

Comments: Promotion of Distance Education Through Digital Technologies

Timothy M. Downs, Ph.D.
Dean of Graduate Studies and Lifelong Learning
Emporia State University
1200 Commercial Street
Emporia, KS 66801
(316) 341-5508
E-mail: *downstim@emporia.edu*

Introduction:

Educational institutions are continually offering more distance education opportunities to varying student populations who may be either place-bound or time-bound. The ability to offer the highest quality educational experiences to these student populations relies on the premise that faculty members will have the ability to access and deliver pertinent information to these populations in a timely fashion and students will have access to these same materials with little or no restrictions. Inevitably, the delivery of copyrighted information will constitute an integral part of the “pertinent information” that must be provided to students in order to assure that educational experiences achieve the appropriate learning outcomes. Therefore, the following comments support the notion that while copyright and fair use laws should always be given the highest degree of consideration we must continually assess the educational contexts and populations using varying sources of information in order to assure that these laws do not become overly restrictive, thus hindering the educational process itself.

Specific Comments:

1. Distance education suggests that the delivery of content is reliant upon a medium different from face-to-face instruction. Modes of delivery vary, including the amount of reliance upon digital technologies for instruction and the dissemination of information. Students taking distance education courses at Emporia State University (ESU) typically use either the internet or a teleconferencing system in the state referred to as Telenet2. Within the structure of these courses students will rely upon e-mail, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and videoconference technologies to interact within their peer groups and with instructors. Course materials are only made available to students enrolled in the program and the course materials themselves are prepared by the faculty member teaching the course. Courses are completed for academic credit and offered to students from within the state of Kansas.
2. In terms of licensing, we use software programs that we have purchased or obtained access to via a University site license. Faculty typically create their own course materials and exercises. Text books and course materials that are copyrighted are made available to students via on-line brokers.

3. Technologically, we offer courses via the internet and a dedicated teleconferencing system in the state of Kansas, referred to as Telenet2. Access to internet courses are password restricted to students enrolled in each course and the Telenet2 system transmits to dedicated sites which are monitored during each instructional session to assure that all students are registered in the courses being offered.

4. Copyright laws should be carefully interpreted in order to avoid impeding the delivery of quality educational experiences to students enrolled in distance learning programs. While the Fair Use laws should not be violated in a wholesale manner, we should attempt to reach a compromise in order to facilitate the use of appropriate materials for all courses delivered electronically.

Summary:

Emporia State University has developed and delivered a significant number of courses reliant upon distance education technologies. We make every attempt to assure that copyrighted materials are used in a lawful and ethical manner. Therefore, we hope that the discussions surrounding these issues lead to informed decisions that do not reduce the quality of educational activities reliant upon mediated technologies for course delivery.