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Alabama Community College Presidents' Perceptions Regarding Distance Education

Janina LaKeshea Nobles

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ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING
DISTANCE EDUCATION

By

Janina LaKeshea Nobles

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Community College Leadership
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2010

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The purpose of this study was to examine Alabama community college presidents' perceptions regarding distance education. Further, this study was intended to determine the adequacy of the training opportunities and support for faculty that teach distance education courses and what services are available for distance education students. This study was designed to investigate distance education in the Alabama Community College System and to provide information in an effort to create a comprehensive plan to maximize access to online learning for students within the system.

A survey was given to a total of 26 Alabama 2-year college presidents (22 comprehensive community colleges and four technical colleges). The online survey consisted of 40 closed-ended multiple-choice questions and 2 open-ended questions. The survey asked questions regarding the presidents' perceptions of distance education, online courses, student support, and virtual community colleges. The results of the statistical analysis were presented in both narrative and table forms to provide answers to

the four research questions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The study concludes with a summary, conclusion, and recommendations for further research.

The findings of the study showed that Alabama community college presidents' perceived distance education as important to the growth of their respective institutions. Alabama community colleges provided adequate training opportunities for faculty who taught distance education courses, and provided adequate services for students that enrolled in distance education courses. In addition, the findings indicated the following factors had a major or moderate influence on their institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings: seeking to increase student enrollment, making more courses available, making more degree and certificate programs available, meeting student demands for flexible schedules and reducing seat time, providing access to college for students who otherwise would not have access, and maximizing the use of existing college facilities. The findings also determined that institutions provided adequate services for students enrolled in distance education courses.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my guardian angel, my late grandfather, Herbert “Herbie” Horton. I could not have completed such a monumental task without your love, encouragement, and support.

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Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:5–6

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for his grace, protection, guidance, and wisdom and for directing my path. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my committee. Sincere thanks also go to Dr. Ed Davis and Dr. Wayne Stonecypher for their guidance, encouragement, and support. I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Adams and Dr. Marty Wiseman for their guidance, insight, and support in completing my dissertation. Special thanks go to Dr. Jimmy Williams for assisting with my research. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Alabama Community College System for supporting my research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Technology-based distance education is emerging as an increasingly important component of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 1997), and the Internet has the potential for anyone to access anything from anywhere at any time (Wall & Sarver, 2003). Contemporary, technology-driven distance education has been embraced as a potentially cost-effective means of overcoming time and location barriers to make higher education more attractive and accessible to students (Gorman, 1998) while maintaining quality programs (Eastmond, 1998). According to Allen and Seaman (2006), approximately 3.2 million students are currently taking online courses in the United States, and those figures are expected to grow annually in the foreseeable future. According to the Office of Postsecondary Education (2006), distance education has the potential to increase enrollment, and it is expected that it will not only continue to grow at traditional institutions but may also serve as a replacement for those institutions and programs. Technologically savvy students are no longer limited by time and space and are enrolling in online classes to give them greater flexibility for their lifestyles (Stumpf McCrimon, & Davis, 2005).

Distance education was once viewed as a non-credit educational program. It has quickly evolved into a comprehensive curricula, and students can obtain both credits and degrees (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 1998). Distance education has

become a widely conventional form for higher education to provide access and be cost effective (Eastmond, 1998). Distance education is accepted as an effective teaching and learning tool (Simonson Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2000), and nearly all institutions of higher education in the United States offer some form of distance teaching and learning (Saba, 2005). Distance education can boost service to nontraditional and underserved students by convincing institutions to direct more attention to those groups (Maeroff, 2003). Technology is rapidly replacing correspondence and traditional classroom courses that may be delivered at multiple locations in rural areas (Waits & Lewis, 2003).

The community college traditionally provided educational opportunities and services to individuals who otherwise would not enroll in a college or university (Cohen & Brawer, 1989) and has been at the capstone of distance learning technology because it often serves a diverse population that is often geographically isolated (Easterday, 1997). Two-year colleges make up the largest sector of higher education, in both numbers of institutions and enrollments (Dillion & Cintron, 1997) and command over 54% of all online enrollments in U.S. higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2007b). The community college is known for its responsiveness, adaptability, and flexibility and is often at the forefront of implementing and refining distance education offerings (Cejda, 2007). Access to technology makes education accessible and affordable anywhere and anytime in the 21st century global marketplace (Stumpf et al., 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, community colleges were expected to meet the changing needs of the communities they served through state-of-the-art programs, curriculum, and an array of alternative delivery systems that accommodated increasingly complex student lifestyles (Lape & Hart, 1997). There has been a tremendous surge in distance education programs across the United States, and colleges and universities must address more than an increase in enrollment for distance education programs to be successful. There are several areas that must be addressed for any distance education program to be successful: online student services such as admissions, advising, registration, financial aid, accounts payable and receivables, online campus bookstore, and online library access (Shea, 2005). There are also a number of unique issues that must be addressed for faculty that teach distance education courses, such as professional development, training in the use and application of distance education technologies, development of curricula and teaching methods for distance education courses, and access to consultation with technical support staff (Hawkins & Rudy, 2008). Having a distance education program is a huge undertaking and comes with both benefits and responsibilities by the universities and the students.

No formalized data were available from the Alabama Community College System with regard to distance education. The Alabama Community College System is just beginning to tap the potential of distance education (Alabama Community College System Chancellor's Report, 2008). With this in mind, the current study investigated Alabama community college presidents' perceptions regarding distance education.

Theoretical Framework

The social psychological approach and the network exchange analysis provide theoretical frameworks for distance education (Stoneall, 1983). The social psychological approach determines how society examines its influences on individuals and in turn how individuals influence society. Distance education is a society-driven approach.

Individuals and their needs regarding distance education and technology influence the development, growth, and changes regarding distance education and innovation (Shea, 2005). There is increasing interest on the part of some policymakers at both the federal and state levels to develop a level playing field in public policies affecting distance and institutional-based higher education, and many have begun to see distance learning as an exciting opportunity to increase the pace of change and reform in higher education (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 1998).

Network exchange analysis examines the exchange between people or institutions (Stoneall, 1983). This theory connects people and or organizations and their constant exchange. Students are part of the constant flow of services that are provided at the institution such as admissions, advising, registering, financial aid, accounts payable and receivables, library services, book store availability, and various auxiliary services.

Distance education requires fundamental changes in traditional approaches to education and requires both understanding and acceptance of the possibilities distance technologies offer (Lape & Hart, 1997). Institutional commitment to distance education initiatives is a key factor that contributes to the success of distance education initiatives (Monolescu, Schifter, & Greenwood, 2004).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine Alabama community college presidents' perceptions regarding distance education. Further, this study was intended to determine the adequacy of the training opportunities and support for faculty that teach distance education courses and what services are available for distance education students. This study was designed to investigate distance education in the Alabama Community College System and to provide information in an effort to create a comprehensive plan to maximize access to online learning for students within the system.

Research Questions

In this study, an investigation was conducted of the Alabama community college presidents' perceptions regarding distance education. The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do community college presidents' perceive distance education as important to the growth of their institutions?
2. Do community colleges provide adequate training opportunities for faculty who teach distance education courses?
3. What factors have an influence on an institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings?
4. Do community colleges provide adequate services for distance education students?

Justification of the Study

In the 21st century, technology is and will continue to be the driving force for the development of innovative programs and services. Not only does the Internet connect students with local, regional, state, national, and international communities, but it also provides a new means of fostering student diversity at the community college (Foster, 2004). By removing the barriers of distance education programs, institutions will now have access to a previously inaccessible pool of student candidates (Benson et al., 2008). The community college is one of the few institutions that gives disadvantaged students a chance to obtain a college education and provides adult learners with affordable opportunities to continue lifelong learning (Watson, 2004). In 2009, the Alabama Community College System embarked on a system-wide assessment of all distance education programs within the system and to develop a comprehensive plan to maximize access to online learning for all students (Alabama Community College System Chancellor's Report, 2008).

Delimitations of the Study

The following are delimitations of the study:

1. The study focused on community and technical colleges in Alabama and did not explore the distance education in other institutions outside of the state.
2. The population of this study was limited to the presidents of 2-year colleges in the state of Alabama and would therefore yield a small sample size. The 2-year colleges in the state of Alabama consist of Alabama Southern Community College, Beville State Community College, Bishop State

Community College, Central Alabama Community College, Chattahoochee Valley Community College, J. F. Drake State Technical College, Enterprise Ozark Community College, Faulkner State Community College, Gadsden State Community College, J. F. Ingram State Technical College, Jefferson Davis Community College, Jefferson State Community College, Lawson State Community College, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, Marion Military Institute, Northeast Alabama Community College, Northwest-Shoals Community College, Reid State Technical College, Shelton State Community College, Snead State Community College, Southern Union State Community College, H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College, Wallace Community College, Wallace Community College-Selma, and Wallace State Community College.

3. A survey was used to collect the data for this study.

Limitations of the Study

The following are limitations of the study:

1. Only 14 presidents in the Alabama Community College System completed the survey.
2. The results were limited to the participants' perceptions at the time the study was conducted.
3. The study did not take into account the level of computer literacy of the participants.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are included in this research study:

1. *Asynchronous* is a two-way communication method that does not happen at the same time (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005).
2. *Blended course* is a course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. A substantial proportion of the course content is delivered online; typically, blended courses use online discussions and have some face-to-face meetings (Allen & Seaman, 2007b).
3. *Community colleges* are regionally accredited institution of higher education that offer associate degrees (Vaughn, 2006) and typically include a transfer curriculum (credits transferable toward a bachelor's degree), occupational (or terminal) curriculum, general education, and adult education (Baker, 1994).
4. *Digital* refers to information that is stored in the form of bits (on/off signals) and transmitted via electronic media (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).
5. *Distance education* is a process of delivering instructional resource-sharing opportunities to locations where the learner and the instructor do not physically meet at the same place or time (Dooley et al., 2005). Distance education often incorporates other educational formats such as videotapes, interactive video, and television as well as Internet and online technologies (Stewart, 2004).
6. *Distance learning* refers to learning at a distance (Willis, 1994).

7. *E-learning* refers to instruction delivered via electronic media, which includes the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasts, audio/video tape, interactive TV, and CD-ROM (Govindasamy, 2002).
8. *E-mail (electronic mail)* refers to messages that are stored and sent via a computer system (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).
9. *Independent study* refers to a type of traditional distance learning in which the program accommodates the students' independence by being more responsive to the students' needs and goals (Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2005).
10. *Internet* is a massive network of networks that connect computers together (Dooley et al., 2005).
11. *Online courses* are courses in which most or all of the course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2007b).
12. *Online learning* refers to the use of the Internet and other online technologies in order to provide learning experiences (Benson, 2002).
13. *Synchronous* is a two-way communication method that is simultaneous or occurs at the same time (Dooley et al., 2005).
14. *Technology* refers to machines that distribute messages and include the postal system; radio and television broadcasting companies; and telephone, satellite, cable, and computer networks (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).
15. *World Wide Web* refers to a network of information that includes text, graphic, sound, and moving images (Dooley et al., 2005).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

“As the artificial walls of our great universities come tumbling down through technology, and as electronic networks expand the reach of university campuses, the range of influence of higher education will increase.... The teaching of the best professors... will be availableto anyone who wants to learn.”

John Sculley, President
Apple Computers 1988

The aforementioned quote is a testament about the emergence of distance education in the 21st century. Computers and the Internet have broken through school walls, giving students greater opportunities to personalize their education, access distant resources, receive extra help on more challenging assignments, and engage in learning in new and unique ways (Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2008).

This chapter provides an in-depth review of literature and explores distance education and how it has evolved from its early inception to today. The review of literature includes the history of distance education, distance education and the community college, and virtual learning communities. This chapter provides a thorough explanation of the importance of distance education to the growth of institutions, the importance of providing adequate training opportunities for faculty who teach distance education courses, and services for distance education students.

The History of Distance Education

Distance education was introduced in the United States in the late 1800s (Saba, 2003). Early versions of distance education included correspondence courses and live instruction at off-campus sites (Cejda, 2007). Correspondence courses using printed materials, postal mail, and television brought together instructors and students separated by great distances (Burgstahler, Corrigan, & McCarter, 2004). W. Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was an early distance educator and was well known as the father of the American junior college (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Research found that Harper created the world's first university distance education program by establishing a division that delivered university courses by mail (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Harper was also considered by some to be the father of American distance education because he strongly supported this form of education during his presidency at the University of Chicago; thus, the connection between distance education and community or junior colleges dates back over 100 years (Bower & Hardy, 2004). From correspondence courses, telephone classes, videotaped instruction, two-way interactive to the Internet and World Wide Web, distance education evolved considerably over the last century (Kretovics, 2003).

According to Moore and Kearsley (1996), distance education evolved through three generations. As illustrated in Figure 2.1 (Moore & Kearsley, 1996), the first generation of distance education was correspondence/independent study courses that used printed materials that were sent by mail. The second generation started with the open universities and broadcast/teleconferencing that used correspondence instruction and broadcast and recorded media. The third generation of distance education used broadcast

television or videotape with interaction by telephone, satellite, cable, or Integrated Service Digital Network (ISDN) lines. Computer conferencing networks and computer-based multimedia workstations were used later.

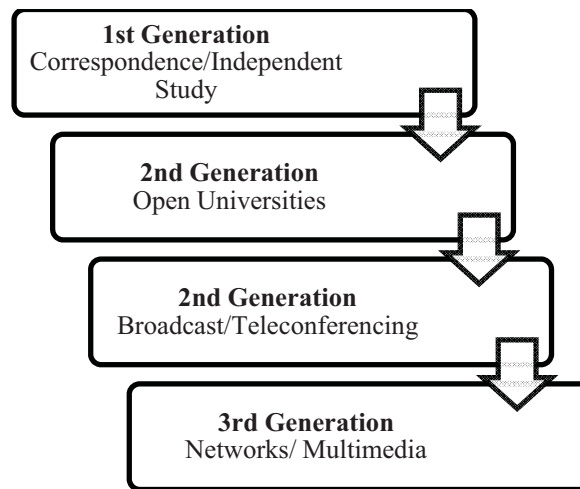


Figure 2.1 The Evolution of Distance Education
(Moore and Kearsley, 1996)

According to Saba (2005), at the end of the 20th century, there were three developments that had a dramatic effect on the future of distance education in the United States: the end of the Cold War, maturation of information technology, and the recession of the early 1990s. At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. government reduced its military procurement leading to massive layoffs of scientists, engineers, mid-level managers, and other highly skilled workers in the defense industry. The result was that publicly supported schools and institutions of higher education that received the primary source of their support from local and state taxes were put in financial jeopardy. The second development was the maturation of information technology. This meant that hundreds of

businesses and industries realized that they could become leaner by replacing mid-level managers with information systems, thus placing the front-line worker in closer communication with the top-level decision maker. The third development was the recession of the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of layoffs reduced tax revenues for local and state governments and decreased resources to respond to social needs, including education. Thus, the economic consequences of the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the new information technology led to efforts in rapid growth of the use of information technology in education and training by businesses and industries, government-supported colleges, and universities (Saba, 2005).

Prior to 1987, fewer than 10 states were actively engaged in distance education in the United States (Willis, 1994). By 1987, 10 states were heavily promoting distance education. A year later that number had grown to nearly two thirds of states, and by 1989, virtually every state had made commitments to distance education programs (Jonassen, 1996). Since the mid-1990s, there was a boom in the number of U.S. colleges and universities providing courses and degree programs via distance education or training courses delivered to off-campus locations via audio, live or prerecorded video, or computer technologies (Lewis, Snow, Farris, & Levin, 1997). By 1998, more than 800 institutions were offering computer-based distance education courses and degree programs (Reasons, 1999). Although education over the Internet has existed since the mid-1980s, only recently has e-learning become an integral part of higher education instruction (Simonson et al., 2000).

A Description of Distance Education

Distance education has become widely accepted as a means for higher education to provide broader access and achieve cost efficiencies while maintaining quality programs (Eastmond, 1998). Online courses give schools the option to grow beyond the confines of their urban campuses without having to invest in new classrooms (Messina, 2008). Existing technology can bring the instructor and the learner together in classrooms without walls to form a new kind of learning environment at campuses, business sites, public libraries, community centers, and at the home (Ball & Crook, 1997). The new technologies, along with the economic environment, are shaping a “different” university as they fundamentally change the educational atmosphere. The market for distance education programs has increased exponentially as the nation’s social and economic structure undergoes radical change (Schauer, Rockwell, Fritz, & Marx, 2005). Typically, distance learners were people who were adults with families, military personnel, full- and part-time employees, people living in rural areas, and those unable to afford full-time study (Dooley et al., 2005). However, the fastest growing groups of distance learners are resident, on-campus students who want flexibility to take courses that are not bound by time or place (Dooley et al., 2005). A growing number of students prefer the flexibility of asynchronous courses offered via the World Wide Web, which allows them to do the course work when their schedules permit rather than being locked into the specific times designated for on-campus course offerings (Kretovics, 2003).

Distance education is a feasible option for many people for whom campus-based education is difficult or impossible (Smith & Kelly, 1987). Additionally, distance education provides residents in rural communities access to the same educational

opportunities as their counterparts in large cities (Major, 1995). The promise of distance education is increased access. American higher education has kept up with the nation's social changes by increasing access and has evolved from one that primarily served elite and wealthy White adolescent males to one that provides opportunities for a variety of socioeconomically, ethnically, and intellectually diverse groups (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Proponents of distance education have cited its potential to reach the disabled, the homebound, the isolated, and the economically and educationally disadvantaged (Berman, Wyman, & Kunz, 1972; Jonsen & Johnstone, 1991). The Internet provides a way for students to communicate electronically with the instructor and other students in the class and acts as a pathway to endless resources and information. The Internet also provides convenient access to students who normally would not be able to obtain an education because of geographical distance or personal circumstances (Hardy & Bower, 2004). Through online and other distance education models, a fair chance at higher education for all is no longer a visionary's dream but a visible reality (Van Hook, 2005).

Distance learning and technology infrastructure have been hailed as leading to potential cost reduction and great savings (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). When institutions create distance learning programs, their focus is usually on surviving and building enrollments (Sachs, 2004). Institutional commitment to distance education initiatives is a key factor that contributes to the success of distance education initiatives (Monolescu et al., 2004), but distance education requires fundamental changes in traditional approaches to education. These changes require both understanding and acceptance of the possibilities distance technologies offer (Lape & Hart, 1997). There are several advantages to distance education: easier access, independent learning opportunities, a

more intimate interface with employment, better quality control over course materials, the possibility of cumulative improvement in pedagogic quality, the staff development effect, and under certain circumstances, lower cost (Smith & Kelly, 1987). A distance education program must be responsible for providing an environment that fosters the enhancement of distance education students' course completion rates (Monolescu et al., 2004).

The 1998 *Peterson's Guide to Distance Learning Programs* lists nearly 800 accredited 2- and 4-year public and independent institutions that are providing courses and/or programs at a distance, in addition to their core programs. By 2001, more than 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States offered at least some virtual courses; one third of those institutions were community colleges (Maeroff, 2003). It was estimated that 127,400 different distance education courses were offered in 2000–2001 (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2004). During the 2000–2001 academic year, there were an estimated 3,077,000 enrollments in all distance education courses offered by 2- and 4-year institutions (Saba, 2005). According to Allen and Seaman (2003) in 2002 and 2003, 34% of institutions offered online degree programs that could be completed online with 97% of public institutions offering at least one online or blended course and 49% offering an online degree program. College-level, credit-granting distance education courses at either the undergraduate or graduate/first-professional level were offered by 55% of all 2- and 4-year institutions (Waits & Lewis, 2003). More than two thirds of all higher education institutions provide some form of online offerings, with the majority of these providing programs that are fully online (Allen & Seaman, 2007b).

In 2004, Fletcher noted that distance learning programs are offered by two thirds of colleges and universities, and the number of institutions offering accredited degrees through distance learning increased to about 55%. Higher education institutions taught nearly 3.2 million online students during the fall term of 2005, an increase of about 850,000 students and a growth rate of 35% (Allen & Seaman, 2006). Almost 3.5 million students took at least one online course during the fall 2006 term; this represents nearly a 10% increase over the number reported the previous year (Allen & Seaman, 2007b). The 9.7% growth rate for online enrollments far exceeded the 1.5% growth of the overall higher education student population (Allen & Seaman, 2007b). In the 2007 report conducted by Allen and Seaman, the researchers found that over one third (1.1 million) of all enrollment in online courses were done by students in southern states. This growth is illustrated with the increase of online enrollment from 1.6 million in 2002 to 3.4 million in 2006 (Allen & Seaman, 2007a). Distance education has enjoyed a rapid growth in the United States in recent years and continues to expand (Saba, 2005).

Distance Education and the Community College

The community college has traditionally been referred to as “the people’s college” (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 8), and it is committed to providing access, opportunity, and a full scope of educational options to those who attend (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Because of these attributes, as well as the unique populations they serve, community colleges have emerged as leaders in providing distance education, particularly to those students who live in remote areas or have limited access to educational resources (Inman, Kerwin, & Mayes, 1999). The community college

commitment to serving students and its willingness to provide education anytime, anywhere make it a prime candidate to lead distance learning in higher education (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Community colleges are often the first to venture beyond predictable and comfortable borders in higher education, seeking to fulfill their open-door mission and tradition of community service (Dillion & Cintron, 1997). Community colleges are generally the first institutions to feel the impact of change because they are positioned so closely to mainstream values in American society (O'Banion, 1997). Community colleges more than any other sector of higher education have developed ties with business and industry, and distance education will strengthen these ties, further bridging the boundaries between higher education and the private sector (Dillion & Cintron, 1997). Education and training through the Internet is becoming big business worldwide (Waits & Lewis, 2003) and is now estimated to be a multibillion-dollar industry (Berge, 2001). Education analysts forecasted that the worldwide market for education could reach as high as \$2 trillion in revenues with the growth of for-profit education, along with universities opening satellite campuses and education content providers tapping communication technologies for international e-learning opportunities (Irvine, 2003).

Community college students cover a wide range of ages, ethnicities, personal situations, and social and economic groups (Boswell & Wilson, 2004). When determining the demographics of students, approximately one half of all African-American, Native-American, and Hispanic college students were enrolled at a community college (Kim, 2002). In fact, 46% of the community college student population was 25 or older, and the average student age in the community college was 29 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2000). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that

35% of first-time entrants in community colleges worked full time compared to 11% in the public 4-year institutions (Kojaku, Nuñez, & Malizio, 1998). Thus, community colleges provided access to higher education to a broader range of students than would be found at most 4-year institutions (Kim, 2002).

The U.S. Department of Education reported that 95% of public community colleges use asynchronous Internet as the primary technology method for instructional delivery in distance offerings (Waits & Lewis, 2003). Technological advances such as the Internet and its wealth of resources have changed higher education dramatically (Bower & Hardy, 2004), have opened up new options for interaction between staff and students, and have lifted constraints that previously seemed unavoidable (Smith & Kelly, 1987). Information technology programs provide access to technology and electronic resources to assist in bridging the digital divide (Bower & Hardy, 2004; Leach & McPhail, 2003). De Los Santos, De Los Santos, Jr., and Milliron (2000) found that community colleges were ideal to close the gap of the technology haves and have-nots and are well positioned to bridge the digital divide. Technology is not an end in and of itself; rather it is a means by which community colleges can better fulfill their responsibility to provide access to all students and to the community at large (Watson, 2004).

The Sloan Consortium conducted several studies regarding online enrollment and found that 2-year associate degree institutions have the highest growth rates that accounted for over one half of all online enrollments within the last 5 years (Allen & Seaman, 2007a). Associate degree institutions are teaching nearly six in ten (59.3%) of all undergraduate online students and are clearly making more inroads among the online learners (Allen & Seaman, 2006). When studying enrollment patterns in southern states,

Allen and Seaman found that more than half (62.1%) of all southern online students are studying at 2-year associate degree institutions as compared to 37.9 % of the overall higher education student population (2007a). Southern associate degree granting institutions taught nearly seven in ten (70.8%) of all southern undergraduate online students and had about 20% larger online enrollments, on average, than the national average for associate degree granting institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2007a).

Virtual Learning Communities

Virtual schools were founded to provide access to high-quality educational opportunities for students who traditionally lacked such opportunities (Davis & Roblyer, 2005). The transformation of higher education to include distance education and virtual learning environments has been critical for institutions to keep up with an increasingly electronic world (Williams, 2002). As the virtual schooling movement gained momentum and states increased their virtual schooling offerings, virtual school populations increased in both size and diversity of students (Roblyer & Davis, 2008). Distance education and virtual learning communities are a way to reach international students and to respond to institutional inequalities by reaching out to a more diverse group of students (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). Equal opportunity and equity requirements make it impossible for most schools to select only certain students to take online courses, so the emphasis has been on strategies to support students in ways that help promote retention and success in virtual courses (Roblyer & Davis, 2008). Developments in technology enabled community colleges to provide access for students throughout the

nation and the world and allowed them to meet the needs of an ever-changing society and to do so economically and efficiently (Bower & Hardy, 2004).

According to Schrum (1998), military, business, and nontraditional educational providers investigated the potential of the Web for online education. E-Army U is the largest military education initiative since the G.I. Bill (Hiltz & Goldman, 2004). The E-Army U first started offering online asynchronous courses in January 2001 and had 15,834 soldier–students by the middle of its second year of operation. Funding was then allocated to accept another 17,166 students by October 2002 (Hiltz & Goldman, 2004). The Army dedicated \$840 million over a 13-year period to the Total Army Distance Learning Program to provide global access to training through distance learning (Phipps, et al., 1998). Increasingly, regional or worldwide consortia were formed to pool online programs and resources; with the aim of creating a much stronger virtual university than any one “bricks and boards” campus could create and support (Hiltz & Goldman, 2004). Distance learning offers new approaches to adult learning and training methodologies (Ball & Crook, 1997).

In the mid-1990s, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) created a regional educational technology cooperative and in 1997 launched the Electronic Campus, an electronic marketplace of online courses, programs, and services that offered over 9,000 credit courses in more than 400 degree programs at roughly 300 institutions (Chaloux, 2004). States were increasingly looking to online strategies and resources to provide students with courses not available locally and to allow accelerated or remedial alternatives for students who needed them (Roblyer & Davis, 2008). Many states have active distance education programs (Lewis et al., 1997), and the number of students who

received part or all of their education at a distance could be well over 6 million (Saba, 2005).

Student Services

Putting student services online is no longer optional for colleges and universities. Students expect to interact with their institutions over the Web, and they judge their schools in part by the type of experience they have (Shea, 2005). College students of the Internet generation are so sophisticated with technology that they have been branded as digital natives because they are the native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet (Berk, 2008). Students are attached to MP3 players, iPods, iPhones, PCs, and all the other tools of the digital age and spend 6.5 to 11 hours a day multitasking (Berk, 2008). The emergence of the Internet as a mainstream communication medium has resulted in the development of new educational opportunities, such as instruction delivered via asynchronous learning networks, synchronous online seminars, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and 3-D virtual worlds (Berk, 2008).

According to Shea (2005) there was a recent Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnership project funded by the U.S. Department of Education and its Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, "Beyond the Administrative Core: Creating Web-Based Student Services for Online Learners," worked with three institutional partners and one corporate partner: Kansas State University, Kapi'olani Community College, Regis University, and SunGard-SCT, a manufacturer of student information systems in order to collaborate on the design of new Web services.

Figure 2.2 reflects the consensus of the project’s partners (Shea, 2005). Each suite contains a collection of services the partners agreed should be available to online learners. The services were divided into five suites: administrative core, academic, communications, personal services, and student communities suites. The figure illustrates dotted lines on the outer edge to show that this is not an all-inclusive list, but rather an evolving one. At the center of the web is the notation “one student and a curriculum,” a reminder to design personalized and customized services from the student’s point of view.

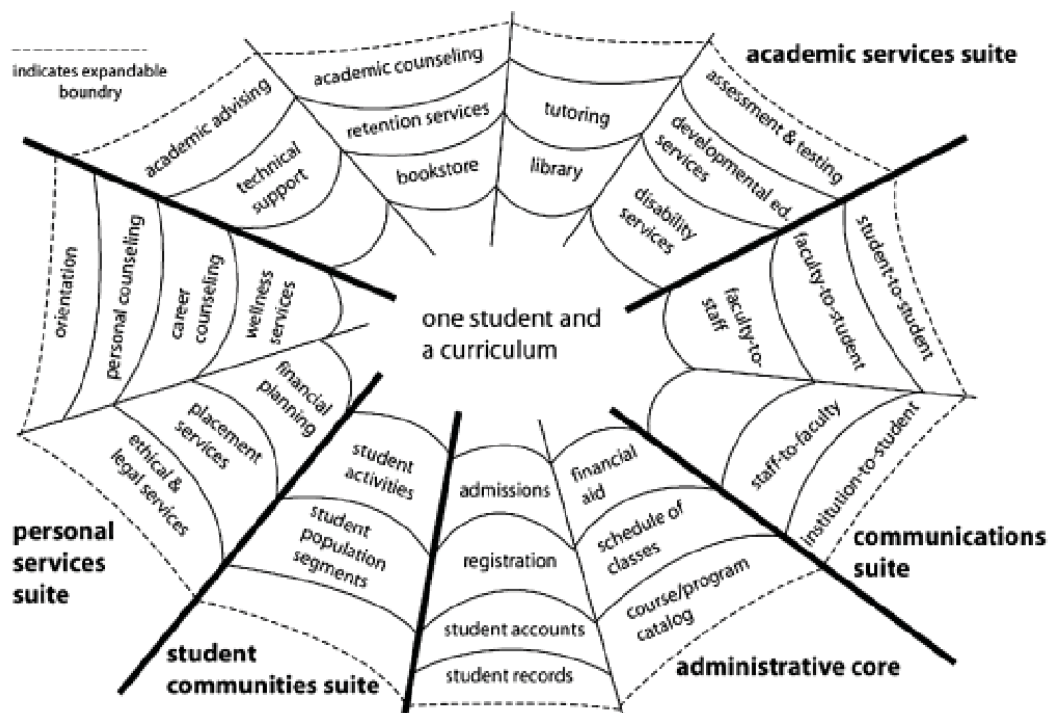


Figure 2.2 Student Services for Online Learners
(Shea, 2005)

The following subsections provide information about several components of these services, including bookstore, library, advising, student information and registration, and technology support:

Bookstore

According to Brigham (2001), a crucial aspect for institutions is being able to provide distance learning students with an affordable, convenient, and reliable access to study materials and resources. Brigham found that establishing an online bookstore with 24-hour access was a way to significantly improve the services provided by the existing bookstore and could result in increased revenue to the college (2001).

Library

Obtaining research materials and assistance particularly for those not living near or having access to adequate libraries has been a persistent problem for distance learners (Brigham, 2001). To address this issue, many institutions have launched virtual libraries and have become partners in library consortiums in which students can have access to several institutions' library databases. The library staff at one institution developed a wide range of services for online and distance learners, including catalog and database access, "ask a librarian" reference help, and basic library instruction (how to search, the difference between popular magazines and scholarly journals, etc.); (Smith, 2001).

Advising

One of the most important services for any student is academic advising, and this is just as important for distance learners. Students having online access to academic advising increases student access to advisors, and messages could be exchanged day or night (Brigham, 2001). According to Smith (2001), because students are more technologically sophisticated and seem to like to use the Internet for everything, a “chat” advising system was developed, and during normal business hours, students may ask advising questions through “Live Help.”

Student Information and Registration

According to Waddoups and Howell (2002), as computer technology became more readily available, those responsible for administering independent study courses began searching for ways to use technology to improve the efficiency of administering programs and improve the quality of students’ learning experience, and these changes included adding a toll-free 800 number for student support, the implementation of a rapid response assignment system, and a grade checking system that allowed students use of the Internet to check a databank for their grades. One institution implemented kiosks in which students can access their grades, links to the course catalogs, testing schedules, and the advising center; register for courses; print a graduation evaluation; and see their unofficial transcripts (Smith, 2001).

Technology Support

Campus information technology (IT) organizations provide common support services and infrastructure in support of the academic mission of institutions. The help desk is critical in helping students overcome the hardware and software challenges that might interfere with their using technology in learning or research efforts (Hawkins & Rudy, 2008). One institution created a Technical Support Tracker that provided students a method for seeking technical support during non-office hours. Technical assistance is requested by selecting the problem from a dropdown menu and typing a detailed message. The program then sends messages directly to staff responsible for each technical area, and students usually receive a reply within 24 hours (Smith, 2001).

Faculty Training

If e-learning is going to become a reality in higher education, the extent of support provided for faculty to learn about and incorporate electronic capabilities into their courses will be a key factor in this transformation (Hawkins & Rudy, 2008). According to a report conducted by Hawkins and Rudy (2008), there were several ways in which faculty were supported in the use of technology in teaching and learning: designated instructional technology center, faculty teaching/excellence center that works with IT, instructional designers who work with technologists, instructional technologists who are discipline specialists, student technology assistants who help faculty use technology, intensive support for faculty using technology, faculty training through scheduled seminars, faculty training on request, activities for faculty to share innovative ideas, and special grants/awards for faculty using technology (2007). In a 2000 study

conducted by the National Education Association (NEA), more than 400 instructors who taught distance learning courses were surveyed to determine their perceptions of distance teaching and learning. The study found that technical support definitely matters to the success of distance teaching and learning. Faculty members believe Web-based courses do a better job of giving students access to information, helping students master the subject matter, and addressing a variety of learning styles.

Summary

Given the constantly evolving and diverse nature of their student populations, community colleges are the ideal institutions to take the lead in advancing distance education (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Unless community colleges rise to the challenge of overcoming misconceptions of the distance learning paradigm, they will be unable to seize all of the opportunities it affords (Stumpf et al., 2005). Online education is here to stay, and technology will become an integral part of daily life for most students and will become a kind of catalyst to a learning revolution (Maeroff, 2003).

Technology has the potential to revolutionize education as we know it. Distance Education has already transformed education from its humble beginnings as correspondent courses to today where there are online courses. Students will continue to seek options that will allow for more flexibility so they can continue to have a career and a family. As more students continue to enroll in online courses colleges and universities will have to provide more services to meet the needs of those students to ensure their success. Student support services are at the heart of any institution and many programs are making these services available online for distance education students such as:

account payables and receivables, bookstores, library services, registration, and advising. Technical support is also a key factor for the success of distance teaching and learning. Faculty that teach distance education courses rely on technical support to provide training and technical support so that students can receive quality online instruction.

This chapter has provided an in-depth review of literature and explored distance education and how it has evolved from its early inception to today. The next chapter covers the methodology used in conducting this research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Alabama community college presidents regarding distance education. This chapter provides a description of the methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. The topics covered in this chapter include research design, population, sample selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

A descriptive data analysis was used to conduct this study. Glass and Hopkins (1984) stated that descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collected. This study was designed to explore Alabama community college presidents' perceptions of distance education.

Population

The Alabama Community College System is comprised of 22 community colleges, 4 technical colleges, and 1 upper-level university. For the purpose of this study, the presidents from the community colleges and technical colleges were chosen to participate. The colleges included in this study were Alabama Southern Community

College, Beville State Community College, Bishop State Community College, Central Alabama Community College, Chattahoochee Valley Community College, J. F. Drake State Technical College, Enterprise Ozark Community College, Faulkner State Community College, Gadsden State Community College, J. F. Ingram State Technical College, Jefferson Davis Community College, Jefferson State Community College, Lawson State Community College, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, Marion Military Institute, Northeast Alabama Community College, Northwest Shoals Community College, Reid State Technical College, Shelton State Community College, Snead State Community College, Southern Union State Community College, H. Council Trenholm State Technical College, Wallace Community College, Wallace Community College-Selma, and Wallace State Community College.

Sample Selection

Prior to beginning this study, approval from the Alabama Community College System and from the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research was obtained. After approval was obtained from the Alabama Community College System, Vice Chancellor for Instruction and Student Services Dr. Susan Price sent a memo on behalf of the researcher to all of the community and technical college presidents encouraging their participation in this study and expressing the importance of this research for the college system. Due to the low number of initial responses to the survey, the Vice Chancellor's office sent a second reminder to the presidents regarding their participation in this study. A total of 26 presidents received the survey, and 14 responded to the survey. Copies of the letters from

the researcher to the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, as well as the approval letter from the Alabama Community College System Vice Chancellor for Instruction and Student Services, are included in Appendix A.

Instrumentation

A review of the literature revealed that there was an existing survey that was done by the National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences (2008) that could be reproduced for this study. An e-mail message was sent to the author of the original survey, Dr. P. Tice, requesting permission to use the survey. A response was received, and Dr. Tice stated that the questionnaire was in a public domain and could be used for this study. Copies of the e-mail messages from the researcher requesting approval to use the questionnaire as well as the response from Dr. Tice granting approval to use the questionnaire are included in Appendix B.

Upon receiving approval from Dr. Tice, the original questionnaire was adapted for use in the current study. The adapted survey was then titled *Distance Education Survey for the Alabama Community College System* (DESACCS). The modified questionnaire included demographic questions, specific questions regarding distance education at respective institutions, and virtual community colleges. An online survey was then created using Zoomerang and administered. A copy of the survey used in this study is included in Appendix C.

The online survey was divided into four sections: (a) demographic information, (b) distance education, (c) student support, and (d) virtual community colleges. The survey was made up of 40 multiple-choice closed-ended questions and two open-ended

questions. The first section (questions 1–8) of the survey was made up of questions regarding demographic information that addressed gender, ethnicity, highest degree attained, and years of presidency in the Alabama Community College System. Questions 6 and 8 were open-ended in order for the participants to list the number of online courses offered at their institutions and the number of students enrolled in those courses. Question 8 addressed the number of certificate and degree programs that could be completed online at their institutions. The second section (questions 9–22) of the survey addressed questions regarding distance education and the availability of services for faculty and the factors that influenced institutions' decisions. Question 9 addressed the first research question: Do community college presidents perceive distance education as important to the growth of their institutions? Question 10 addressed the question: Does your institution have a separate distance education department/ office? Questions 11–14 addressed the second research question: Do community colleges provide adequate training opportunities for faculty that teach distance education courses? Questions 15–22 addressed the third research question: What factors have an influence on your institution's decision regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings?

The third section (questions 23–38) of the survey addressed student support and was made up of questions regarding recruitment, disabilities, and resources available for distance education students. Questions 31–38 addressed the fourth research question: Do community colleges provide adequate services for distance education students? The fourth and final section (questions 39–42) of the survey addressed questions regarding virtual community colleges. Section four was designed to gauge the interest of the

participants regarding virtual community colleges. Table 3.1 illustrates the survey items by sections.

Table 3.1
Survey Items by Section

Section	Items
Section one: Demographics	1–8
Section two: Distance Education	9–22
Section three: Student Support	23–38
Section four: Virtual Community Colleges	39–42

The researcher tested the content validity of the instrument by asking a panel of experts to review the contents of the online survey to ensure that there was no ambiguity within the survey. The panel was comprised of 20 Alabama and Mississippi college and university professionals and administrators from various 2- and 4-year institutions and diverse demographic backgrounds. After reviewing the survey, the panel of experts did not find any ambiguity in the survey. The survey was then made available online to the participants.

Data Collection

The survey was administered online through Zoomerang during the spring semester of 2009. Zoomerang is an online surveying tool that allows the researcher to create, administer, test, and analyze data received from a survey. As participants opened

the online survey, there was a letter of consent that detailed the purpose of the study, description of the survey, and duration to complete the survey. The letter also informed participants that their participation was completely voluntary and they could choose to stop participation at any time. After viewing the letter of consent, participants were granted access to complete the survey. Participants were not required to enter e-mail addresses or IP addresses automatically attach when submitting the survey. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, the link to the online survey was sent to the presidents from the Vice Chancellor's office with the researcher having no initial contact with the potential participants. Due to the low number of initial responses to the survey, the Vice Chancellor's office sent a second and third reminder to the presidents that included an electronic link to the survey. As a fourth attempt, the researcher entered each president's e-mail address into Zoomerang's electronic distribution list. The parameters of the survey were modified in Zoomerang, which included blind responses from the participants and automatic reminders to be sent only to individuals that did not complete the survey. The presidents were then sent an online invitation to participate in the survey. After two weeks, a reminder e-mail was sent as a follow-up to encourage the completion of the survey. As a fifth attempt, the researcher re-launched the survey, and the presidents were sent an invitation to participate in the survey. The survey was made available for two additional weeks as a final attempt to encourage presidents to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Zoomerang gathered the results from the raw data collected from the survey responses. The researcher then exported the raw data file into Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 16.0. Once the data were exported into SPSS, measures of central tendency and measures of variability were computed on the data. Measures of central tendency described the mean and median of responses to the closed-ended questions in the survey. Measures of variability described the range of responses to the open-ended questions in the survey. Descriptive research was the method used to illustrate the findings from the study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Alabama community college presidents regarding distance education. After obtaining IRB approval, the DESACCS was administered to 26 community and technical college presidents in Alabama. The survey was completed online using Zoomerang. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the findings of the survey research. The demographics of the participants are presented first followed by the participants' responses to questions regarding their perceptions of the importance of distance education, training opportunities that are available for faculty that teach distance education courses, the factors that influence decisions regarding distance education, the availability of online services for distance education students, and virtual community colleges. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Demographics

Section one of the survey instrument was used to analyze the demographic data. Elements of section one encompassed the gender, ethnicity, highest degree attained, and the years of presidency of the participants. In addition, information regarding courses that are formally designed as online, and the availability of certificate and degree programs are presented. Also presented in section one are two open-ended survey questions. The first question addressed the number of online courses offered and the number of students enrolled in those courses in 2007-2008. The second open-ended question addressed the number of certificate and degrees that could be completed through distance education in 2007 through 2008. Section one is presented in Tables 4.1 through 4.9.

Table 4.1 provides a display of the information related to gender. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.1
Gender ($N = 14$)

Gender	n	%
Male	9	64.3
Female	5	35.7

The majority of the participants were males (64.3%, $n = 9$). There were 5 females (35.7%) who responded to the survey.

Table 4.2 provides a display of the information related to ethnicity of the participants. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.2
Ethnicity ($N = 14$)

Ethnicity	n	%
Caucasian	12	85.7
African American	2	14.3

The majority of the participants were Caucasian (85.7%, $n = 12$). There were 2 African Americans (14.3%) who responded to the survey.

Table 4.3 provides a display of the information related to the highest degree attained by the participants. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.3

Highest Degree Attained ($N = 14$)

Highest degree attained	n	%
Doctorate of education	8	57.1
Doctorate of philosophy	6	42.9

The majority of the participants 57.1 % ($n = 8$) hold a doctorate of education degree. There were 6 participants (42.9%) who hold a doctorate of philosophy degree.

Table 4.4 provides a display of the information related to the number of years the participants' had served as president. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.4

Years of Presidency ($N = 14$)

Years of presidency	n	%
1–5 years	8	57.1
6–10 years	3	21.4
11–15 years	1	7.1
16–20 years	0	0
20–25 years	1	7.1
26 years or more	1	7.1

There were 57.1% ($n = 8$) of participants who had served as president for 1 to 5 years. There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who had served as president for 6 to 10

years. There were 7.1% of participants ($n = 1$) who had served as president for 11 to 15 years. There were no participants who had served as president for 16 to 20 years. There were 7.1% of participants ($n = 1$) who had served as president for 20 to 25 years and 7.1% of participants ($n = 1$) who had served as president for 26 years or more.

Table 4.5 provides a display of the information related to online courses that were offered in 2007–2008. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.5
Online Courses Offered in 2007–2008 ($N = 14$)

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	14	100
No	0	0

There were 100% ($n = 14$) of participants who reported that in 2007–2008 (12-month academic year) their respective institutions offered college-level, credit-granting courses that were formally designated as online courses. There were no participants who reported their institutions did not offer online courses in 2007–2008.

Table 4.6 provides a display of the information related to the number of online courses offered at the institutions in 2007–2008. The range and frequencies are provided in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Number of Online Courses Offered in 2007–2008

Range	10–140
Responses	<i>N</i> = 12
Participant 1	104
Participant 2	75
Participant 3	10
Participant 4	32
Participant 5	34
Participant 6	140
Participant 7	56
Participant 8	102
Participant 9	54
Participant 10	40
Participant 11	65
Participant 12	15
Participant 13	No response
Participant 14	No response
TOTAL	727

The responses to this survey question ranged from 10 online courses to 140 online courses that were offered in 2007–2008 at the institutions. Two participants declined to respond to this question.

Table 4.7 provides a display of the information related to the number of students enrolled in online courses in 2007–2008 at the institutions. The range and frequencies are provided in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Number of Students Enrolled in Online Courses in 2007–2008

Range	200–7,401
Responses	$N = 12$
Participant 1	2,359
Participant 2	2,625
Participant 3	200
Participant 4	708
Participant 5	3,665
Participant 6	7,401
Participant 7	2,693
Participant 8	2,105
Participant 9	3,240
Participant 10	372
Participant 11	2,500
Participant 12	250
Participant 13	No response
Participant 14	No response
TOTAL	28,118

The responses to this survey question ranged from 200 students enrolled to 7,401 students enrolled in online courses that were offered in 2007–2008 at the institutions. Two participants declined to respond to this question.

Table 4.8 provides a display of the information related to the availability of degree and certificate programs designed to be completed totally through distance education. This item was a Yes or No response and was not a Likert-scale response type. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.8

Certificate/Degree Programs Designed to be Completed Through Distance Education
($N=13$)

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	5	38.5
No	8	61.5

There were 38.5% ($n = 5$) of participants who stated that their institutions did have college-level degree or certificate programs available. Conversely, the majority of the participants (61.5%, $n = 8$) stated that in 2007–2008 their institutions did not offer any college-level degree or certificate programs that were designed to be completed totally through distance education. One participant declined to respond to this question.

Table 4.9 provides a display of the information related to the number of college-level certificates and degrees designed to be completed totally through distance education. The range and frequencies are included in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Number of Certificates and Degrees Designed to be Completed by Distance Education

Range	0–2	0–4
Responses	Certificates (<i>n</i>)	Degrees (<i>n</i>)
Participant 1	1	0
Participant 2	1	4
Participant 3	0	1
Participant 4	2	0
Participant 5	2	2
TOTAL	6	7

The responses ranged from zero to two certificates that could be completed through distance education. The responses ranged from zero to four degrees that could be completed through distance education at the institutions in 2007–2008. Overall, the participants indicated six certificates and seven degree programs could be completed online.

Section two of the survey instrument was used to analyze participants' responses to survey questions regarding the importance of distance education, training opportunities for faculty, and the factors that have an influence on the participants' institution's decisions regarding distance education. Research questions 1 through 3 are presented in this section. Section two is presented in Tables 4.10 through 4.16.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the participants' response to how vital distance education is to the growth of their respective institutions. A five-point Likert-scale was used to administer this question. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3; Disagree = 2; and Strongly Disagree = 1. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.10 and 4.11). Table 4.10 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.11 illustrates the mean and standard deviation.

Table 4.10

Distance Education and Institutional Growth ($N = 14$)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Distance education is vital	8 (57.1)	4 (28.6)	1(7.1)	0 (0)	1(7.1)

There were 57.1% ($n = 8$) of participants who strongly agreed that distance education was vital to the growth of their institutions. There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who agreed that distance education was vital to the growth at their institutions. There were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed that distance education was vital to the growth of their institutions. Conversely, there were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants who strongly disagreed that distance education was vital to the growth of their respective institutions.

Table 4.11

Distance Education and Institutional Growth Part II

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Distance education is vital	4.29	1.13

Most participants strongly agreed that distance education was vital to the growth of their respective institutions. This response had a mean score of 4.29 and standard deviation of 1.13 indicating that the majority of participants perceived distance education as vital to the growth of their institution.

Table 4.12 provides a display of the information related to the availability of a separate department/office for distance education. This item was a Yes or No response and was not a Likert-scale response type. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.12

Separate Department/Office for Distance Education (*N* = 14)

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	10	71.4
No	4	28.6

There were 71.4% (*n* = 10) of participants who stated that their institution did have a separate department/office for distance education. There were 28.6% (*n* = 4) of participants who stated that their institution did not have a separate department/office for distance education.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed the availability of training for faculty that taught distance education courses. A three point scale was used to administer this question. The response set used for these items included: Required = 1; Available 2; and Not Available 3. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.13 and 4.14). Table 4.13 displays the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.14 illustrates the means and standard deviations.

Table 4.13

Training Opportunities for Faculty Who Teach Distance Education Courses ($N = 14$)

Item	Required <i>n</i> (%)	Available <i>n</i> (%)	Not Available <i>n</i> (%)
Use of applications	9 (64.3)	5 (35.7)	0 (0)
Development of curricula	5 (35.7)	7 (50)	2 (14.3)
Teaching methods	6 (46.2)	6(46.2)	1(7.7)
Technical support	3(21.4)	11(78.6)	0 (0)

There were 100% ($n = 14$) of participants who stated that training was either required ($n = 9$) or available ($n = 5$) for faculty who used distance education technologies. There were 85.7% ($n = 12$) of participants who stated that training was either required ($n = 5$) or available ($n = 7$) for faculty in the development of curricula for distance education courses. The remaining 14.3% ($n = 2$) of the participants stated that training in development of curricula for distance education courses was not available at their institution. There were 92.4% ($n = 12$) of participants who stated that training was either

required ($n = 6$) or available ($n = 6$) for faculty in teaching methods for distance education courses. The remaining 7.7% ($n = 1$) of the participants stated that training was not available for faculty in teaching methods for distance education courses. One participant declined to respond to this question. There were 100% ($n = 14$) of participants who stated that consultation with technical support staff was either required ($n = 3$) or available ($n = 11$) at their respective institutions.

Table 4.14

Training Opportunities for Faculty Who Teach Distance Education Courses Part II

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Use of applications	1.36	.49
Development of curricula	1.79	.69
Teaching methods	1.62	.65
Technical support	1.79	.42

The use of applications had a mean score of 1.36 and a standard deviation of .49 with the majority of participants responding that training was either required or available. The findings suggest that institutions provided adequate training opportunities for faculty who taught distance education courses.

Research Question 3

The third research question addressed the influences on institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. Tables 4.15 and

4.16 illustrate the participants' responses regarding the factors that influence decisions at their respective institutions concerning distance education courses.

A four-point Likert-scale was used to administer this question. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Major Influence = 1; Moderate Influence = 2; Minor Influence = 3; and Not at All = 4. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.15 and 4.16). Table 4.15 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.16 illustrates the means and standard deviations.

Table 4.15

Factors That Influence Decisions Concerning Distance Education Courses ($N = 14$)

	Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not at All
Item	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Increase student enrollment	7(50)	6(42.9)	1(7.1)	0(0)
More courses available	8(57.1)	5(35.7)	0(0)	1(7.1)
More degree programs available	4(28.6)	4(28.6)	3(21.4)	3(21.4)
More certificate programs available	3(21.4)	5(35.7)	4(28.6)	2(14.3)
Demands for flexible schedule	13(92.9)	1(7.1)	0(0)	0(0)
Access to college	13(92.9)	1(7.1)	0(0)	0(0)
Use of existing facilities	6(42.9)	6(42.9)	2(14.3)	0(0)
Reducing seat time	7(50)	4(28.6)	3(21.4)	0(0)

There were 50% ($n = 7$) of participants who stated that seeking to increase student enrollment had a major influence on their institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 42.9% ($n = 6$) of participants who stated that seeking to increase student enrollment had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions, and 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who stated that seeking to increase student enrollment had a minor influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 57.1% ($n = 8$) of participants who stated that making more courses available had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 35.7% ($n = 5$) of participants who stated that making more courses available had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions. Conversely, 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants stated that making more courses available did not have an influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who stated that making more degree programs available had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who stated that making more degree programs available had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions, and 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who stated that making more degree programs available had a minor influence on their institution's decisions. Conversely, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants stated that making more degree programs available did not have an influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who stated that making more certificate programs available had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 35.7% ($n = 5$) of participants who stated that making more certificate programs available had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions, and 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who stated that making more certificate programs available had a minor influence on their institution's decisions. Conversely, 14.3% ($n = 2$) of the participants stated that making more certificate programs available did not have an influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 92.9% ($n = 13$) of participants who stated that meeting student demands for flexible schedules had a major influence on their institutions' decisions, and 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who stated that meeting student demands for flexible schedules had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 92.9% ($n = 13$) of participants who stated that providing access to college for students who otherwise would not have access had a major influence on their institution's decisions, and 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who stated that providing access to college for students who otherwise would not have access had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 42.9% ($n = 6$) of participants who stated that maximizing the use of existing college facilities had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 42.9% ($n = 6$) of

participants who stated that maximizing the use of existing college facilities had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions, and 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who stated that maximizing the use of existing college facilities had a minor influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

There were 50% ($n = 7$) of participants who stated that meeting student demands for reducing seat time had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who stated that meeting student demands for reducing seat time had a moderate influence on their institution's decisions, and 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who stated that meeting student demands for reducing seat time had a minor influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

Of the participants, 82.9% stated that seeking to increase student enrollment, making more courses and degree and certificate programs available, meeting student demands for flexible schedules and reducing seat time, providing access to college for students who otherwise would not have access, and maximizing the use of existing college facilities either had a major or moderate influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

Table 4.16

Factors That Influence Decisions Concerning Distance Education Courses Part II ($N=14$)

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Seeking to increase student enrollment	1.57	.64
Making more courses available	1.57	.85
Making more degree programs available	2.36	1.15
Making more certificate programs available	2.36	1.00
Student demands for flexible schedules	1.07	.26
Providing access to college	1.07	.26
Maximizing the use of existing facilities	1.71	.72
Student demands for reducing seat time	1.71	.82

Both the student demands for flexible schedules and providing access to college shared a mean score of 1.07 and a standard deviation of .26. The findings suggest that student demands for flexible schedules and providing access to college had a major influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings. All of the other items had means that indicated a major or moderate influence on their institution's decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings.

Section three of the survey instrument was used to analyze participants' responses to survey questions regarding student recruitment, accommodations for students with disabilities, and the availability of online services for students that are enrolled in

distance education courses. The fourth research question is presented in this section and in Tables 4.17 through 4.23.

Tables 4.17 and 4.18 illustrate the participants' responses regarding distance education being an active part of recruitment strategies at their respective institutions. A five-point Likert-scale was used to administer this question. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3; Disagree = 2; and Strongly Disagree = 1. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.17 and 4.18). Table 4.17 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.18 illustrates the mean and standard deviation.

Table 4.17

Distance Education as an Active Recruitment Strategy ($N = 14$)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Distance education is vital	3 (21.4)	6 (42.9)	3(21.4)	2 (14.3)	0 (0)

There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who strongly agreed that distance education was an active part of recruitment strategies at their institution. There were 42.9% ($n = 6$) of participants who agreed that distance education was an active part of recruitment at their institutions. There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed, and 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who disagreed that distance education was an active part of recruitment strategies at their institution.

Table 4.18

Distance Education as an Active Recruitment Strategy Part II

Responses	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Recruitment strategies	3.71	.99

This item had an overall mean score of 3.71 and a standard deviation of .99 indicating that the majority of participants agreed that distance education was an active part of recruitment strategies at their institutions. Conversely, there were participants that disagreed with this survey question.

Table 4.19 illustrates the participants' responses regarding potential students that are targeted for distance education courses at their respective institutions. This item was a Yes or No response and was not a Likert-scale response type. The frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 4.19

Distance Education Targets ($N = 14$)

Potential Students	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)
Non-English speaking individuals	0 (0)	14 (100)
Military personnel	2 (14.3)	12 (85.7)
Individuals with disabilities	2 (14.3)	12 (85.7)
Native Americans/Alaskan Natives on tribal land	0 (0)	14 (100)
Professionals seeking recertification	3 (21.4)	11 (78.6)
Skill updating/training	5 (35.7)	9 (64.3)

There were 100% ($n = 14$) of participants who reported that their institutions did not target non-English-speaking individuals for distance education courses. There were 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who reported that their institutions did target military personnel, and 85.7% ($n = 12$) of participants who reported that their institutions did not target military personnel for distance education courses. There were 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who reported that their institutions did target individuals with disabilities, and 85.7% ($n = 12$) of participants who reported that their institutions did not target individuals with disabilities for distance education courses. There were 100% ($n = 12$) of the participants who reported that their institutions did not target Native American/Alaskan Natives on tribal land for distance education courses. There were two participants that declined to respond to this question. There were 21.4 % ($n = 3$) of participants who reported that their institutions did target professionals seeking

recertification, and 78.6% ($n = 11$) of participants who reported that their institutions did not target professionals seeking recertification for distance education courses. There were 35.7% ($n = 5$) of participants who reported that their institutions did target workers seeking skill updating or training for distance education courses, and 64.3% ($n = 9$) of participants who reported that their institutions did not target workers seeking skill updating or training for distance education courses.

Tables 4.20 and 4.21 illustrate how often institutions received requests to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. A four-point Likert-scale was used to administer this question. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Frequently = 1; Occasionally = 2; Never = 3; and Not Sure = 4. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.20 and 4.21). Table 4.20 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.21 illustrates the means and standard deviations.

Table 4.20

Frequency of Requests to Provide Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
($N=14$)

	Frequently n (%)	Occasionally n (%)	Never n (%)	Not Sure n (%)
Request for Accommodations	0 (0)	7 (50)	2 (14.3)	5 (35.7)

There were 50% ($n = 7$) of participants who reported that their institutions occasionally received requests to accommodate students with disabilities, and 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants reported that their institutions never received requests to accommodate students with disabilities. However, 35.7% ($n = 5$) of participants who reported that they

were not sure if their institutions received requests to accommodate students with disabilities.

Table 4.21

Frequency of Requests to Provide Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Part II

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Accommodation for students with disabilities	2.86	.94

This item had a total mean score of 2.86 and a standard deviation of .94 indicating that half of the participants perceived that students with disabilities occasionally requested accommodations. However, several participants were not sure if their institutions received request for accommodations.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question addressed the availability of online services for distance education students. A four-point Likert-scale was used to administer this question. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Available for All Courses = 1; Available for Some Courses = 2; Not Available for Courses = 3; and Not Sure = 4. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.22 and 4.23). Table 4.22 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.23 illustrates the means and standard deviations.

Table 4.22

Online Services Available for Distance Education Students ($N = 14$)

Services	All Courses	Some Courses	Not Available	Not Sure
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Registration	12(85.7)	1(7.7)	0(0)	1(7.1)
College bookstore	7(64.3)	2(14.3)	2(14.3)	3(21.4)
Advising	4(28.6)	3(21.4)	4(28.6)	3(21.4)
Payables and receivables	9(64.3)	1(7.1)	3(21.4)	1(7.1)
Toll-free telephone, e-mail	12(85.7)	0(0)	1(7.1)	1(7.1)
Electronic link for library	9(64.3)	1(7.1)	3(21.4)	1(7.1)
Library Staff assigned	6(42.9)	1(7.1)	4(28.6)	3(21.4)
Cooperative agreements	9(64.3)	0 (0)	1(7.1)	3(21.4)

There were 85.7% ($n = 12$) of participants who reported that online registration was available for all courses. There were 7.7% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that online registration was available for some courses. However, 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if online registration was available for students who enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 64.3% ($n = 7$) of participants who reported that online access to the college bookstore was available for all courses. There were 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who reported that online access to the college bookstore was available for some courses. There were 14.3% ($n = 2$) of participants who reported that online access to the college

bookstore was not available for courses. However, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if online access to the college bookstore was available for students who enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who reported that online advising was available for all courses. There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who reported that online advising was available for some courses. There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who reported that online advising was not available for courses. However, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if online advising was available for students enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 64.3% ($n = 9$) of participants who reported that online account payables and receivables were available for all courses. There were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that online account payables and receivables were available for some courses. There were 21.4% ($n = 3$) of participants who reported that online account payables and receivables was not available for courses. However, 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if online account payables and receivables was available for students enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 85.7% ($n = 12$) of participants who reported that a toll-free telephone, e-mail, or other online access to technical support staff was available for all courses. There were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that a toll-free telephone, e-mail, or other online access to technical support staff was not available for courses. However, 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if a toll-free telephone, e-

mail, or other online access to technical support staff was available for students enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 64.3% ($n = 9$) of participants who reported that access to an electronic link with their institution's libraries was available for all courses. There were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that access to an electronic link with their institution's libraries was available for some courses. However, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants reported that access to an electronic link with their institution's libraries was not available for courses, and 7.1% ($n = 1$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if access to an electronic link with their institution's libraries was available for students enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 42.9% ($n = 6$) of participants who reported that their institution's libraries had staff assigned to assist distance education students with all courses. There were 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that their institution's libraries had staff assigned to assist distance education students with all courses. There were 28.6% ($n = 4$) of participants who reported that their institution's libraries did not have staff assigned to assist distance education students with courses. However, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants reported that they were not sure if their institution's libraries had staff assigned to assist students enrolled in distance education courses at their respective institutions.

There were 64.3% ($n = 9$) of participants who reported that cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries were available for all courses, and 7.1% ($n = 1$) of participants who reported that cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries were not available for courses. However, 21.4% ($n = 3$) of the participants

reported that they were not sure if their institutions had cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries. One participant declined to respond to this question.

Table 4.23

Online Services Available for Distance Education Students Part II

Services	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Registration	1.29	.82
College bookstore	2.07	1.26
Advising	2.43	1.15
Payables and receivables	1.71	1.06
Toll-free telephone, e-mail	1.36	.92
Electronic link for library	1.71	1.06
Staff assigned to distance education students	2.29	1.26
Cooperative agreement to use other libraries	1.85	1.34

Online registration had a total mean score of 1.29 and standard deviation of .82 indicating that the majority of participants agreed that online registration was available for all courses at their institutions. The findings suggest that institutions did provide adequate services for students enrolled in distance education courses.

Section four of the survey instrument was used to analyze participants' responses to survey questions regarding their perceptions of virtual community colleges, and technical support to maintain a virtual community college. Section four is presented in Tables 4.24 through 4.25.

Tables 4.24 and 4.25 illustrate the responses to the survey questions regarding virtual community colleges. A five-point Likert-scale was used to administer these questions. The Likert-scale response set used for these items included: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3; Disagree = 2; and Strongly Disagree = 1. This information is organized into two tables (Tables 4.24 and 4.25). Table 4.24 illustrates the frequencies and percentages. Table 4.25 illustrates the means and standard deviations.

Table 4.24

Virtual Community Colleges ($N=14$)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Response	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Beneficial to your institution	1(7.7)	2(15.4)	6(46.2)	2(15.4)	2(15.4)
Creating a VCC	0(0)	4(30.8)	5(38.5)	1(7.7)	3(23.1)
Beneficial to the system	0(0)	4(30.8)	5(38.5)	1(7.7)	3(23.1)
Technical support	3(25)	2(16.7)	1(7.7)	5(41.7)	1(8.3)

Note: All participants did not respond to each item.

There were 7.7% ($n = 1$) of participants who strongly agreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the growth of their institution, and 15.4% ($n = 2$) of participants who agreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the growth of their institution. There were 46.2% ($n = 6$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the growth of their

institution. However, 15.4% ($n = 2$) of the participants disagreed, and 15.4% ($n = 2$) of the participants' strongly disagreed that a virtual community college would not be beneficial to the growth of their institution. One participant declined to respond to this question.

There were 30.8% ($n = 4$) of participants who agreed that they would be open to the idea of creating a virtual community college, and 38.5% ($n = 5$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed that they would be open to the idea of creating a virtual community college. However, 7.7% ($n = 1$) of the participants disagreed and 23.1% ($n = 3$) of the participants strongly disagreed that they would be open to the idea of creating a virtual community college. One participant declined to respond to this question.

There were 30.8% ($n = 4$) of participants who agreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the Alabama Community College System. There were 38.5% ($n = 5$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the Alabama Community College System. However, 7.7% ($n = 1$) of the participants disagreed and 23.1% ($n = 3$) of the participants strongly disagreed that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the Alabama Community College System. One participant declined to respond to this question.

There were 25% ($n = 3$) of participants who strongly agreed that there was adequate technical support at their institutions to support a virtual community college, and 16.7% ($n = 2$) of participants who agreed that there was adequate technical support at their institutions to support a virtual community college. There were 7.7% ($n = 1$) of participants who neither agreed nor disagreed that there was adequate technical support at their institutions to support a virtual community college. However, 41.7% ($n = 5$) of the

participants disagreed and 8.3% ($n = 1$) of the participants strongly disagreed that there was adequate technical support at their institutions to support a virtual community college. Two participants declined to respond to this question.

Table 4.25

Virtual Community Colleges Part II

Responses	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Will be beneficial to your institution	2.85	1.14
Open to creating a virtual community college	2.77	1.16
Will be beneficial to the system	2.77	1.16
Adequacy of technical support	3.08	1.44

Both responses whether the participants would be open to creating a virtual community college and would a virtual community college be beneficial to the system shared a mean score of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 1.16. In general, the findings suggest that participants perceived that a virtual community college would be beneficial to the Alabama Community College System.

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV presented the results of the statistical analysis along with a discussion of the data. The data were organized by frequencies and percentages. The four research questions were examined. Research question one was analyzed using means and standard deviations. Research question two was analyzed using means and standard deviations.

Research question three was analyzed using means and standard deviations. Research question four was analyzed using means and standard deviations. The open-ended questions were analyzed using ranges and frequencies.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine Alabama community college presidents' perceptions regarding distance education. Further, this study was intended to determine the adequacy of the training opportunities and support for faculty who taught distance education courses and what services were available for distance education students. This study was designed to investigate distance education in the Alabama Community College System and to provide information in an effort to create a comprehensive plan to maximize access to online learning for students within the system.

For this study, the presidents from the community colleges and technical colleges were chosen to participate. The colleges included in this study were Alabama Southern Community College, Beville State Community College, Bishop State Community College, Central Alabama Community College, Chattahoochee Valley Community College, J. F. Drake State Technical College, Enterprise Ozark Community College, Faulkner State Community College, Gadsden State Community College, J. F. Ingram State Technical College, Jefferson Davis Community College, Jefferson State Community College, Lawson State Community College, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, Marion Military Institute, Northeast Alabama Community College, Northwest Shoals Community College, Reid State Technical College, Shelton State Community College, Snead State Community College, Southern Union State Community College, H. Council

Trenholm State Technical College, Wallace Community College, Wallace Community College-Selma, and Wallace State Community College. A total of 26 presidents were surveyed, and 14 responded to the survey, which was a response rate of 54%. The survey consisted of 40 closed-ended multiple-choice questions, and two open-ended questions. The survey examined the presidents' perceptions of distance education, online courses, student support, and virtual community colleges. This study examined four research questions:

1. Do community college presidents perceive distance education as important to the growth of their institutions?
2. Do community colleges provide adequate training opportunities for faculty who teach distance education courses?
3. What factors have an influence on institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings?
4. Do community colleges provide adequate services for distance education students?

Summary and Conclusions

A survey was used to collect data from the presidents at the 26 community and technical colleges in Alabama. Demographic information was collected from the study. The data collected included gender, ethnicity, highest degree attained, and the number of years of their presidency. Most of the participants were male (64.3%, $n = 9$), with five participants that were female (35.7%). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (85.7%, $n = 12$). There were two participants that were African American (14.3%). More

than half of the participants (57.1%, $n = 8$,) held a doctorate of education degree. There were six participants (42.9%) who held a doctorate of philosophy degree. The majority of the participants had served as president for 1 to 5 years (57.1%, $n = 8$) or for 6 to 10 years (21.4%, $n = 3$).

The following conclusions were drawn as a result of the analysis of the survey data:

Research Question 1: Do community college presidents perceive distance education as important to the growth of their institutions?

Alabama community college presidents perceived distance education as important to the growth of their respective institutions with 86% responding favorably. A total of 12 out of 14 participants agreed that distance education was vital to the growth at their respective institutions. Distance education is a vital, viable part of higher education. Technology is providing more opportunity for students to pursue their goals of attending college or gaining valuable skills that will make students more productive in the workplace.

Research Question 2: Do community colleges provide adequate training opportunities for faculty who teach distance education courses?

Alabama community colleges provided adequate training opportunities for faculty who taught distance education courses with 94.5% of participants responding that training was either required (41.9%) or available (52.6%). Having resources and support available for faculty is key for any distance education program to be successful. Faculty need to be comfortable with the technology required to effectively provide quality instruction for distance education courses.

Research Question 3: What factors have an influence on institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings?

Of the participants, 82.9% stated that the following factors had a major or moderate influence on their institutions' decisions regarding college-level, credit-granting distance education offerings: seeking to increase student enrollment, making more courses and degree and certificate programs available, meeting student demands for flexible schedules and reducing seat time, providing access to college for students who otherwise would not have access, and maximizing the use of existing college facilities.

Research Question 4: Do community colleges provide adequate services for distance education students?

Alabama community colleges did provide adequate services for students enrolled in distance education courses with 69.27% responding that services were either available for all (61.26%) or some courses (8.01%). Providing services that support distance education is an important part of having a successful distance education program. Having the courses available is what initially attracts prospective students, but having student support services is what will keep the student and attribute to student success and retention.

There were two open-ended questions asked in the survey. The first open-ended question asked the participants to report the number of online college-level, credit-granting courses offered and the number of students enrolled in those courses in 2007-2008 at the institutions. The number of online courses that were offered at ranged from 10 - 140. The number of students enrolled in online courses ranged from 200-7,401.

The second open-ended question asked the participants to report the number of online college-level certificate programs and degrees designed to be completed totally through distance education in 2007-2008. The number of certificates that could be completed through distance education ranged from zero to two. The number of degrees that could be completed through distance education ranged from zero to four. Overall, there were six certificates and seven degree programs that could be completed online.

Implications for Practice

This study can serve as a model for 2-year institutions to examine their presidents' perceptions regarding distance education. In addition, assessments can be administered to students, faculty and staff at 2-year institutions to determine their perceptions' regarding distance education. Then, comparisons of study results can be used to gain further knowledge regarding distance education within the 2-year institution settings. With more information available specific to 2-year institutions, colleges should be able to provide a better array of programs and services to current and future distance education students.

Limitations of the Study

After conducting the study, several limitations became apparent to the researcher. The method of delivery of the survey instrument and the ability of the potential participants to overlook or purposely ignore the request to participate in the study may have contributed to some choosing not to participate in the study. The researcher did not take into account the level of computer literacy of the participants. Paper surveys could have been made available for participants who were not computer savvy.

Those presidents choosing to participate in this study may have positive perceptions of distance education, and those with negative perceptions may have opted not to participate in this study. The number of responses to this survey constitutes a little more than half of the total number of possible participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

An analysis of the data for this research study and the literature review produced the recommendations for further research. The research findings for this study revealed information and perceptions regarding distance education at the colleges in the Alabama Community College System. The discussion regarding distance education should include not only colleges but also local businesses and industry, community leaders, and students as well as local and state representatives. There are thousands of students in Alabama who are not being reached who could be valuable assets to not only the local community college but also to the workforce in the state. The following recommendations for future research are proposed based on the results of this study:

1. This study should be replicated with faculty, staff, and administrators at all community and technical colleges in the Alabama Community College System. Use of the research findings would benefit not only each individual college and potential students but also the state as a whole.
2. This study should be expanded to include students' perceptions of distance education and virtual community colleges. This research will reveal how students perceive distance education, and colleges could take that into consideration with planning and course offerings.

3. This study should be expanded and replicated in order to determine the perceptions of administrators not only in Alabama but also across the region. To attract students in the 21st century, institutions must seriously look at distance education and the role it plays in the growth and vitality of the local community college. This study is only scratching the surface of the distance education discussion within the Alabama Community College System.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER REQUESTING APPROVAL TO CONDUCT SURVEY AND
LETTER GRANTING APPROVAL TO CONDUCT SURVEY FROM
THE ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Janina L. Nobles

3085 Summit Drive
Fultondale, AL 35068

February 27, 2009

Chancellor Bradley Byrne
Post Office Box 302130
Montgomery, AL 36130-2130

Chancellor Byrne:

My name is Janina Nobles and I am Doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Mississippi State University. I am currently working on my dissertation research on distance education and virtual community colleges. I would like to examine the perceptions of Alabama Community College President's' toward distance education and virtual community colleges.

To conduct this research I would like to administer an online survey to the Community College Presidents in Alabama. The survey is comprised of twenty questions and would take less than 10 minutes to complete. I have enclosed a copy of the survey. Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me. Participation will be entirely voluntary and I can assure confidentiality. I believe that the data from this study will be of great value to the Alabama Community College System.

In order to complete my research, I am requesting your permission to conduct this survey involving the Community College Presidents. I will need written approval from you giving me permission to administer the survey. You can email or mail the confirmation letter back to me. I assure you that the responses of the participants will remain anonymous and will only be used to conduct my dissertation research.

Should you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 205-999-4427 or by email at janinanobles@bellsouth.net.

Sincerely,

Janina L. Nobles
Doctoral Candidate
Mississippi State University



Bradley R. Byrne
Chancellor

Department of Postsecondary Education
Post Office Box 302130
Montgomery, AL 36130-2130
t 334.242.2900
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March 6, 2009

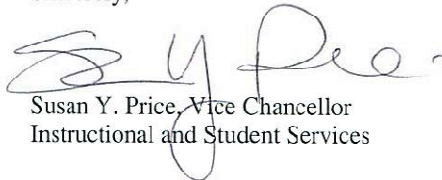
Ms. Janina Nobles
3085 Summit Drive
Fultondale, Alabama 35068

Dear Ms. Nobles:

I am in receipt of your letter regarding your dissertation research on distance education and virtual community colleges. Your request to examine the perceptions of presidents in the Alabama Community College System regarding this issue is approved. I believe this is a worthwhile endeavor and wish you much success.

I look forward to reviewing your findings when you are finished. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Susan Y. Price, Vice Chancellor
Instructional and Student Services

tj

cc: Bradley R. Byrne

education works.

Governor Bob Riley
President

Randy McKinney
District 1
Vice President

Betty Peters
District 2

Stephanie Bell
District 3

Ethel Hall
District 4
Vice President
E-monta

Ella B. Bell
District 5

David F. Byers Jr.
District 6

Sandra Ray
District 7

Mary Jane Caylor
District 8
President Pro Tem

APPENDIX B

LETTER REQUESTING APPROVAL TO USE SURVEY AND
LETTER GRANTING APPROVAL TO USE SURVEY FROM
THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Re: Permission to use survey

Mon, January 26, 2009 9:52:39 AM

From: "janinanobles@bellsouth.net"

To: peter.tice@ed.gov

Good Morning Mr. Tice,

My name is Janina Nobles and I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University. I am conducting my dissertation research on "Community College Presidents Perceptions Toward Distance Education and Online Learning Communities." I came across the NCES- IES report on "Distance Education at Degree Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-07" and it has been a tremendous resource for me.

I am requesting approval to use the questionnaire that was used in the aforementioned report. If there are any questions please let me know. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Janina L. Nobles

Doctoral Candidate

Mississippi State University

RE: Permission to use survey

Mon, January 26, 2009 10:52:33 AM

From: "Tice, Peter" <Peter.Tice@ed.gov>

To: "janinanobles@bellsouth.net" <janinanobles@bellsouth.net>

Hello Janina,

Thanks for the inquiry. We're glad you find the instrument useful for your purposes. The questionnaire is in the public domain, so feel free questions/items from it in your work. I would add that in your appendix or technical notes that you acknowledge the source of the questions/items.

Regards,

Peter Tice

Peter Tice, Ph.D.
Project Officer, FRSS/PEQIS
National Center for Education Statistics
Institute of Education Sciences
US Department of Education
1990 K St., NW Suite 9033
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(202) 502-7077 (fax)

APPENDIX C

SURVEY

**Distance Education Survey
Alabama Community College System**

Demographic Information

1 **Gender**

- Male
 - Female
-

2 **Ethnicity**

- African American
 - American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic/Latino
-

3

Highest Degree Attained

- Bachelors
 - Masters
 - Ed.D.
 - Ph.D.
 - J.D.
-

4

**Years of Presidency in the Alabama Community
College System**

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years

- 20-25 years
- 26 or more years

5

In 2007-08 (12 Month Academic Year), Did Your Institution Offer Any College-Level, Credit-Granting Courses That Are Formally Designated As Online Courses?

YES

NO

6

Please Report The Number Of Online College-Level, Credit-Granting Courses Offered And The Number Of Students Enrolled In Those Courses In 2007-08 At Your Institution.

Number of Courses

Number of Students
Enrolled

7

In 2007-08 (12 Month Academic Year), Did Your Institution Have Any College-Level Degree or Certificate Programs Designed To Be Completed Totally Through Distance Education?

(Only Include Degree or Certificate Programs That Are Based On Credit-Granting Courses)

YES

NO

8

How Many Different College-Level Degree Or Certificate Programs Designed To Be Completed Totally Through Distance Education Did Your Institution Offer In 2007-08?

Degree	
Certificate	

Distance Education

9

Distance Education Is Vital To The Growth Of My Institution.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10

Does Your Institution Have A Separate Distance Education Department/Office?

YES NO

Are The Following Training Opportunities Required Of Or Available To Faculty Who Teach Distance Education Courses?

11 **Training In The Use And Application Of Distance Education Technologies**

Required	Available But Not Required	Not Available
1	2	3

12 **Training In The Development Of Curricula For Distance Education Courses**

Required	Available But Not Required	Not Available
1	2	3

13 Training In Teaching Methods For Distance Education Courses

Required	Available But Not Required	Not Available
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3

14 Consultation With Technical Support Staff

Required	Available But Not Required	Not Available
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3

What Factors Have an Influence on Your Institution's Decision Regarding College-Level, Credit-Granting Distance Education Offerings?

15 Seeking To Increase Student Enrollment

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

16 Making More Courses Available

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

17 Making More Certificate Programs Available

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

18 Meeting Student Demands For Flexible Schedules

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

19 Making More Degree Programs Available

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

20 Providing Access To College For Students Who Otherwise Would Not Have Access (e.g., because of geographic, family, or work-related reasons)

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21 Maximizing The Use Of Existing College Facilities

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22 Meeting Student Demands For Reduced Seat Time

Major Influence	Moderate Influence	Minor Influence	Not At All
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Student Support

23

Distance Education Is An Active Part Of Recruitment Strategies At My Institution.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does Distance Education Courses At Your Institution Target Any Of The Following?

24 Non-English-Speaking Individuals

YES NO

25 Military Personnel

YES NO

26 **Individuals With Disabilities**

YES NO

27 **Native Americans/Alaskan Natives On Tribal Land**

YES NO

28 **Professionals Seeking Recertification**

YES NO

29 **Workers Seeking Skill Updating Or Retraining**

YES NO

30

How Often Has Your Institution Received Request To Provide Accommodations For Students With Disabilities In Your College-Level, Credit-Granting Distance Education Courses?

Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Not Sure
1	2	3	4

Are The Following Resources Available To Students Enrolled In Your Distance Education Courses?

31 **Online Registration**

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
1	2	3	4

32 Online Access To The College Bookstore

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

33 Online Advising

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

34 Online Account Payable And Receivable

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

35 Toll-Free Telephone, E-mail, Or Other Online Access To Technical Support Staff

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

36 Access To An Electronic Link With Institution's Library

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

37 Institution Library Staff Assigned To Assist Distance Education Students

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

38 Cooperative Agreements For Students To Use Other Libraries

Available For All Courses	Available For Some Courses	Not Available For Courses	Not Sure
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

Virtual Community Colleges

39

Would A Virtual Community College Be Beneficial To The Growth At Your Institution?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

40

Would You Be Open To The Idea Of Alabama Creating A Virtual Community College?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

41

Would A Virtual Community College Be Beneficial To The Alabama Community College System?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

42

There Is Adequate Technical Support At My

Institution To Support A Virtual Community College.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



APPENDIX D

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY

Compliance Division
Administrative Offices
Animal Care and Use (ACU)
Human Research Protection
Program (HRP)
1527 Ray Bldg West
Stateville, MS 39762
(662) 325-6166 fax

Safety Division
Biosafety Unit
Radiation Safety
Hazardous Waste
Chemical Safety
Fire & Life Safety
All Hazards Office
Mississippi State, MS 39762
(662) 325-6766 fax

<http://www.orc.msstate.edu>
compliance@research.msstate.edu
(662) 325-6294

October 16, 2009

Janina Nobles
3085 Summit Drive
Fultondale, AL 35068

RE: IRB Study #09-066: Alabama Community College Presidents' Perceptions
Regarding Distance Education

Dear Ms. Nobles:

This is to confirm the revised title of the project that was previously reviewed and approved via administrative review on 4/13/2009 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php>.

Please refer to your IRB number (#09-066) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at cwilliams@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-6220.

Sincerely,

[For use with electronic submissions]

Christine Williams
IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: James Ed Davis

Office of Regulatory Compliance • Post Office Box 6233 • Mississippi State, MS 39762