

The Journal of Distance Learning

Abstracts

BILL GROTE, Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education: A Discussion of Current Developments and Practices

Journal of Distance Learning 5, 1, 2000, 5-17

The focus of quality assurance (QA) in the tertiary education sector has shifted from an emphasis on peer review and other internal quality measures to a greater use of external auditing agents. These changes are being driven by governments who demand greater transparency and accountability as they simultaneously withdraw from fully funding the sector. A study of QA processes in Australia, the UK, NZ and the US at the national level and of Open and Distance Learning at institutional level, revealed a sector under stress, subject to rapid change and ongoing government scrutiny. The approaches to QA in these four countries are evolving along similar lines. If there is sufficient convergence, then the foundations are created for an international quality system that would reflect the new global education market place.

CYNTHIA WHITE, The Use of Multiple Textual Forms in Distance Learning

Journal of Distance Learning 5, 1, 2000, 18-26

This article reports on a study of how students perceive, access and evaluate the different textual forms which comprise a distance education course. The setting for the study was an introductory distance programme in Spanish, using print, aural and visual media. Thirty one students completed a self-report questionnaire which investigated the following aspects of the use of multiple textual forms: primary vs. secondary sources, preferences for initial input, intertextual links, time allocation, source evaluation. Findings revealed a consistent pattern in terms of conceptions of primary vs. secondary sources: in particular, the study guide was consistently judged to be central to the course, more so than other print, visual or aural sources. Students' reported behaviour when embarking on a new unit revealed a distinct preference for either verbal or visual input, each providing a qualitatively different orientation to the unit. Intertextual links characterised the way students worked with the multiple texts: it was possible to identify two 'anchor' texts, which acted as the base texts and were supplemented by other sources. Responses of students highlighted the importance of multiple texts for learning, largely because of their complementary nature, the 'relief' they provide and opportunities for students to establish their own learning paths. The article concludes with a view of the learner not as a course consumer but as a course developer, creating texts and intertexts through engagement with multiple sources.

RACHEL McCAHON, How Can We Help? Supporting Students in Distance Tertiary Education: An Evaluative Study

Journal of Distance Learning 5, 1, 2000, 27-38

This article reports on a study which investigated the role of student support in the completion of a distance education programme at tertiary level. It aimed to identify crucial methods of support in distance education, related to the nature of the student body in a specific programme of study. It found that a wide range of support mechanisms were needed and valued. Tutor attributes such as availability and approachability were regarded as crucial, personal knowledge of students by tutors increased students' sense of identification with the programme and the likelihood of their completion, and the effectiveness of support systems could be enhanced by the creation of a feeling of intimacy within an institution.

ANDREW HIGGINS, Some Outcomes of Flexible Learning at the University of Otago 1996-98

Journal of Distance Learning 5, 1, 2000, 39-47

The purpose of this report is to examine the adoption and implementation of flexible learning initiatives at the University of Otago. Altogether there have been 169 projects of varying size incorporating technologies in teaching. Twenty-eight of these have been designated specifically as flexible learning projects. The report discusses definitions surrounding the term 'flexible learning', the role it plays in helping change teaching strategies and presents five brief case studies which describe the implementation and outcomes of some flexible learning projects.