

# DISTANCE education

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Report

## Sloan Survey Finds Growth, Obstacles for Distance Education

In their largest study to date, the Sloan Consortium says that online learning is continuing to grow without any sign of a plateau. There were 3.2 million students who took at least one course online in 2005, (the last year for which complete data is available) up from 2.3 million the previous year. Forty-four hundred schools were contacted for the survey, every school on the Federal Inventory of Higher Education, and with more than 55% responding, a picture of the growth and acceptance of distance education in the United States emerged. Yet despite the strong growth rates, pockets of resistance remain. An immovable core remains unconvinced of the value of online education, a figure that may only slowly begin to shift.

*Distance Education Report* talked to Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, co-authors of the report, titled *Making the Grade: Online Education in the United States, 2006*.

They laid out for us in detail what the new research means for distance education, and what the future is likely to hold.

**DER:** *You've been doing this survey for*

*three years haven't you?*

**Seaman:** Yes. Every year we go out and ask a few questions about the numbers. One is how many and the other is what do you expect to happen next year with your enrollments – do you expect them to stay the same, to grow, to decrease? And if they're going to grow, by how much? We always ask about the preceding fall, so in 2003 we asked about 2002, and the answer to the first question was 1.6 million and people thought it was going to keep growing close to 20 percent. Then when we went back the following year we were astonished to find it had grown by about 20 percent. More than 20 percent actually. This past year, which was looking at fall 2005, it grew at a rate faster than we had seen in the previous years, it grew 35 percent, so both the percentage growth and the actual numeric growth far exceeded anything we'd seen in the previous years.

**Allen:** So we don't think it's plateauing any time soon.

**Seaman:** And the further evidence of that is when we ask schools if they still expect growth, they're still expecting growth in excess of 20

percent per year.

**DER:** *What are they basing their projections on?*

**Seaman:** It's all over the map. It's an individual thing for each school. It might be a self-fulfilling prophecy – "The numbers are growing like mad, I'm going to get my share and I'm going to grow as much as anybody else." But what we see is that for many schools they notice the demand out there, they're launching new programs or they have plans to expand programs or to convert a small program into a large program, and so they're basing it on very specific actions they're taking.

**DER:** *What did you find out about the acceptance of distance education?*

**Allen:** While the number of people that agree [that online education is being accepted by their institution] increases, there's the same number that disagree pretty much every year. There seem to be schools where the faculty is entrenched -- there is overall a group of faculty that don't believe in the value of online education. Eighteen percent absolutely don't agree that their faculty are accepting the value and legitimacy of online education. and that doesn't change.

**Seaman:** It's been the same over all the surveys and if anything the opinion is getting slightly more negative. We've asked this question over three years and the results by type of school, size of school, Carnegie classification, are remarkably consistent for every year

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## Horizon Report Identifies Six Higher Ed Learning Technologies to Watch

The New Media Consortium (NMC) and the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) have just released the *2007 Horizon Report*. The annual *Horizon Report*, as have previous editions of the report, identifies six emerging technologies that the underlying research suggests will become very important to higher education over the next one to five years.

The six selected areas for 2007 are: user-created content, social networking, mobile phones, virtual worlds, new scholarship and emerging forms of publication, and multiplayer educational gaming.

A central focus of the discussion of each technology is its relevance for teaching, learning, and creative expression. Live web links to example applications and additional readings are provided for each technology.

The selected technologies are presented in order of the projected "time-to-adoption." The times-to-adoption for the six technologies selected in this year's report are:

One year or less:

- user-created content
- social networking.

Two to three years:

- mobile phones
- virtual worlds.

Four to five years:

- the new scholarship and emerging forms of publication
- massively multiplayer educational gaming.

The NMC's Emerging Technologies Initiative focuses on expanding the boundaries of teaching, learning and creative expression by creatively applying new tools in new contexts. The Horizon Project, the centerpiece of this initiative, charts the landscape of emerging technologies and produces the NMC's annual Horizon Report.

The chairperson of the 2007 Horizon Project Advisory Board is Kristina Woolsey, Learning Experience Designer, New Media Thinking Project and Former Distinguished Scientist at Apple Computer, Inc.

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### USDLA Accepting Nominations for Distance Learning Awards

The United States Distance Learning Association is accepting nominations for its 2007 Distance Learning Awards, among the most distinguished awards for accomplishment in the distance learning field. The

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### Author Attribution

The article, "Working a Courseware Migration with Online Faculty," in the February 15th issue of *Distance Education Report*, was written by Dr. Karen M. White, Assistant Dean, Mercy College/Mercy Online, Dobbs Ferry, New York.

## The Tipping Point: The Moment that Transforms an Institution

In the language of public health, the “tipping point” is the point at which an outbreak becomes an epidemic—where the individual occurrences “spread by small changes that reproduce themselves and expand in geometric progression, grow bigger until they reach a ‘critical mass.’” Thereafter, any additional change alters the equilibrium and tips the system so that the disease becomes an epidemic.” You can see the tipping point effect at work in social as well as medical phenomena, from large demographic changes to kids buying iPods. What does this have to do with distance education? The idea of the tipping point applies to the long-term acceptance of distance education within an institution, making it a permanent or even dominant part of the institution.

If you want your school to be identified with distance education there’s a lot to be learned by studying the idea of a tipping point. And there’s some things to be learned even if you don’t. In either case, your path up to the tipping point should be a conscious one, says Claudine SchWeber, Chair of the Doctor of Management Program at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), or you may find yourself with more distance education than you can handle.

SchWeber has been making a science out of predicting the moment that an institution has tipped into being a primarily online institution. This is what she’s come up with:

*Small changes replicate ↔ Critical Mass(CrM)  
CrM+1=alteration of equilibrium ↔ tips the system  
--38-40% x (online enrollments) tips the system into an epidemic (overwhelming force for change).*

### Tipping too fast

In other words, individual instances of the phenomenon i.e., students enrolling in online courses, grows until a critical mass is reached, at which point you only need the smallest additional weight—symbolized here by the number one—to tip the system. This will happen when about 38 to 40 percent of the enrollees are online.

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***If you have an infrastructure that’s very elaborate, but you haven’t trained the faculty or the faculty are not interested, or you don’t have very many enrollments, you have a very expensive problem.***

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“I’m not a statistician,” SchWeber says, “but people ask me ‘how do you know when you’ve gotten to it?’ I was trying to figure out if you could do that.”

There are risks in the tipping process—you have to watch how you build to your critical mass. SchWeber suggests you watch three indicators at your institution—enrollments, faculty involvement and infrastructure. If the tipping point is your goal, you need to have all three moving upwards together at something like the same rate, supporting each other.

“Student enrollment in online classes are the easiest data to track and to quantify,” SchWeber says. “When that hits 38-40 percent, I’m arguing that that institution has tipped. And that means the other two parts have to be in sync.” For instance, if your enroll-

ments are booming but you don’t have enough faculty, or you don’t have very good technical support, (your system’s always crashing, people can’t get the online library resources, etc.) you’re going to have a serious problem. Similarly, if you have an infrastructure that’s very elaborate, but you haven’t trained the faculty or the faculty are not interested, or you don’t have very many enrollments, you have a very expensive problem.

“What you don’t want,” SchWeber says, “is for it to tip *over*.”

The point, SchWeber says, is that if you want to bring your institution fully online, and do it successfully, you should pay attention to the three indicators. “This should not be about ‘Let’s get on the latest craze and see if we can bring in some money.’ There’s commitment, there’s a reward a structure for faculty who want to engage in this, there’s money for the technical support, for training, for libraries. It’s conscious.”

To successfully transform an institution requires the highest levels of the administration to be on board. The president and the provost have to want to move the project forward. And SchWeber suggests that those administrators may have to announce that there are consequences if faculty don’t participate. But, she says, it’s not so much about individual leadership. “It’s not just having the right person in a leadership position,” she says. “It’s about making a conscious commitment and reward structure and support network to do this.”

### Deciding what you want

Of course, your institution might want to do something short of tipping.

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## Reflections from the Front Line: A Conversation with Darcy Hardy

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

**D**r. Darcy W. Hardy is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Executive Director of the UT TeleCampus, the virtual university of The University of Texas System that supports online delivery of System-wide collaborative academic programs from UT institutions.

Recently, Dr. Hardy received the Mildred and Charles Wedemeyer Outstanding Distance Learning Practitioner Award in Madison, Wisconsin (2006), was inducted into the Texas Distance Learning Association Hall of Fame (2006) and received the WCET Richard Jonsen award (2005) for “long-standing willingness to nurture and assist others in the distance learning community, significant contribution to the field, and innovative service to distance learning students.” Her most recent publication, *Dancing on the Glass Ceiling: Women, Leadership and Technology*, which she co-edited with Dr. Don Olcott, received the 2005 Charles Wedemeyer Publication Award from UCEA.

Dr. Hardy sits on *Distance Education Report's* advisory board

**DER:** *You have just won the Wedemeyer Outstanding Distance Learning Practitioner award. Tell us a little about the work leading up to that award?*

**Hardy:** Receiving the Wedemeyer award was a little overwhelming, to say the least. You know, I entered this career almost by accident, and over time I've looked at the people who receive awards like this and never put myself in the same company. It was a great honor.

The work leading up to the award?

I'm not sure exactly what that work is. Seriously, it seems like it's just been my whole life since 1988. It's all I've done and all I've ever thought about since then. While I was not a distance education pioneer in the truest sense, I think I joined the band wagon fairly early. I was a firm believer of using technology to reach distant audiences

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*“Women in the field of distance learning have a better shot at reaching equality. Women have embraced this field early, so in some cases, the leadership was there for the taking.”*

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from the very beginning, and I think I knew with my first program using audioconferencing that this was where I was supposed to be. Over the years, I have been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to try or create new strategies for delivering content.

**DER:** *Do you mean with technological innovation?*

**Hardy:** There seemed to have been (and unfortunately continues to be in some circles) too much focus on the technology and not enough on pedagogy, faculty preparation and student support services. When I led a group of people in 1997 who created what would become the UT TeleCampus, it was important to me to stay focused on services. And when we launched the TeleCampus in 1998, it was all about service -- we didn't have any courses for a year!

While the service-first focus was by design, it wasn't what some people expected. Remember that was about the time when everyone across the country seemed to be discovering online education and people were scrambling to find courses, any courses, home grown or canned, to put on the Internet. We held firm and to this day, I firmly believe that a primary reason we survived that flurry and have now become very successful is because we kept our focus on service – and still do.

**DER:** *Tell us about the TeleCampus.*

**Hardy:** The TeleCampus is by far my proudest innovation. I don't mean to imply that I take all the credit. The TeleCampus has been a labor of love for all of us who have been a part of it. We have taken the organization from a staff of one to 25, from two programs to over 30, and from about 400 annual enrollments to over 10,000. I like to spread the wealth when it comes to our success. People sometimes tie the TeleCampus directly to me, and I do know that there's a lot of my vision behind the organization, but to see what this staff has done in partnership with our 15 institutions in nine years – well, it's almost overwhelming.

And while the organization has the occasional personality clash just like any other group of people who work under pressure, we have a great work environment. I decided a long time ago that if you don't really care about the people who work with you, you'll never get the productivity levels that are within reach. Our productivity levels are huge. I am confident that it's because all of the staff is treated like family, looking out for each other, being there when personal life takes its tolls, being a

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administration...from page 3

A healthy 26 percent online may be exactly what your long term strategy calls for. "Institutions that are getting into online learning need to pay attention to the paths that they're on," SchWeber says. No matter what path you're on, even if limited online growth is all you're looking for, SchWeber's same three factors—enrollments, faculty and infrastructure--still apply. "What if you have 25 or 30 percent online enrollments and let's say 30 percent of the faculty. And you're not able to get on to the library except from nine to five. That's not going to work. The three balls have to be in the air together."

### Faculty resistance

Of the three key elements that have to be in place for transformation, faculty is by far the most problematic. SchWeber notes several ways to deal with faculty resistance. Your first move should be to recruit the early adopters,

younger faculty used to using technology, who want to try online teaching. They become your supporters and champions. Then you pick carefully which programs you want to move online--you don't do all at once. You also want to reward and recognize people for working online. SchWeber cites Georgetown University for faculty support. Georgetown funds faculty research in online learning, they recognize online teaching as part of the tenure process, and they have an annual ceremony, attended by the president, to honor the best courses or research. "If you do that you'll get the people who are inclined but scared because of the consequences for tenure," SchWeber says. Another faculty-related issue is unionization. Faculty unions have various kinds of arrangements with their institutions--some of which have to do with intellectual property, others with workload and quality issues.

Sometimes external factors can affect when and how a school reaches the tipping point. Hurricane Katrina

brought a number of schools in New Orleans online, and pushed some all the way over the tipping point. "Sometimes there's an incident, and the institution realizes, "Oh my God, if we had this we could keep going. Online learning makes an institution more resilient," SchWeber says. In fact, for SchWeber, the notion of resilience has a lot to do with the decision to transform an institution. The resilience of online learning gives an institution the flexibility to follow where their enrollments are going. "Figure out who you want in your student population, where they're coming from, whether some of this would serve them. And be careful about it. Don't do it to be doing the latest thing, but think about it-- what does it cost, what do we want to do, what stages will we go through, how do we support faculty and students? Think it through." ●

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awards are presented annually to organizations and individuals, and recognize four categories of excellence:

- 1) 21st Century Best Practice Award
- 2) Best Practice Awards for Distance Learning Programming
- 3) Excellence in Distance Learning Teaching Awards
- 4) Outstanding Leadership by an Individual award.

The 2007 USDLA Distance

Learning Awards are presented to five major sectors of distance education and training. These include the pre-K-12, higher education, corporate, government and telehealth markets.

The 2007 USDLA Awards will be presented at the USDLA awards ceremony, scheduled for May 6-8, 2007 during the USDLA 20th Anniversary Conference being held in Kansas City, Mo., at the Hyatt Regency Crown Center. This year's conference, "Our Past...Your Future" will celebrate USDLA's 20th Anniversary and will examine major

trends that are impacting the present and future of distance learning in education, government, business, and health care.

You can register for the conference: <http://www.msbanet.org/register/usdla.htm>

Submit nominations at: <https://secure.txdla.org/usdla/usdlaAWARDform1.asp?fct=new&src=user> ●

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with no major changes at all. The types of schools, the proportion of them that thought that their faculty were on board, the percentage of people who will say “I get cooperation, they’re supportive of online education” is not changing at all over any of those survey years. And the proportion saying they have a big problem, [the faculty] are openly hostile to it, hasn’t changed at all either. We see no movement one way or the other in the faculty attitudes.

We did ask one other question about the acceptance of online education and that’s if they saw a lack of acceptance of online degrees from potential employers, and there are very few who see that as a problem. It’s only about one in four at the schools that are not engaged in online. The number gets down to below one in ten among the people who are actively engaged in online programs, who see any issue in the acceptance of online degrees among potential employers.

**DER:** *Do you see the possibility of a shift in attitudes, where that hard core of opposition might shrink or break up?*

**Allen:** The trend would not appear to be in favor of that happening, but we are going to be doing this survey for at least four more years. So that will be very interesting for us to watch.

**Seaman:** We have nothing here that says we should be looking for a fundamental difference in that. But we’ve got this tension rising among the schools. An increasing number of them say that online is critical to their long term strategy and they’re seeing phenomenal growth in their online programs, and they see that their programs are going to continue to grow

at a fast rate, and at the same time they say they have issues of acceptance with their faculty. So at some point the two sides are going to bang heads. It’s an issue that’s going to have to be resolved one way or another. What may be happening now is that people are accepting that the faculty as a whole don’t accept it but they can find enough individual faculty who can teach the courses to keep them going, because it’s still less than one quarter of their total enrollments. Yet if it keeps growing it might reach the critical point where they’ve got to convince some more faculty to get involved, because that’s going to be a damper to growth if it keeps growing at its current rate. We don’t know what the answer is going to be, but it does look like in the next few years something’s got to shake out on that.

It also may be that one thing that will happen over time is that, that because there are more online students every year, there will be more faculty every year with experience online. So it may be that we’re going to convert the faculty from within because there will be more and more of them who have had some online experience. But it’s all speculation.

**DER:** *Is there more resistance at certain types of institutions?*

**Seaman:** Yes, but the differences are not huge. The institutions that are most heavily engaged in online education tend to be the large public institutions--who have the highest enrollments, who are most likely to say it’s part of their long term strategy. They’re the most positive on almost all the dimensions of online. There’s still a number of them who say the faculty are not on board. Now if you go to the ones that are least engaged, a small

private baccalaureate institution, they are more likely to say that their faculty don’t support it. But the differences aren’t that big. The faculty acceptance at the small baccalaureate and the faculty acceptance at the large public, those are not huge differences.

**Allen:** Even at small liberal arts schools there’s some degree of engagement with online. Absolutely. There is not a classification of school for which there is no activity. No matter how you slice and dice it there’s some subset of those schools that have some online. It’s just that the levels can be so much lower. But yes there is, even at the small liberal arts schools, where as a class they’re the most negative, there are people there who are involved, who are talking about online. They’re growing. They’re at a much lower level but they’re growing as well. Possibly growing at the same rate but I hesitate to give you a figure because the sample is so small at that level, it’s hard to give a statistically accurate estimate. We don’t have anything to say they’re not growing. One thing is that they all believe that they’re serving new students. So even for a small baccalaureate, they don’t see it as a way of keeping their enrollees, they see it as a way of expanding their enrollees by finding a new student base.

*The second half of “Sloan Survey Finds Growth, Obstacles for Distance Education” will appear in the April 1st issue of Distance Education Report.*

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friend -- and that type of leadership/management has to come from the top. If I don't set a good example, I can't expect others to do so either. While I've been recognized for my work in distance learning (and for which I am quite humbled), I'd like to be known for how I treat other people even more. I think that's what leads to success.

**DER:** *You have also been involved in events and projects related to women in leadership and technology. I'm thinking particularly of the USDLA sponsored International Forum for Women in E-learning (IFWE) and the book you co-edited, Dancing on the Glass Ceiling. Are there still gender issues facing women in the field of distance learning? Do you see these issues as being different from issues women face in the traditional classroom or administrative suite?*

**Hardy:** During my tenure as president of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) in 2004, I proposed establishing a forum for women in the field. Since the USDLA constituency includes K-12, higher education, corporate, military, telehealth and government members, I thought that by bringing women together from across these diverse areas to address issues in e-learning, we might also be able to discuss issues that were specific to our gender.

IFWE was born in 2004 and now runs every 18 months. The next event will be in November in Santa Fe, New Mexico. At the same time I was developing IFWE, my colleague Don Olcott and I were talking about starting the *Dancing on the Glass Ceiling* book -- a collection of interviews and stories by women and men about women, leadership and technology. After finishing the book and participating in two

IFWE events, here are my observations. I know there are lots of statistics available that can demonstrate that women are either above or below the glass ceiling, but I believe overall we are doing okay -- in this particular field. It is common to see women in senior leadership and director roles within these organizations, so we've made progress.

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***We need to pay attention to the way this generation communicates via technology. It's not the same way that we do, and yet they expect us to communicate with them their way.***

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Is it an equal playing field now? No way. There are many women who are still not paid the same amount as a man would be paid for doing the same job. I believe that the difference is that women in the field of distance learning have a better shot at reaching equality. Women have embraced this field early, so in some cases, the leadership was there for the taking. Since "distance learning" was not a field of study in higher education when the use of the Internet for education exploded, those who jumped in and ran with it have done well for the most part.

The purpose of books like *Dancing*, or events like IFWE, is not to whine and complain about the struggles women still face. They are designed to help women celebrate how far we have come in this field in particular, to share ideas about how to go further, and to recognize the importance of having

mentors. It's critical to success today.

**DER:** *During the past few years, you've spent some of your time observing and speaking about the Millennial generation. What do you think this group of young people are looking for with regard to distance learning?*

**Hardy:** I'll be honest. The Millennials [born between 1982 and 1994] fascinate me, possibly because I have two daughters - one born in 86 and one in 88. They are digital natives and watching how they interact with technology is amazing. I love technology, and I sometimes feel like I live and breathe it, but not like they do. It's in their blood - I on the other hand have to learn it every day.

Although I speak about the Millennials, I am not the researcher behind my statements. I look to people like Diana Oblinger and her husband, James, and the great work they have done. I do however have my own personal observations from watching my children and their friends over the past 20 years. Research has clearly shown that this generation uses instant and text messaging more than the telephone. My observation is these two communication tools have taken over with the Millennials.

These kids do not even use their cell phones for talking that much anymore. They use IM when they are in their dorms or homes, and they use text messaging from their cell phones when they are mobile. What this tells me with regard to distance learning - and learning in general - is that we need to pay attention to the way this generation communicates via technology. It's not the same way that we do, and yet they expect us to communicate with them their way. We're still on the phone and

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sending emails.

If mobile technology and communication is the future, and I believe it is, we need to start spending more time in our organizations talking to Millennials if we plan to continue to meet their needs. We all thought we were on the cutting edge by putting courses online for distance learning. Today distance has very little to do with it, and this new generation has blown right past what we considered innovative only a few years ago. I find it quite sad when we see online courses that include a few PowerPoint and Word files, and think these students will be impressed with our technical savvy. While I'm proud to say that courses offered through the TeleCampus are generally very well designed and make excellent use of technology, there are way too many courses out on the Internet today that are simply not going to cut it with this generation or those that follow. Not only is the content less than engaging; there is no communication between students or with the instructor.

We, as distance educators, should be leading the way by keeping up with the communication and learning preferences of the Millennials. If we don't, I'm afraid we will end up with the rest of the crowd that may not have a clue.

**DER:** *What challenges do you think distance learning must be ready for in the coming years? Do these changes come from technology or from other considerations?*

**Hardy:** In addition to being aware of the communication and learning styles of future generations, I think one of our biggest challenges will be the field itself. By our own admission, and as I stated above, this is not about distance anymore. We had a very

noble cause for many years - providing educational access to those away from a campus - a cause that was sometimes appreciated but often overlooked.

I used to feel like we were out there on the edge of the university, screaming, "Look at us! Distance learning is good!" We begged to be recognized for delivering content away from the campus. We wanted our col-

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*There are way too many courses out on the Internet today that are simply not going to cut it with this generation or those that follow.*

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leagues to understand that technology can be used to reach learners in the classroom and at a distance.

Well, be careful what you wish for. The Internet took off and after a few years two things happened: convenience became more important than distance, and everyone became an expert in online education. It was almost as if overnight people started getting what we have been saying for years. Only they still weren't necessarily listening to us about how to do it right.

I tell people all the time that if you are in this field and you are not in front of faculty and administrators, you need to get there. Your place is now at the table, not on the outskirts. Otherwise we will have continued misuse of technology for education. The train is moving very fast -- we need to be driving, not standing on the sideline.

**DER:** *Tell me a little more about your current work and projects. What haven't I asked you about that you would like to*

*share with the readers of Distance Education Report?*

**Hardy:** Currently, I'm involved in an exciting course redesign project for the TeleCampus. Based on the work of Carol Twigg and NCAT, and through a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, we are partnering with three UT System academic campuses to redesign Calculus I. By redesign, we mean using technology in a way that will do two things: increase learning mastery and lower the cost of delivery.

The TeleCampus has licensed high-quality multimedia course content from the National Repository of Online Courses (NROC). Using this content as the primary instructional material, three faculty (one from each campus) will develop a joint, collaborative online course which will include a common assessment strategy. But this is not a typical online course. In addition to accessing the content 24x7, students will receive assistance with the materials through a "math emporium" on their campus, and/or via Smarthinking, the online 24x7 live tutoring service already used by the TeleCampus. Each math emporium will be staffed at various times by upper level undergraduate students or teaching assistants (tutors) available to assist students with the course.

So, not only do we plan to develop a high quality Calculus I course that can be accessed 24x7, we will complement it with both face-to-face and 24x7 online tutoring. Each of the campuses involved will reduce the number of course sections by creating one section for the course, therefore reducing campus costs and making space available for other classes. We plan to go live with the new course on all three campuses next fall. ●