

Why Distance Learning? Higher Education Administrative Practices, by Gary Berg. Westport, CT: American Council on Education, Praeger, 2002, xviii + 208 pp. \$39.95

Reviewed by Veronica Diaz

Veronica Diaz holds a doctorate from the Center for the Study of Higher Education with an emphasis in Science and Technology and a minor in Management and Policy from the University of Arizona. Currently, she is a Research Associate and Administrator for the Project for Online Instructional Support (POLIS) at the Learning Technologies Center at the University of Arizona. Veronica studies various areas of distributed learning at both the 2- and 4-year level of higher education. Her research has focused on higher education intellectual property policy as it relates to faculty members and their instructional products. Other research interests include distributed learning activities and digital products in higher education along with emerging technology to include digital repositories and learning objects.

Why Distance Learning? presents a comprehensive review of literature and other materials in several relevant topics around distance education and distance learning programs in higher education institutions: administration, pedagogy, institutional motivation for participation, and commercialization. Literature in these areas frames the results of Berg's qualitative and quantitative survey of distance learning administrators, which includes 176 surveys and 17 interviews conducted to describe the current distance learning practices and policies in various higher education settings.

Berg makes a significant contribution to the field by providing significant background for the evolution of distance learning in higher education. He does so by placing distance learning in the context of literature describing both levels of institutional activity and institutional motivations for participating. He concludes by presenting his findings in the four areas reviewed in the literature: institutional motivation, administrative practices, commercialization and pedagogy.

The study reveals some interesting findings in each of the four areas of analysis. Although Associate's Colleges make up over a third of the participants, among a diverse set of motivations, Berg finds access (93%) is the most common reason institutions cite to pursue distance learning programs. The second is pedagogical advantage at 63%, followed by institutional desire to keep up with the competition at 55%. Also interesting is Berg's finding that on the whole, less than 25% of distance learning courses are taught by part-time or adjunct faculty members. This is especially interesting given that, according to previous studies, it was believed that distance education courses were developed by institutions to be taught by less expensive faculty labor and to free up other instructional resources. Berg notes that distance learning courses are usually developed and also delivered by full-time faculty members. In the area of pedagogy, Berg finds that those institutions motivated by revenue generation are relatively as concerned with the importance of attention to converting traditional course material to distance learning formats. Finally, results indicate that distance learning courses or programs are initiated by top administrators (32%), followed by continuing education administrators (26%). This finding, especially in the area of continuing education, supports the contention that higher education is moving toward the commercialization of instruction by increasing enrollment and access to traditional as well new student populations.

This study is unique in its mixed methods approach of combining the use of national institutional and individual administrator interview data. It is often difficult to reach an understanding of organizational behavior using either quantitative or qualitative data by itself. Berg first reviews the quantitative data and then uses those results to inform the subsequent interviews. He showcases the rich data collected through the seventeen administrative interviews and includes several excerpts that reveal, for instance, institutional motivations for the pursuit of distance learning to include boosting enrollments in stalled programs, the cultivation of corporate relationships, and the development of a marketing tool to attract new student populations.

One limitation of the study is that it seems to have a disproportionate number of participating institutions classified as Associate's Colleges (32%); although Berg finds that two-year institutions have historically played more of a leading role in the development of distance learning than four-year institutions. As a result, we see motivations and practices that are perhaps specific to that type of institution, while the literature review framing the study contains a general higher education perspective and in some areas specifically that of research universities. Interestingly, Berg finds that four-year institutions have revenue generation motives for pursuing distance learning, whereas two-year institutions are driven by the need to provide access. Since two- and four-year institutions are significantly different in their missions, student populations, and funding structures, it may have been useful to disaggregate the study, as well as the literature, by institutional type.

Berg closes with a summary of six best practices for those institutions venturing into the use of distance learning each of which touches on his four areas of analysis. First, he recommends that institutions understand their motivation for implementing distance learning and then try to incorporate it into their institutional planning processes. He cautions institutions that are entering into agreements with for-profit entities for their distance learning as his research finds that most organizations eventually moved out of such partnerships. As there were some modest, but lower levels of pedagogical quality in those institutions seeking to develop distance learning courses for the purpose of generating revenue, he encourages administrators to watch the quality and to understand the economic implications of such programs. Overall, Berg finds that distance learning is too closely modeled after traditional classroom education, rather than on new models of teaching and learning. Berg's last recommendation deals with faculty compensation and intellectual property rights in distance learning environments. On the first issue, he recommends the exploration of new compensation structures that are more flexible and equitable. On the issue of intellectual property, he suggest short-term copyright agreements and long-term "custodial" arrangements for the maintenance of distance learning materials.

Berg's *Why Distance Learning?* may serve as an important resource to administrators and institutions that are interested in pursuing or becoming more involved in distance learning programs, especially as they establish evaluate their motivations for doing so. Although, this study does not actually provide results, in other words, it doesn't provide evidence of institutional success in providing access to certain student populations or improving instructional pedagogy, it does offer some anecdotal evidence of success. A review of the interview excerpts provides some insight into institutional strategies for implementing distance education programs and the goals they hope to achieve in doing so.