance—the receiving or the sending board? Policies need to clarify this issue before problems in need of resolution emerge.

Faculty Issues

Faculty, or labor-management, issues can easily be the most difficult for policy developers, especially if teachers are unionized. Increasingly, existing labor-management policies are being used to cover distance education. Clearly, faculty need to be recognized for their efforts and expertise in working with distant learners, and until distance education becomes mainstream and expected of all teachers, policies need to be in place that clarify distance teaching responsibilities.

Key issues include class size, compensation, design and development incentives, recognition of intellectual property of faculty, office hours, staff development for teachers, and other workload issues. Many recommend that labor-management issues be kept flexible since many are difficult to anticipate (Gellman-Danley & Fetzner, 1998). However, faculty issues should be resolved early on in order to avoid critical problems later. Once again, the concept of integration is important. Integrating distance education faculty policy with traditional labor-management policy seems to most often be the best strategy.

Legal Issues

Many faculties and administrators are quite naïve about the legal issues involved in distance education. Policies about copyright and fair use; liability, especially for inappropriate use of telecommunications networks; and intellectual property are important to resolve. When units, courses, and programs are offered at a distance, they are easily scrutinized and violations are very apparent. In addition to developing clear policies related to these issues, many institutions are developing comprehensive staff development/training experiences for faculty that deal with copyright and liability.

Ownership of intellectual property is an important issue for distance education. When courses or portions of courses are packaged for delivery to the distant learner, the question of who owns the "package" becomes an obvious issue, more obvious than when students entered a classroom in a traditional school. On one side of the issue are those that emphasize the *property* side of the intellectual property equation. This group argues that the school is the owner of any works produced during working hours, using school resources, by faculty. At the other extreme are those that feel the contribution of knowledgeable faculty, the *intellectual* component of "intellectual property," is most important. This camp advocates course ownership by faculty.

Most would agree that both elements are necessary and that neither extreme best serves the school. Often, policies that share profits after expenses with faculty that develop instruction for distant learners are best. The exact split for this sharing should be negotiated, and policies developed, before courses are offered.

Student Policies

Student services should be integrated. In other words, policies related to students learning at a distance should be reflected by general student policies. However, regular policies may need to be modified to accommodate the distant learner. Specifically, if asynchronous instruction is being offered, then support services will need to be available when students need them. For example, [AQ1] if a school offers courses such as AP calculus to students in other schools, then distant students may need to be able to access support services outside of regular school hours. Homework "hotlines" may need to be established and be available to all students, not just distant learners.

Library/media center resources should be available to everyone, and computer laboratories should be of equal quality. Polices related to students and their needs are often overlooked, but become more critical in a distance education environment.

Student-support policies should be clear, flexible, and widely understood, not only by students but also by faculty. Policies related to feedback from instructors should be monitored and special requirements of distance learners, such as mailing of assignments, use of e-mail, access to Web sites, and proctoring of exams should be clear and designed to assist the student in becoming a successful distant learner.

Technical Policies

Usually, some organization owns the network used for distance education, or is responsible for its reliability. If a private-sector business is the provider, then clear expectations must be in place, and all members of a consortium should be part of the relationship. If a public agency such as a state education department or education organization is the telecommunications service provider, then very clear chain-of-command responsibilities should be in place. Often, telecommunications policies are not the same as other policies related to the distance education enterprise since they are not related to the educational mission of the organizations involved and often they are mandated by the private or public provider of services. However, telecommunications procedures should be understood by all people involved with managing distance education.

Policies related to student and faculty technical needs, such as the quality of personal computers needed by students who learn at home, should be established. Hardware, software, and connectivity minimum requirements should be clearly explained.

Philosophical Issues

Often overlooked when policies are developed are those which relate to vision, mission, and understanding of distance education. Many advocate that, when an educational organization decides to become involved in offering or receiving distance education, its vision and mission statements should reflect this commitment.

Of more direct importance to the success of distance education is the recognition that this approach is credible, high quality, and appropriate. Distance education is an innovation, new to most, and misunderstood by many (Rogers, 2003). Training, administrator support, publicity, and attention to quality are important components of a successful and accepted distance education program. Organizational policies related to these issues should include distance education.

SAMPLE POLICIES

Next, sample policy statements in each of the seven areas will be listed. These samples are to provide examples of issues that are often included in state and district distance education policy statements.

Academic

- **Title 92—Nebraska Department of Education Chapter 10**—". . . to be an accredited high school in Nebraska, the school must provide access to 400 instructional units for each [AQ2]

student each school year . . . schools provide required instructional units on sit or through a combination of local and distance learning programs . . . up to 100 instructional units of the 400 unit instructional program requirements of the high school may be met through the use of courses presented primarily through one or more forms of distance learning technologies, such as satellite, regional course sharing, or other audio-video distance learning. . ."

- "each course is shown on the high school class schedule . . . at least one student is enrolled and participating in each course to be counted . . . each student enrolled in a course is assigned to a local certificated teacher who monitors student progress and general appropriateness of the course . . ."
- ". . . off-site courses are made available to all students at the school's expense."
- ". . . at least one student enrolled in each course used towards compliance with the instructional program requirement."
- ". . . class is scheduled . . . each day that school is in session with a certificated teacher present (one teacher may supervise several courses within a single class period)"
- ". . . the distance education class must be shown on the high school class schedule."
- ". . . Carnegie class time equivalents will be the same for television courses as for any course."

Fiscal

- "students pay the same fees for distance education classes as for classes delivered on-site."

Faculty

- "Instructors must meet the standards and procedures used by the institutions for regular instructors."
- "Instructors teaching on interactive distance education will be compensated at the rate of $500 per remote site."
- "Instructor training, including system use and suggested teaching procedures, shall be a requisite prior to teaching a course via the distance learning system."
- "The school will provide 12 clock hours of formal training, including at least 8 hours using the network."

Legal

- ". . . course materials will be reviewed by appropriate school officials to insure copyright regulations are strictly adhered to . . ."
- ". . . course materials developed locally will be the property of the originating school, unless special arrangements are made in writing."

Student

- "students . . . must have the same services, the same options for continuing education, and the same choices of delivery methods as the traditional on-site students."

Technical

- ". . . students must remain in sight of the video camera."
- ". . . students must respect the equipment."
- ". . . three violations and students are dismissed from the distance education class."
- ". . . classes missed because of technical problems will be rescheduled and required. . ."

Philosophical

- ". . . is the mission of . . . school district . . . using electronic or other technologies to provide high quality educational experiences."
- ". . . courses delivered to distant learners are considered equivalent to those offered traditionally."
- "Each student, prior to graduation, will enroll and complete at least one course delivered using distance education technologies."

SUMMARY

Integrated policies for distance education are preferred (King et al., 1998). In other words, policies that provide guidance and direction to the educational systems should seamlessly include and incorporate the concept of distant delivery of instruction. Students should be defined by their enrollment in a course or program, not by whether they are distant or local learners (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2006). Initially, distance education policies will probably need to be infused with existing policies. Ultimately, they should be integrated to indicate that distance education is a routine and regularly occurring component of the educational enterprise. Policies are merely tools to facilitate program integrity.

In order to plow straight rows, the farmer does not look down at the ground, but at the end of the field.

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[AQ6]

[AQ1]AU: Spell out Advanced Placement?

[AQ2]AU: Please supply full reference for this excerpt.

[AQ3]AU: Need date retrieved

[AQ4]AU: Insert month presented

[AQ5]Need date retrieved

[AQ6]Need date retrieved