

# DETC Member Survey On Online Learning

The DETC member institutions that participated in this survey lend helpful insight to the Internet's role in distance education. The results show that implementing online courses and activities is becoming increasingly popular, and most schools are eager to develop online curricula and tools. These survey respondents reveal the focus on change and growth. Almost every responding institution disclosed plans for improvement – new course designs, additional online options, or experimentation with various Learning Management Software. DETC schools are prepared to embrace the changes in technology and increased online delivery while continuing to provide superior education to the distance learning student.

The results also demonstrate reluctance to abandon an asynchronous, print-based method of learning. While many DETC schools incorporate the Internet in various ways, students still have the option of mailing an enrollment form, studying independently, or reading through a physical textbook. In fact, 93% of DETC schools responding to this survey are self-described as “asynchronous,” and more than half do not consider themselves to be “online schools.” More than 80% of students must use printed texts to complete their programs. Also, students enrolling in primarily Internet-based programs also have the option of selecting a print-based version of the course.

The survey was put on the Internet using Zoomerang.com in mid-November 2003, and institutions were given until December 15, 2003 to complete it. Forty-seven DETC institutions participated in the survey, which resulted in a 67% return rate!

## General and Enrollment Information

1. Institutions: 47 out of 70 responded
2. Name and e-mail address of person filling out this survey:
3. How often is your web site updated?  
10% = hourly; 13% = daily; 34% = weekly; 30% = monthly; 13% = yearly
4. What percentage of students currently enroll online?  
36% = 0-10%; 13% = 10-30%; 9% = 30-75% 42% = 75-100%
5. Must students also mail in a paper enrollment in addition to enrolling online? 43% = yes; 57% = no

Additional Comments: Several schools arrange for students to download and print the enrollment form and then submit it through the mail. One school allows students to fill out an online request to receive an enrollment package. Another school has students verify, in writing, the accuracy of the enrollment form before enrolling. Several schools report plans to install online enrollment in the future.

6. What percentage of students pay tuition online?  
28 = 0-10%; 6 = 10-30%; 3 = 30-50%; 4 = 50-75%; 6 = 75-100%

## Online Learning: Course Design and Requirements

### 7. For what purposes do your students use the Internet?

Students use the Internet for:

77% = submitting lessons; 51% = chat rooms; 91% = e-mail;  
57% = message boards; 91% = submitting questions; 57% = threaded discussions;  
55% = library access; 51% = tutorials; 79% = supplemental information;  
79% = research; 77% = necessary course information; 64% = schedule information;  
60% = tuition & financial; 66% = course registration;  
53% = ordering books & other supplies; 62% = test taking

Additional Comments: Several schools report that students can access general course information as well as relevant links to professional sites from the institution's site. In some cases, prospective students may access a demonstration program as an introduction to distance learning. Several schools plan to implement threaded discussions and online test taking to current course designs.

### 8. What percentage of your students regularly use the Internet in their studies?

0 = 0-10%; 23% = 10-20%; 2% = 20-40%;  
11% = 40-60%; 16% = 60-80%;  
9% = 80-90%; 39% = 90-100%

### 9. Do you consider your online courses to be: 7% = synchronous; 93% = asynchronous

### 10. Do your online courses follow a fixed schedule, with fixed assignment dates? 30% = yes; 70% = no

### 11. Are your students *required* to have (or have access to) a computer? 59% = yes; 41% = no

Additional Comments: Some schools report only certain programs or courses require the use of a computer. Other schools provide paper courses to the students without any access to the internet, or allow students to choose from Internet-based, print-based, or combination courses. As a whole, respondents notice an increased interest in online delivery, but one school pointed out that 99% of students choose to enroll in the print-based correspondence courses.

### 12. Are your students *required* to have access to the Internet? 61% = yes; 39% = no

Additional Comments: In some institutions, correspondence students are not required to obtain Internet access, and other schools offer print-based courses for those without access. Some institutions require students to have Internet access only for certain programs or courses. One school points out that having Internet access and skills is essential to the particular field of study. Several schools are planning future online opportunities for students.

### 13. Do students take tests and exams online? 62% = yes; 38% = no

Additional Comments: Several respondents report students may take online tests, but final examinations or other tests must be administered in person by a proctor. One institution allows students to submit lesson questions online and receive automated, graded responses. Another school proctors online exams via videoconferencing. One institution has "yet to find an examination process online that is secure enough" while another school reports only 1% of students take exams electronically. Others schools plan to implement more online testing soon.

14. If we define “Online Learning” as “the use of the Internet for most student to teacher interaction – with *all* student and teacher communications taking place via the Internet,” do you consider your school to be an “Online School”? 49% = yes; 51% = no

## Miscellaneous

15. Must students use printed texts to complete their programs? 81% = yes; 19% = no

16. Are course study guides generally:

51%= printed and mailed; 43% = downloaded from the Internet; 6% = not used

17. What is the name of your Learning Management Software?

30% = use of custom LMS; 22% = use Blackboard; 48% = report 13 other types of LMS, including WebCT, ThinkQ, eCollege, Moodle, Educator, WBT Systems, Exam View, and Xtention

Additional Comments: Several school report Blackboard is easy to use, but one institution also feels constrained because Blackboard is perhaps best designed for synchronous use. One school describes Blackboard as an “excellent platform, but pricey.” Another school does not use any LMS to avoid the “too many bells and whistles that aren’t relevant for our students.” When asked about the LMS system Moodle, a school reports “it is free and works very well,” while another school simply labels WebCT as “excellent.” Others schools boast their custom-designed LMS systems are less expensive and suit their specific needs.

19. What comments do you have about your institution’s future use of the Internet?

Most schools responded with enthusiasm for online learning and expect continued growth in educational Internet use. Many institutions plan to implement online activities and learning tools, such as chat rooms, threaded discussions, message boards, virtual library access, online testing, video-conferencing, and online tutorials. Several schools hope to launch online courses and programs very soon; others have a long-term goal of becoming primarily online schools. One school claims that online learning is “definitely the path of the future.”

Institutions also report an interest in using the Internet to improve administrative duties and student services. One school member comments, “We are committed to making better use of the Internet to serve students and provide instruction” while another states, “We plan to increasingly include additional student services options and multimedia resources for our courses.” Another DETC member speaks of the Internet’s unifying nature: “The Internet enables students, faculty, and service staffs in various regions of the world to communicate with each other flexibly, free from concerns of time difference. Use of the Internet is essential for an international educational institute.”

Even with all the plans to switch to online learning, most schools report the desire to retain traditional “correspondence” methods. The new online courses will often still include printed course material. One school asserts, “We are a mix of paper-based and online programs. We are not solely an online school. There is still a high interest in paper courses for many reasons.” While institutions may be quick to embrace new technology and all that the Internet can offer in education, most schools do not intend to become synchronous, fully online institutions.

***Our sincere thanks to the institutions that participated in the survey!***