

# Power and Quality in Distance Education





## Power and Quality in Distance Education

- Distance Ed is not the norm; its forward momentum requires power from all stakeholders
  - Legislature, Institution, Faculty
- Distance Ed is growing rapidly and requires oversight to ensure sustainability
- Quality and competencies in DE are still nebulous and unformulated
- Quality Distance Ed can result in student power: autonomy, competence, relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Thomas Kuhn (1970), in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, said, "There is no paradigm change without crisis. Novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background of expectation. Awareness of the anomaly grows into anticipation" (p. 64).**

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# Power and Quality in Distance Education

Pajo and Wallace (2001) explained:

The growth of the World Wide Web (the Web), combined with rapid technological advances in computing power, has paved the way for Web-based distance learning. The use of the Web for delivery of distance courses is a major development that is changing the way knowledge is imparted to the widest audience inside and outside the classroom. These technological innovations are profoundly influencing university practices and policies and may even be fundamentally altering our conceptualizations of education.  
(p. 1)

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## Power and Quality in Distance Education

“Online enrollment jumped from 1.98 million in 2003 to 2.35 million the following year, accounting for 7 percent of postsecondary education” (Washington Post Article, May 16, 2006, A06).

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## Power and Quality in Distance Education

Sloan Consortium May 2005 report:

- 68% of Southern schools offering undergraduate f2f courses also offer undergraduate courses online
- 72% of higher ed institutions in SREB states use core faculty to teach online courses
- 64% of SREB schools, and 78% of 2-year colleges, identify online education as critical long-term strategy



## Power and Quality: Legislature

- Distance Ed in Texas continues to be shaped by the state legislature
  - 6/29/06 Hearing by Senate Subcommittee on HE
  - seeking recommendations for possible legislative action to maximize benefits of distance education



# Power and Quality: Legislature

Senate Subcommittee on HE  
Interim Report Released  
Dec. 2006

- CHARGE 1: Distance Ed
- CHARGE 4: Closing the Gaps



# Power and Quality: Legislature

- Subcommittee Charge One: Distance Ed
  1. Principles of Good Practice adopted
  2. Principles of Good Practice required by all institutions for online courses
  3. Consider review systems for Quality Online Education/natl & state models
  4. Encourage institutions to implement peer review tools to assess and ensure quality of online education courses
  5. Address faculty workload reporting; Articulation of courses across institutions; Inter-institutional registration; and Course scheduling in collaborative programs
  6. Evaluate concept of a state-wide repository of learning objects to be shared by HE
  7. Review statewide access to digital online library resources and software
  8. Explore statewide inter-institutional registration and student services





# Power and Quality: Legislature

## Subcommittee Charge One: Distance Ed Cont'd

9. Reward institutions for offering online courses that share resources, increase quality, promote collaboration, and meet critical needs
10. Assess financial impact of online learning on space and facilities; require institutions to use blended learning for efficient use of space and facilities (scheduling)
11. Make quality online training resources available statewide
12. Provide statewide cooperative purchasing for software and services (course mgmt; student info; degree audit; online tutoring).
13. Explore expansion of Internet2 to all public and private school districts, ESCs, public and private HE institutions



# Power and Quality: Legislature

## Subcommittee Charge Four: Closing the Gaps

1. Develop strategic plan for HE to coordinate campuses/systems to deploy HE resources – **by 2015, add 630,000 students to HE and award 210,000 undergrad degrees/certs**
2. Expand Early Childhood ed programs
3. Develop joint programs between K-12 and HE
4. Align High School exit and college readiness standards; align workforce readiness and college-readiness standards
5. Increase funding for financial aid programs
6. Strengthen developmental programs; apply online instruction
7. Strengthen transfer of credits and articulation agreements



# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

<http://www.itcnetwork.org/Accreditation-EvidenceofQualityinDEPrograms.pdf>

- U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, March 2006 Report: *Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn From Interviews With The Accreditation Community* retrieved from: <http://www.itcnetwork.org/Accreditation-EvidenceofQualityinDEPrograms.pdf>
  - Regional Accrediting Associations defined “good practices” and “red flags”
  - What SACS may be looking for...

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# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

## Good Practices:

- Common course platform
- Consistency in course format
- Schedule or matrix of online course offerings available for online programs
- Learning objectives linked to assignments and assessments
- Courses have clearly defined deadlines



# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

## Good Practices:

- Evidence of interaction between faculty and students and among students (rich discussions, group work, peer evaluation)
- Faculty-added information beyond the textbook (in content and feedback)



# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

## Good Practices:

- Faculty training:
  - emphasizes distance education pedagogy, not just a technology tool
  - specific emphasis on instructional strategies to foster interaction, to convey concepts, and to assess student learning
- Faculty receive guidance in converting courses from f2f to online
- Prospective students are provided a tool to assess their readiness for online learning

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# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

## Good Practices:

- Technical support services available 24/7 or, at a minimum, some evening/weekend hours
- Contingency plan for network outage
- Faculty describe in the syllabus the timeframe in which they will respond to questions and assignments
- Students have access to academic advisor by phone, fax, email or chat
- Library resources in electronic form

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# Power and Quality: Accrediting Agencies

## Good Practices:

- Decisions about distance education growth are guided by:
  - Institution's stated intent to increase online programs by a specific number
  - Budget for marketing, academic and administrative costs
  - Goals for dist ed enrollment, student/faculty support, course development
  - Investment of revenue from de for sustainability of de
  - Course and faculty evaluations





# Power and Quality: Higher Ed Institutions

- Philosophy
  - Institution embraces distance education as part of mission to:
    - close gaps
    - acknowledge societal needs and demands
    - extend programs to populations unable to travel to institution
    - extend information to all special populations (ADA)

There is resistance to change.

# Power and Quality: Higher Ed Institutions

- Policy –
  - The institution:
    - Acknowledges faculty contribution (intellectual property)
    - Funds departmental and faculty efforts in course and program development
    - Funds faculty/student support units
    - Oversees internal quality standards
    - Creates institutional benchmarks – not just minimum standards.

**“World-class benchmarks not only define what should be done but also delineate how well it should be done. When specifying quality standards, you should consider whether you want to define minimum requirements or identify world-class benchmarks that people within your organization should strive to achieve” (Hirumi, 2005, p. 315).**



## **Power and Quality: Higher Ed Institutions**

- Funding – The institution allocates sufficient funds to support the development and delivery of online education, and this may include incentives for faculty.

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## Power and Quality: Faculty Teaching Philosophy & Disposition

- Learner-centered (shares power)
- Approachable
- Desires interaction
- Provides ample feedback and support to students
- Teacher-centered (holds power)
- Unapproachable
- Non-communicative
- Withholds feedback and support

**“Instructors who are rude online are probably rude in person. When I met her in person, she was the same; she didn’t seem to care about people’s feelings. She couldn’t hide that online” (Weatherly study, 2006).**



# Online Education



Flexible



Student-driven



Communicative/  
Interactive

= **Student Opportunity & Power**



## Choosing Online Instructors

- Imagine that you have been approached by *Your Institution* to select faculty for a new, fully-online program.
- What are the criteria you will use to select online faculty?

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## Qualitative Research...Weatherly Study of Women Who Earned an Online Master's Degree

### Excellent instructors:

- "have knowledge in the field"
- "have the ability to share power and who can accept that this needs to be done"
- "are able to envision what those students will go through to do what you want them to do."
- "can develop a course with an element of complexity that makes it challenging but not so stupidly convoluted that students become constantly disoriented."
- "realize that the technology should not be more challenging than mastering the content."
- "let their personalities shine through."

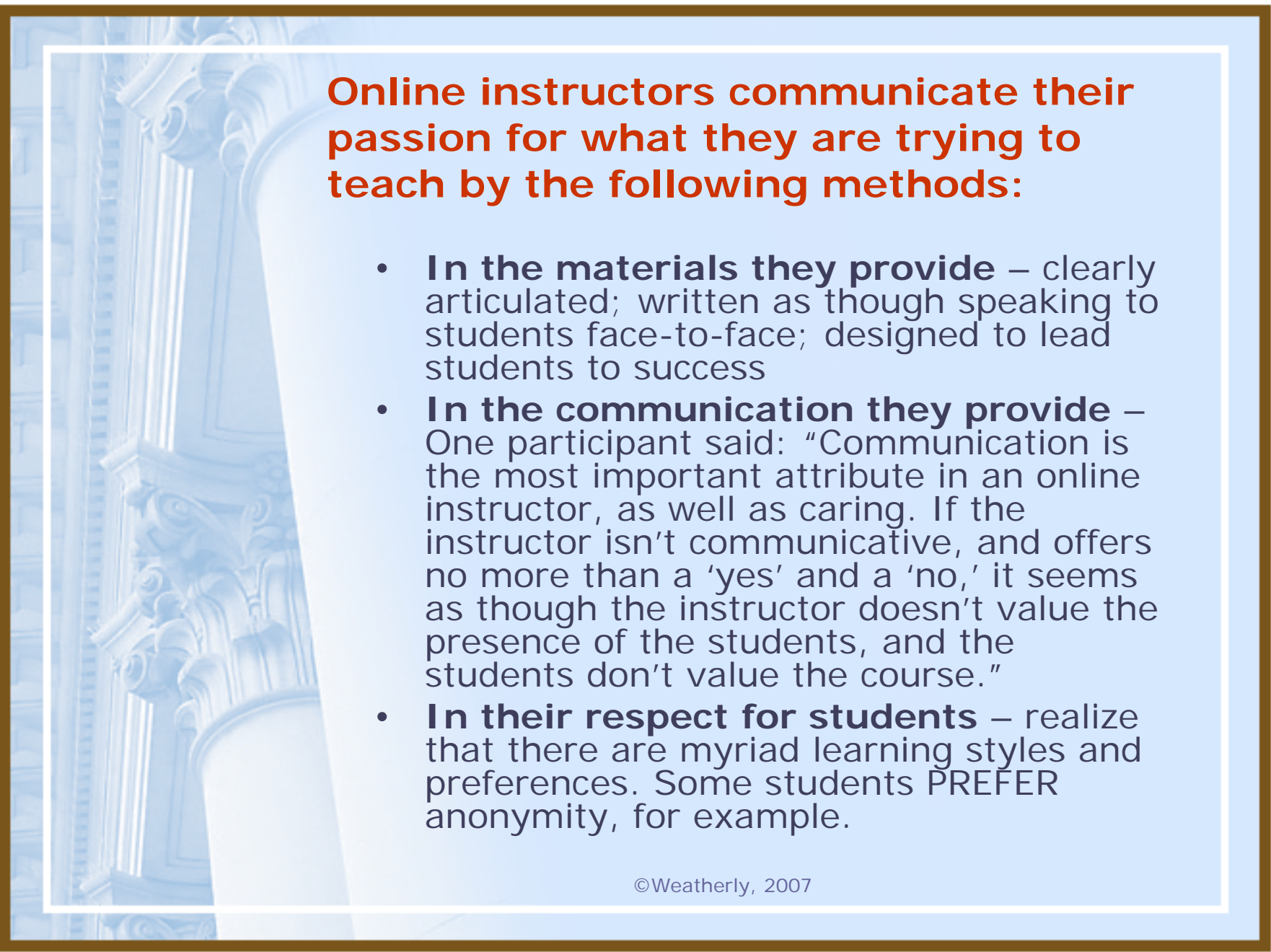
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## Qualitative Research...Weatherly Study of Women Who Earned an Online Master's Degree

### Excellent instructors:

- "are good writers."
- "are approachable."
- "are encouraging."
- "are supportive."
- "look ahead and guide the student."
- "are able to convey a lot of information efficiently and in a friendly manner."
- "are those that are the toughest, yet most approachable. They are the ones that you acknowledge that theirs was a hard class, and yet you loved every minute of it."



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## Online instructors communicate their passion for what they are trying to teach by the following methods:

- **In the materials they provide** – clearly articulated; written as though speaking to students face-to-face; designed to lead students to success
- **In the communication they provide** – One participant said: “Communication is the most important attribute in an online instructor, as well as caring. If the instructor isn’t communicative, and offers no more than a ‘yes’ and a ‘no,’ it seems as though the instructor doesn’t value the presence of the students, and the students don’t value the course.”
- **In their respect for students** – realize that there are myriad learning styles and preferences. Some students PREFER anonymity, for example.

## Online instructors communicate their passion (cont'd):

- **In the sharing of positive feedback -**  
“Confirmatory feedback lets students know what they did correctly. Corrective feedback identifies areas and provides recommendations for improvement. Consider delineating what is meant by timely and appropriate feedback based on research, theory, and documented best practices” (Hirumi, 2005, p. 318).
- **In the quality of content –**
  - **EXPERTISE** is shared by the instructor with students in conversational format (asynchronous and synchronous) to:
    - Interest students in topic
    - Promote understanding of the topic
    - Help students relate the topic to their situations and contexts
- **In considering the disabled –**
  - accessibility is required by law
  - courses are made better for all students.

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## Online instructors communicate their passion (cont'd):

- **In the quality of assessments, assignments, and projects** – meaningful assessments and assignments promote higher order thinking; generate interaction; lead to application of the learning; demonstrate relevance
- **In the discussion questions they craft** – promote reflection; require sharing of learning; create a safe environment that welcomes all contributions
- **In synchronous communication** – “Engaging in chat makes it seem as though the instructor is in the boat with students. Email and discussion boards have no conversation going on. Without synchronous interaction, I felt I was not getting the full experience. I felt I was getting short-changed.”

# Efforts Toward Quality

Institutions provide:

- an opportunity for instructors to be an online student in a course that models a positive online experience
- an opportunity for instructors to practice developing a model of what is expected by those critiquing online education
- guidelines for student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content interaction
- guidelines for content
- guidelines for assessment

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# Efforts Toward Quality

Instructors:

- Transmit a high degree of respect for all students and their individual contributions
- Demonstrate a sincere desire for student success
- Demonstrate caring
- Demonstrate a willingness to remove him or herself from the spotlight and focus instead on the student
- Maintain a safe environment for all contributions

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