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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES IN NURSING DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by

JOY H. FRASER 

A THESIS
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine administrative issues associated with post-RN baccalaureate degree programs offered by distance education in Canada. The study centered on the broad two-part question: What are the issues faced by administrators of nursing degree programs offered through distance education and what processes have they put into place to address these issues?

To undertake the study, interviews were conducted according to accepted qualitative methods with individuals involved with administering post-R.N. nursing degree programs in Canadian dual-mode universities. Using a naturalistic approach to inquiry, data were gathered from interviews and documents, and were analyzed on an on-going basis, concluding with the emergence of six broad categories of administrative issues.

The main issues were related to student participation, student support services, faculty participation, program development and delivery, interaction, and bureaucratic systems. Participants identified different ways of dealing with the issues, by putting processes into place to manage them, by ignoring them, or simply accepting them as part of the reality of providing distance education in dual-mode universities.

Three main themes that were embedded in and across the issues emanated from the study: marginalization, intensity and commitment. From the issues and the themes that emerged it seems that there is considerable room for improvement in the way distance education is accommodated in these institutions. Conventional, dual-mode universities appear to support offering distance education as an option, and despite the

difficulties associated with it, program administrators are committed to making it work.

However, there are many gaps in the way most distance education programs have evolved. This study suggests that a more systematic approach needs to be taken when planning and administering these programs, so that issues such as student support, faculty support and course development and delivery are consciously considered. Administrators need to be more fully aware of what they reasonably can and cannot do within the constraints of dual-mode universities. Furthermore, if distance education is going to be a success, the administrators of these institutions will have to seriously consider providing additional resources, support and recognition to those charged with administering the programs.

Dedication

This is dedicated to my sons Kent and Alexander, for their patience and understanding while on this long journey with me; and to my oldest son Shayne, who came on this trip in his own way and who, if here in person, would be very proud. To my mother, Mrs. Muriel Jones and my stepfather, Mr. Earl Jones for their love and encouragement. To my friends who generously provided support, friendship, and encouragement. Finally, to Wayne, my best friend, who, besides donating his time and talents helping me edit and format the document, showed genuine interest in my research, and exemplified how, when motivated, one can truly transcend time and distance.

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The participants in my study who were so much more than that--generously giving me their time, their thoughts, and some of them, their homes. Thank you for being such wonderful colleagues and friends.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> ....Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become....The first sentence of every novel should be: "trust me, this will take some time but there is order here, very faint, very human."
> (Micheal Ondaatje, 1996, p.146)

Time, distance, or funding often prevent individuals from having access to educational opportunities. With advances in technology, education can more easily be provided by a variety of Instructional media, including sophisticated wireless technologies, as well as the common telephone and mail networks that circle the globe. Distance education methods are increasingly being incorporated into post-secondary education offerings as educators and administrators search for means to overcome the barriers of time, distance, and funding, thereby making college and university education more accessible. In order to do, this dual-mode institutions (those that offer both campus-based and distance education programs) have had to recoup costs in various ways such as charging more for distance education courses than for on-campus courses.

Stenerson (1998) observed that distance education, which has been in existence for over one hundred years, "has acquired a dubious reputation, establishing a conflict with many traditional colleges and universities. Over the past ten years, distance education has challenged historical perceptions and started climbing the Ivy Tower" (p. 12). Indeed, distance education, previously thwarted in higher education, has not only become accepted, but is now of worldwide interest and importance. It is important not only for those who are geographically removed from large urban centers

and campus-based universities; it is increasingly appealing to many urban students who require flexible times and places to study. The interest in distance education, though not new is growing rapidly, manifested by the large number of distance education courses and programs now available globally. For example in North America (Canada and the United States) there are 97 Canadian and 177 American institutions and thousands of courses listed in the International Council of Distance Learning Database (1998). The accelerated interest in distance education is influenced by several factors. Not surprisingly, writers in the field have different perceptions as to what these factors are.

Brown and Brown (1994) have attributed the growing interest to the perceived cost-effectiveness of distance delivery systems, and to the increased acceptance of distance programs and courses by students, educators and governments. Perraton (1991) observed that worldwide experience with diverse types of distance teaching systems has demonstrated that distance education can be used successfully for various purposes and with different populations, therefore enhancing its credibility. Rumble (1992) referred to the widespread use of distance education as an "emergence of an alternative educational paradigm in which students are not in face-to-face contact with their teachers or their institutions" (p. 14). Stenerson (1998) cited the emergence of advanced information technology coupled with the changing demographics of the student population as two factors that have broken down the barriers, thus enabling distance education to be accepted as an alternative. In my experience all of these have contributed to the increased use of distance education.

Of particular interest here are the uses, significance of, and issues associated with distance education for professional nursing education in Canada. Over the past several years, the availability of distance education as an alternative to conventional university education has enabled many Canadian nurses to attain a university degree that otherwise might not have been accessible to them. Ross Kerr (1996) who recently documented the growth of distance education programs for nurses nation-wide, stressed the pivotal role that distance education can play in meeting the goal of baccalaureate preparation as entry to practice. She maintained, "The achievement of the goal of the profession will be facilitated by extending the campus and offering baccalaureate-degree programs in other than traditional university settings" (p. 389). Ross Kerr noted also that distance education will provide the means to make graduate programs available to the urgently needed "larger cadre of nurses prepared to engage in advanced nursing practice in a variety of settings" (p. 389).

Other nursing leaders, such as Larsen and Baumgart (1992) emphasized the importance of accessible university programs for nurses, suggesting that because they are mainly women "who have frequently faced economic disadvantages because of deficiencies in education, better educational options are important in achieving social justice and employment equity"(p. 392). University education is important as well, to raise the profile of the profession. There is widespread concern in the profession that nursing has never attained the stature it deserves in Canada's health care system. This observation was echoed by Rachlis and Kushner (1994) in their book *Strong Medicine: How to save Canada's Health Care System*, where they proclaimed nurses as "the key to health reform" (p. 335).

Larsen and Baumgart (1992) and Ross Kerr (1996) agreed that nurses should play a more active role in health care. Writing about the large number of Canadian nurses still prepared at the diploma level, they maintained that university education is essential for nurses if they are to gain the professional skills and values needed to cope in a changing world. Furthermore, they suggested that the university credential would also increase Nursing's power. Thus, nurse educators are challenged to provide accessible university degree programs, not only for new students, but also for the many nurses who were originally prepared at the diploma level.

Nurse educators have always been faced with challenges in their endeavors to be responsive to local, national and international societal trends and changes. Reich (1992) highlighted some of these changes in his analyses of the changing international economy and its effect on the nature of work and the implications for education. He identified the forces of international competitiveness, economic restructuring, and technological change as being significant for the future. In Reich's view, the roles of today's university graduates encompass the ability to identify and conceptualize problems and solutions, requiring the skills of abstraction, systems thinking, experimentation and collaboration. Nurses certainly require an education that will help them gain these skills to prepare them for key roles in today's and in future complex health care systems.

For nurses and nursing educators there are other trends to consider, such as an aging society, coupled with health care reforms, a focus on health promotion and primary care, and the need for lifelong learning opportunities. There is also a pressing need to change public perception about nurses' roles and to forge coalitions

with consumers, allied health professionals, and policy makers. In addition, as evidenced in government documents by Ady (1994), Bates (1995), and The Minister of Supply and Services Canada (1994), all educators and educational administrators are increasingly accountable to governments.

These same governments have responded to economic and social developments by drafting public policies that call for access, relevance, affordability and accountability from post-secondary institutions. Many educational administrators and authors, including Bates (1995), Larsen and Baumgart (1992), and Rumble (1992a) have warned that reforming efforts in education will require dedicated leadership from faculty and administrators to redirect professional skills and values and to experiment with new ways of organizing educational and research activities.

Indeed, many administrators of university level nursing programs across Canada are experimenting with new ways of organizing and offering educational programs through the use of distance education. These administrators are the leaders in nursing education; paving new roads and exploring innovative ways of teaching and learning. It is unfortunate that there is little formal documentation of these new initiatives or of the experiences of others who have already led the way in the development of similar programs. Meilicke and Larsen (1992) called for more research on nursing leaders across Canada saying "knowledge about leaders shapes the image of what future leaders should be like" (p. 522). However, from my own discussions with those responsible for administering distance education programs in Canada, they may be too busy doing administrative work to document their

experiences or to focus on research. This view is consistent with Jegede (1992) who stated:

> Compared with research in conventional education, research in distance education has neither been as pervasive, rigorous nor taken as very consequential if what obtains in the literature is anything to go by. A number of reasons might account for this state. First, the field of distance education is comparatively young and therefore requires time for maturity. Second, distance education providers and practitioners are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume, complexity and variety of activities involved in the provision of education at a distance. As a consequence, time is not always available to address issues relating to research. (p. 324)

This impression was supported by a survey of 89 distance educator experts from developed and developing countries where Jegede (1992) found that time and funding were named as the two greatest difficulties these researchers faced. These experts indicated a need to embark on research in all areas of distance education, with management and planning listed by respondents as priorities for study.

Smith (1991) commented on the paradox of universities recommending and doing research for the nation's industries while neglecting to do research into their own industry--higher education. Furthermore, of the little undertaken, rarely has research been carried out within the Canadian context. Jones (1993) noted that generally most research on educational administrators at the level of program manager has been conducted in community colleges and universities in the United States, with virtually none undertaken in Canada.

The lack of research is particularly disturbing to newcomers to the field who look to published research for guidance, as I did. Moreover, because of this discovery and because researchers are drawn to study that which interests them or is of personal

significance, I decided to undertake research in the area of educational administration in distance education. Given the personal motivation for this study, it seems warranted here to briefly describe myself, the researcher, so as to provide some background on the significance of this topic for me.

I graduated with a diploma in nursing at age nineteen, and have enjoyed a diverse and exciting nursing career--first as a staff nurse, then in middle management positions and later in clinical research and educational administrative positions. I have been employed full-time for my entire nursing career with the exception of very short intervals. In addition to carrying out responsibilities associated with being a wife and mother while employed, I have often been a student. Consequently, I felt fortunate to have the opportunity to complete some courses by distance education while completing my post-RN baccalaureate degree. Without that option, completing my degree would have been difficult if not impossible, as one of my children was seriously ill for an extended period of time.

My experience with distance education is relevant to this study in many ways. First, the feeling of liberation I had when I discovered I could complete my degree without leaving home will remain forever in my memory. The fact that I was not required to attend classes for specified hours or days of the week enabled me to carry out my other responsibilities as well as studying. Secondly, my experience of being a distance education student in three different courses made me conscious of the differences among tutors. It was not difficult to discern whom I considered to be the "good" from "not so good" home study tutors. This experience has helped me remain

aware of my own performance in the role of a teacher in distance education and I believe it has benefited my students.

Thirdly, I encountered a different, less unwieldy, less intimidating, and less bureaucratic administrative structure than I had experienced in conventional universities, which made it easier and less stressful to register in and complete the courses I required. Lastly, my experience as a distance education student was a critical factor in my motivation to apply for a position at Athabasca University and I believe, in being successful in obtaining the position.

I have been a faculty member at Athabasca University for the past seven years. For a relatively large percentage of that time, I was charged with administering a baccalaureate degree program offered by distance education. At the time of this writing I was administering a graduate program for advanced practice community nurses offered on the Internet. During my experience in distance education I have found the lack of published research on administration, especially in nursing distance education, particularly striking.

This void, combined with a genuine interest in administration and distance education, attracted me to this topic. In addition, the fact that distance education is quickly becoming the means to higher education for nurses at undergraduate and graduate levels, further justified undertaking research in this area. Consequently, I undertook this study in an attempt to learn more about the experiences of and the issues faced by administrators of nursing distance education programs.

NEED FOR AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

An array of books and articles identify general concerns related to distance and open education. However, there has been relatively little written specifically about the administration of distance learning systems. Exceptions include Paul (1990) who provided a useful description of what he viewed as problems and challenges facing leaders of open learning organizations, although he focused mainly on university presidents; Markowitz (1990), who also explored a broad range of management issues in higher education but avoided any detailed or critical discussion of issues; Perraton (1991), who described administrative structures; and Rumble (1986, 1992b), who presented issues and choices facing educational planners and administrators interested in embarking on the establishment of distance education learning systems, focusing mainly on planning, organizing and controlling functions. Rumble (1992b) identified three specific subsystems that comprise distance education systems: a student-learner subsystem; a materials subsystem, and an administrative subsystem. He highlighted different issues related to each that may pose challenges for managers due to the physical separation of students from their teachers and from the institutions.

Paul (1990) has contended that planners and administrators need to consider a wide range of issues and requirements before they get too directly involved in the design and development of distance learning systems. Likewise, Albrecht and Bardsley (1994) emphasized the importance of comprehensive and coordinated planning in order to minimize social, political, and financial costs associated with distance education initiatives. This advice has relevance for administrators of nursing programs who are in the process of developing, or are planning to embark on distance education initiatives.

Given the importance of the availability of distance education programs for the profession and practice of nursing, planners and administrators need to be aware of the unique experiences of those working in the various programs and the issues needing to be addressed. Planning, whether for new programs or to incorporate the use of different teaching/learning methods into existing educational programs, is an expensive and arduous undertaking. It seems reasonable to believe that learning from, and building on the experiences of others could save much money, time and perhaps frustration. However, as previously mentioned, a review of recent literature revealed that educational administration in distance education continues to be neglected as far as any comprehensive research is concerned.

The need for more detailed examination of issues facing distance education administrators was proposed almost a decade ago by some experts in the field. For instance, Murgatroyd and Woudstra (1989) using a case study approach, examined issues related to strategic planning and strategic management at one distance education university, concluding that more research is required in this area. They stated, "The literature concerning management of distance education is largely descriptive and rarely analytic...(and)...of all the areas of study in the field of distance education, the field of management appears most neglected" (p.15).

Barker and Dickson (1994), Moore (1993), Rossman (1992), Sherry (1996) and Stenerson (1998) agreed that there are many questions that cannot be neglected and need to be addressed related to the administration of distance education and the use of new technologies. They contended that there are many administrative issues around coordinating and regulating electronic courses offered on computer networks

and satellites, choosing what technology to use, and deciding what kind of administration and funding should exist. Furthermore, these authors maintained that the availability of communications technologies for education, and our ideas about how to use them in teaching and learning were running ahead of administrators' abilities to conceptualize ways of organizing and managing these technologies. It seems this continues to be the case as we move into the next millenium.

This view is supported by Kahle (1998) who, in his annotated bibliography of contemporary writings, presented some central issues surrounding the use of computer mediated communication (CMC) for distance learning in higher education. He observed that there is a wide array of literature available and many issues identified that require additional research. However, he also pointed out that "discussions on the administration of CMC based educational programs and their impact on lifelong education for all peoples are noticeably missing in the literature" (p. 2).

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) provided a succinct and comprehensive review of complexities and operational issues related to the administration and management of distance education enterprises. They divided what they identified as common issues into three major categories: personnel, facilities and curriculum issues. At first glance it might appear that these issues are no different from those in any higher educational administration context. However, as these authors noted in their review, scholars of distance education such as Snowden and Daniel (1988) and Davis and Elliott (1989) have suggested that because operational issues occur at every level--local state/provincial, national and international--the issues are far reaching.

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) described distance education systems as more complex with highly interdependent parts, consequently requiring 'tighter' management than conventional educational institutions. They suggested that in most cases, effective coordination of personnel at many levels and at numerous sites requires excellent communication and appropriate control over various organizational components. Hence, like Paul (1990) and Rumble (1992b) they concluded that in order to be successful distance education managers, a high degree of planning, control and excellent communication is required.

Farrell and Haughey (1986) and Haughey (1989, 1995) also identified specific issues pertaining to distance education and open learning systems, and decisions that needed to be made with respect to instructional design and production of course materials, student services, budget allocations, adoption of new technologies, administrative models, philosophies and learning theories, and political jurisdiction. These issues have persisted according to Bates (1995), Paul (1990), Rumble (1992b), Schlosser and Anderson (1994), Sherry (1996), Jeffries (1997) and Stenerson (1998).

Issues highlighted by these writers are related to the need for preservice and inservice training of faculty; additional administrative support, time, and equipment for those teaching by distance; national standards for curriculum development and program evaluation; additional student support services; expeditious and appropriate feedback related to student testing and evaluation; and the need to carefully consider the compatibility, cost and longevity of equipment prior to purchasing technology. In addition, with the present emphasis on resource utilization and partnerships, and when

technologies involve group processes, coordination with other service providers becomes an important consideration.

Depending on the extent to which distance education has been incorporated into nursing programs, and the type of delivery systems used, I believed the issues identified in the literature could all be concerns for nursing administrators. In addition, nursing educators may have concerns related to establishing a system of clinical placements and preceptorship for students taking clinical courses at a distance, and the need to continuously revise courses to ensure their currency and relevancy in an ever-changing health care environment.

In summary, the literature related to distance education administration though limited in volume, reveals a broad range of general administrative issues and concerns. Unfortunately, none of the issues and concerns have been studied or discussed from the perspective of nursing administrators. Furthermore, there is almost unanimous agreement among distance education writers that more research in administration is needed. Given the rapid and diverse development of distance education initiatives in nursing across Canada, and the importance of these programs to furthering the profession and practice of nursing, I believed that the administration of such programs warranted study.

I believed also that the experiences and practices of those who have been involved in similar programs should inform new educational initiatives. In addition, prior to this study it was not known the extent to which issues identified by administrators of other types of educational programs, (such as the use and cost of technology, faculty training, student diversity, collaboration with others, or structural

issues) were relevant to or had meaning for educational administrators of distance education programs in nursing. Nor was it known how any identified issues were being addressed in traditional universities.

I did surmise that there might be additional and unique issues and challenges associated with administering professional degree programs. For example, it was and continues to be my experience as a faculty member and administrator, that an array of issues arise related to the practice component in nursing degree programs whether offered on- or off-campus. At Athabasca University, I have found administering the clinical courses by distance education far more time-consuming and complex than "straight theory" courses. Moreover, I had often wondered to what extent, if any, my colleagues in dual-mode universities experienced similar issues.

Perraton (1991) argued: "There is a real and important job to be done in deriving guidance to the practice or understanding of distance education both from the theory and from analysis of the experience" (p. 62). Therefore this study was designed to gain a better understanding of the experiences of administrators of distance education nursing programs by exploring with them the nature of their experiences and the issues they faced. I hoped also to learn more about how they managed the administrative issues they encountered in their daily lives.

This study may be meaningful to anyone responsible for administrative aspects of distance education programs, including administrative and technical support staff, faculty members, nurse administrators, and senior administrators. Ultimately, it may be meaningful to students, both those studying by distance education and those studying the field of distance education. By increasing our understanding of

administrative issues associated with distance education, perhaps we can work toward resolving the issues and reducing barriers to teaching and learning in this mode.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This chapter has served as an introduction to the dissertation. It has presented a glimpse of the distance education scene and an introduction to me as a distance student, educator and administrator. I have attempted to provide a landscape against which a description and discussion of issues in distance education can be etched. In sharing my own experiences and the reasons for my interest in this topic, I have revealed some of my values and possible biases. This will permit you, the reader, to judge how I may have influenced the data collection and analysis. Finally, the significance and need for this study is illustrated in this first chapter and supported by literature calling for research in this area.

Chapter 2 broadens the contextual basis for the study with a review of relevant distance education literature. Beginning with a definition of distance education, the chapter then leads into the evolution of distance education, followed by a description of different configurations for distance education in Canada. An overview of distance education in nursing and of nursing educational administration sets the contextual basis for the study. The chapter concludes by explaining the purpose of the study.

Chapter 3 poses the general research question and describes the research methods and design. Central to this chapter is a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings for the qualitative methods used in a naturalistic, interpretive approach to inquiry. Specifics about the study participants, methods used to gather data and strategies of data analyses are provided. Included are descriptions of the means used

to maintain data trustworthiness, the assumptions made, the delimitations and limitations, and ethical considerations associated with the study.

Chapters 4 to 9 describe the issues identified in the study. Issues are presented in broad categories with subcategories linked to the main broad issues. Chapter 10 comprises a summary of the research, themes that emerged, a discussion and synopsis of the findings, implications for further study, and conclusions.

Chapter 2

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

> The Brainians could see the long, thin arteries along which the humans travelled. They noted that after the sunrise the humans all travelled one way and at sunset they all travelled the other way. They could see that their progress was slow and congested along these arteries, that there were endless blockages, queues and delays causing untold frustration and inefficiency. All this they could see quite clearly. What was not clear to them was why.
>
> (Elton, 1991, p. 4-6)

My intent in this chapter is to establish part of a contextual basis for the emergence of nursing degree programs offered by distance education in Canada; a backdrop against which administrative issues faced by those associated with them can be considered. I present the results of a review of the literature, incorporating literature on distance education in general, distance education in Canada, nursing educational administration, and distance education in nursing.

As noted earlier, very little has been found in the way of research on the administration of distance education, and none on distance education programs in nursing from the perspective of program managers or administrators. There is however, a large body of literature on distance education in general. Selected distance education literature related to my study is presented here.

DISTANCE EDUCATION DEFINED

For the purposes of this study, I did not examine the entire field of distance education but limited the review more specifically to post-secondary distance education and its evolution. However, prior to discussing the evolution of distance education, a definition is in order. Rumble (1992a) defined distance education thus:

"In its pure form, distance learning is a method of education in which the learner is physically separated from the teacher" (p. 16) requiring the use of some media for teaching and communicating. In the literature or in practice, one is unlikely to find a "pure form" of distance education anymore than one will find a static definition of it. Definitions of distance education have changed, just as the nature of distance education itself has evolved. Schlosser and Anderson (1994) illustrated in their overview of the distance education literature, "The term 'distance education' has been applied to a variety of programs, serving numerous audiences via a wide variety of media" (p. 1). Furthermore, distance education is sometimes referred to as distance or open learning or more recently, as distributed learning.

Throughout its evolution, no single definition of distance education has been agreed upon, although many theorists including Holmberg (1981), Kaufman (1989) Keegan (1986, 1988) and Rumble (1992) have proposed definitions that share commonalities. Jeffries (1997) pointed out that "how distance education is best defined or differentiated from other educational approaches has been the subject of much debate" (p. 4). The substantial effort spent on defining the term became apparent in my review of the literature, and admittedly, I came to share Moran's (1993) view that the debates over how distance education should be defined are sometimes quite tedious and unhelpful.

One problem in trying to define distance education is that at some universities one can find one group being taught face-to-face, while one or more groups at different sites are simultaneously taught by the same teacher using technology. This is usually referred to as distance education when it is really a combination of

traditional teaching and distance education. In any event, one constant in most definitions is the separation of the student and the teacher in space and/or time for the majority of the teaching-learning experience, with some two-way communication between the teacher and learner(s). This feature is included in Perraton's (1991) definition, where distance education is defined as "an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner" (p.1). There are two assumptions embedded in this definition. The first is that some method is used to mediate two - way communication, and secondly, that there is a formal system to provide instruction and credit to students. Expanding on Perraton's definition and adopted for the purposes of this study is Moore and Kearsley's (1996) definition where distance education is:

> Planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements. (p. 2)

EVOLUTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Brown and Brown (1994), Schlosser and Anderson (1994), and Sherry (1996) in their reviews of distance education literature have noted the immense scope of activity and literature in the field. Brown and Brown (1994) examined among other sources, the Distance Education Database developed for the Commonwealth of Learning by the International Council for Distance Education, which includes information on all of the Commonwealth institutions and their distance courses. From the information available in a database on CDROM, they found over 590 institutions offering distance education, and over 4,000 bibliographic entries on

distance education. Brown and Brown (1994) and Sherry (1996) provided succinct descriptions of the beginnings and evolution of distance education--beginning with the transfer of information by travelers through word of mouth, then the use of print, on to radio broadcasting and now through sophisticated telecommunications systems.

Threlkeld and Brzoska (1994) noted, "Distance education can trace its roots into misty antiquity, when early civilizations used drums, fire and smoke, petroglyphs, and ultimately the printed word to communicate" (p. 42). Hence, distance education is certainly not a new concept. Holmberg (1995) described the evolution of distance education saying, "Distance education at the end of the twentieth century is a product of an evolutionary development rooted in early attempts to teach and learn by correspondence" (p. 53). These authors observed that for over 80 years correspondence instruction was the only form of education available to students for whom time and place posed barriers to formal education. Spodick (1996) also discussed the evolution of distance education noting that it had become so widely accepted that by 1995 over 300,000 people in the United States were engaged in distance education. In Canada this figure has grown well over that in the past few years.

Throughout the rich history of distance education important landmarks have been identified. For instance, Holmberg (1995) linked the pioneering of university correspondence study in England with the founding of the University Correspondence College (1887) and Wolsey Hall (1894). These were developed to provide correspondence courses for students acquiring external degrees from the University of London, an institution that had been established in 1836 to register and examine

students for accreditation. Pioneers in the United States were Boston Wesleyan College (1874), the Correspondence University in Ithica, New York (1883) and the university extension department of Chicago University (1890).

Holmberg (1995) went on to describe how from the beginnings of correspondence study, distance education steadily expanded, with few changes save the use of more sophisticated technologies. Both in the United States and Canada the development of satellite technology in the 1960s led to widespread, although not extensive use of instructional television for distance learning. As Sherry (1996) observed, the major drawback of radio and broadcast television was the lack of two-way communication between the instructor and the students. Schlosser and Anderson (1994) outlined the more radical changes that came in 1962 when the University of South Africa became a solely distance education university resulting in a fundamental change in the way education was practiced in the world. Holmberg (1995) explained how the University of South Africa emerged:

> ...as a development of the University of Good Hope, founded as an examining body based on the model of the University of London. It started teaching at a distance in 1946. The University of South Africa was established as a distance teaching university through a government decree in 1962. (p. 49)

Holmberg (1986, 1995) and Rumble and Keegan (1982) attributed the founding of the Open University of the United Kingdom in 1969 as the landmark that brought heightened prestige to distance education, citing its full degree programs, sophisticated courses, and innovative use of media as key features that enhanced the quality of distance education. Kaye and Rumble (1981, p. 16) described the British Open University as an autonomous institution established solely and specifically for

external students, using a variety of distance-teaching methods to provide especially prepared multi-media courses, and with the formal responsibility for evaluation and accreditation.

The British Open University spurred the development of similar institutions throughout the world including West Germany, Japan, Australia, China, Israel, Holland, Canada, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Brown & Brown, 1994; Holmberg, 1986, 1995; Keegan, 1986; Rumble,1992; Schlosser & Anderson, 1994; Young, 1995). Holmberg (1986) claimed the reasons these distance education universities came into being included: the general need to increase the offerings of university education; to increase access to a large portion of prospective students who were adults with jobs, family and social commitments; and the need in many professions for university education.

On the other hand, Hall (1995) contended that distance education began as a movement to extend the traditional university by overcoming the problems of scarcity and exclusivity: "Distance education developed as a political response to the increasing inability of the traditional university structure to grow bigger" (p. 1). However, Threlkeld and Brzoska (1994) maintained that cost has been the driving force behind the establishment of distance education systems. They stated, "Although there are instances where social or political needs (i.e., to serve an isolated population) are the major forces, distance education is more often touted as a way to reduce costs or serve greater numbers with the same funds" (p. 58). Haché (1998) noted that many studies have been done to demonstrate that distance education programs, if well planned, can be as efficient and often cost less than traditional face-to-face teaching.

Conversely, Perraton (1982) and Rumble (1993) and Stenerson (1998) maintained that even if well planned, some methods of providing distance education could be more expensive than traditional approaches.

Regardless of the reasons for the establishment of distance education systems, there is consensus that there has been an exponential increase in the number of people who wish to have access to distance education; consequently distance learning is the fastest growing instructional pattern in the world. As Brown and Brown (1994) put it: "Interest in distance education has gripped the world ...[and]...even a cursory scan of what is happening in distance education would fill volumes" (p. 9). They maintained however, that although distance education has enjoyed unprecedented growth in North America over the last several years, "As a field of endeavor [it] remains at a beginning stage" (p. 6). Nevertheless, they predicted that with the use of new and emerging technologies, distance education will expand at an even faster rate in the near future. Furthermore, they noted that the trend has been to emphasize the use of distance learning in post-secondary education, but it is rapidly being adopted at every level.

The increased use of distance education in the few years since they wrote this, is evidence that Brown and Brown's (1994) prediction is coming true. Indeed, Haché (1998) observed that "with the growth, diversification and decrease in costs of interactive technologies, distance education is developing its own infrastructure to become the emerging educational network of the 21st century" (p. 28).

It is clear from the literature and from my personal experience that distance education has become very visible and its use is being widely debated by students, teachers, administrators and governments. The volume of articles available bears

witness to the expanding roles that open, flexible and distance learning methods are playing in post-secondary education. Nevertheless, this widespread acceptance has not always been there noted Stenerson (1998), who maintained that distance education has had a dubious reputation since its inception.

Similarly, Keegan (1986) had earlier observed that distance learning has historically been viewed with much skepticism. However, he commented on how with its growth, has come improvements in distance education systems and subsequently a changing image. Along with the founding of the British Open University, he attributed this enhancement in distance education to several other factors: (a) improved design of instructional materials; (b) sophistication in the use of instructional materials; (c) better support services for students; and (d) the development of new communications technology.

In the distance education literature the opportunity for students to interact with the instructor and with other students is identified as the distinguishing feature separating modern distance education from the earlier methods that relied strictly on broadcast media and textbooks. As Kahle (1998) pointed out: "The principal intermediary between students and instructors, communications technologies have historically assumed and continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the practice and character of distance education" (p. 1). Until recently, the telephone, the most widely used technology for interactive media in developed countries, continued to be a popular medium for many. Threlkeld and Brzoska (1994) observed, "The ubiquity of the telephone....and...the relatively low cost of the technology has made it a wise choice for many distance education programs" (p. 44).

Over the past few years there has been wide use of new 'third generation models' of distance delivery, which integrate a combination of print, videotape, audiotape, fax, audioconferencing, and videoconferencing. In addition, Bates (1995), Berge (1998), Haché (1998), Harasim (1989), Kaufman (1989), Waggoner (1992), Wells (1994), and Kahle (1998) have described how many distance education systems now include the use of sophisticated computer and telecommunications systems. These newer technologies are professed to provide greater opportunities for social interaction and collaborative learning. In particular, computer-mediated communications are said to be "dramatically altering the relationships between teachers, students, and educational institutions" (Kahle, 1998, p. 1).

While I consider the practice of sending faculty members to off-campus sites to be outreach or extension education rather than distance education, the following point made by Albrecht and Bardsley (1994) regarding the integration of technology warrants consideration:

> The technologies now available present a daunting challenge to those responsible for distance education. Until recently most institutions were limited to one or more processes of distance education, offering correspondence courses or sending faculty members to off-campus sites. The development of technology has increased the number of alternatives available on one hand but it has raised the cost and complexities on the other. (p. 80)

Regardless of the communication medium used, Rumble (1992) pointed out, and Holmberg (1995) later agreed that distance education continues to be characterized by: "Mediated student-teacher interaction and mediated subject matter presentation; media being necessary as students do not meet tutors face to face or do so only to a limited extent" (p. 51). These authors also noted that students have

always chosen and continue to choose distance education not only because they cannot make use of conventional educational opportunities due to the constraints of their jobs, families, geographical locations, or finances, but also because some genuinely prefer it.

Conversely, Hall (1995) maintained that despite its current popularity, all distance learning institutions have experienced and still grapple with three fundamental problems. These are related to the continuing cost and quality of communications. Whether it is the postal system or telecommunications systems, most communications infrastructures are not reliable or student friendly for teacher - student interactions. This in turn contributes to the second problem of lack of timely and frequent interactions and feedback. Thirdly, he cited the lack of adequate resources for student research as an unresolved problem. Similarly, Stenerson (1998) stated that "the technology has changed but the central issues and concerns of distance education especially in the area of superficial interpretation of course material, motivational and learning experiences and low retention rate remain"(p. 14).

Moreover, Hall (1995) predicted that though distance educators are optimistic that their problems can be solved with the use of new computer technologies, it is more likely the case that the addition of new technologies in distance education will lead to wider acceptance of distance education by conventional universities and ultimately a situation of convergence. This notion of convergence has been widely discussed in the literature. For example, Pacey (1993) described the paradox that the new technologies poses for distance educators, noting that while on one hand the integration of technologies in distance education holds the potential to promote and

foster learning, on the other hand, conventional universities are using technology to extend the boundaries of the physical campus.

While this convergence should create more opportunities for students, both Hall (1995) and Pacey (1993) suggested that the blurring of boundaries may pose a threat to some distance educators and could potentially halt the evolution of distance education institutions and instead make them redundant. Bates (1995) identified several issues related to convergence such as the relevance of residential and prior qualifications for entrance, student access to technology, and the implications for education and training of faculty. Others have also expressed concern about the effects of convergence.

Haughey (1995) provided a comprehensive discussion of the multiple meanings of convergence saying:

> ...the technological convergence of cable and telephone networks; the economic convergence of computer, publishing and entertainment conglomerates; the pedagogical convergence of on-campus and distance education courses....are happening in the changing context of Canadian post-secondary education where economic and global realities have converged to produce a culture of neo-conservatism which stresses free market economic values. (p. 1)

In addition to highlighting the implications of convergence for distance educators and researchers, Haughey (1995) reminds us that "the convergence of federal directions, provincial concerns and business and industry preferences has provided a major boost to open and distance learning" (p.11).

Of course, the nature of the effects of technology and convergence will depend on the particular institution. Distance education is offered in a variety of ways, and distance learning systems are diverse in terms of their purposes, structures, size,

technologies, openness, underlying philosophies and efficiencies. Notwithstanding, educational programs must meet certain characteristics to be classified as distance education programs according to Keegan (1982). He identified the following criteria as critical:

There is separation of the teacher and learner for most if not all of the educational experience;

The program is offered under the auspices of some educational institution which distinguishes it from private study;

Some type of instructional media, such as print and/or other technology, is used to present the educational content and unite the teacher and learner;

Some form of two-way communication enables dialogue between the teacher and learner;

Teaching is mainly on an individual basis rather than group basis, with the possibility of occasional meetings for didactic and socialization purposes, and;

Certain "industrial" features related to planning, division of labour, and mass production are present (40-41).

In Canada, the amount and type of interaction between teacher and student varies with the particular course and/or program, and with the extent to which physical proximity, number of students, and cost affect the feasibility of contact. Nevertheless, most of the college and university programs purporting to offer distance education contain Keegan's features. Exceptions occur most frequently in relation to his criteria that teaching is mainly on an individual basis rather than in groups, as some programs using video and audio technologies teach students in groups exclusively. But groups

taught by audio or video-conferencing still have teaching at a distance--it is not the group feature but the combination of other criteria that counts. The line becomes blurred further when the group meets with a tutor and has no designated instructor in the traditional sense. Even Athabasca University, an autonomous distance education university, whose mission is to provide access to individual learners, offers several courses to groups in this way. The Athabasca University model and other specific arrangements for distance education in Canada are described below.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN CANADA

In Canada, responsibility for education rests with the ten provinces, the Yukon and the NorthWest Territories, while the federal government maintains responsibility for tele-communications, industrial development and training programs. In addition, the provinces receive transfer payments from the federal government to help fund health care and post-secondary education, although these payments have been reduced over the past few years. Canada's vast geography and relatively sparse, widely scattered population prompted early interest in identifying ways to extend information and education to rural areas. Hence, Brown and Brown (1994) described Canada as an innovator in the use of technology in both traditional and distance education. Because of its vastness and the differences between provinces, Bates (1989) portrayed the provision of distance education in Canada as "patchy, arbitrary, and incoherent" (p. 135).

The history of distance education in Canada, like that of Europe and the United States, can be characterized in three phases. Whereas correspondence study began in Europe and the United States in the 1840s, in Canada correspondence study began in

the 1890s. Rothe (1986) reported that one of the first university developments was in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Queen's University, where university credit correspondence courses have been offered since 1889. Rogers (1993) noted that by the mid-920s, the ministries in Nova Scotia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Manitoba had all established correspondence branches to offer courses to primary and secondary school children. During these beginning stages there was little support offered to students besides the printed material received in the mail.

The second phase came with the emergence of single mode open universities when the essence of "distance education" emerged, as opposed to correspondence study. Moran (1993) noted that this phase reached its peak in the 1980s with the use of computer-based technologies for course production and delivery, a focus on learner/teacher interaction, and the development of student support systems. Print continued to be the dominating media, but the quality of courses improved and there was increased interest in new communications technologies. Evans and Nation (1992) commented that it was during this period that Otto Peters characterized distance education as an industrialized form of education. It was also a period where a variety of distinctive organizational structures and processes for distance education emerged (Perraton, 1991; Rumble, 1986). Moran (1993) described this second phase thus:

> In a sense, distance education moved to one end of the educational spectrum, away from face-to-face education, as distance educators sought to define and justify distance education as a unique, but legitimate and effective form of teaching/learning. (p. 44)

In Canada and in most of the developed world we have entered a third phase. In this phase the difference between distance education and classroom-based education is increasingly blurred as the new communications technologies become integrated into both systems. Bates (1995), Moran (1993) and Tiffin and Rajasingham (1995) have argued that computer-based technologies are becoming standard parts of daily life in schools, work and home; giving learners access to an array of educational resources and the ability to create a virtual classroom wherever they are.

The evolution of distance education has, as Rogers (1993) remarked, "been interwoven with the invention of new communications" (p. 2) and developments in technology have significantly affected the structures and processes for distance education in Canada and around the world. According to the Canadian Association of Distance Education Directory (1995), over 39 of the 86 conventional universities in Canada were engaged in distance education. In a review of distance education and open learning activities in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (1995) observed, "The number of single and dual mode universities active in distance education [had] not changed substantially between 1990-91 and 1993-94. The activity level of those who were involved, however, [had] increased by 27% in the same reporting period" (p. 8). The results of their survey of continuing education units at Canadian universities indicated that almost all of the 38 respondents offered distance education courses, and over 60 percent offered complete degree, diploma or certificate programs through distance education (p. 17).

In addition, they reported a survey of the 143 community colleges in Canada where over 66 percent were involved in distance education. Of the 24 that were inactive in distance education, 54% intended to become active in the near future (p. 9-10). Subsequently, Paul (1995) reported, "Every university in Canada is involved in some form of distance education, consortia are springing up everywhere, and there is considerable excitement about new technologies and new ways of delivering education at a distance" (p. 130).

It is recognized that colleges play a very active role in post-secondary distance education, however, they are not included in this study, because the focus of this study and my interests are mainly in university distance education. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, institutional arrangements for offering post-secondary distance education are classified generally as autonomous distance education universities, campus-based universities engaged in distance education, and networks and consortia.

AUTONOMOUS DISTANCE EDUCATION UNIVERSITIES

There are three autonomous distance education universities in Canada: in Alberta, Quebec and British Columbia. Sweet (1986) wrote that the Télé-université in Quebec and Athabasca University in Alberta, both developed in the early 1970s, were the first universities dedicated to distance education in Canada. The Open Learning Institute in British Columbia (OLI) was created a few years later, in 1978, offering its first courses in September 1979. In 1988 OLI joined with the Knowledge Network of the West (KNOW) to become the Open Learning Agency (OLA). Sweet went on to explain how, though the mandate of each university is slightly different due

to the particular post-secondary systems in each province, they all share similarities in terms of institutional autonomy.

Furthermore, although all three universities vary in terms of their student support services and course development and delivery systems, Sweet (1986) noted they were all involved in similar activities. These included: "Providing information on admissions and registration regulations as an aspect of student recruitment; maintaining student biographical records and examination results; and offering individual tutoring, counselling and advocacy services" (p. 178). In addition, in all three cases some variation of a team approach to course development was used:

> The team approach to course development demands that content specialists interact directly with instructional psychologists and designers, submitting their work to scrutiny and, often enough, some form of criticism. This process contrasts with the private development activities of the individual professor who designs his or her lessons for the classroom. (p. 179)

Because of their open teaching/learning systems the distance education institutions are fundamentally different from traditional universities in terms of governance, management, leadership, the work of faculty, design of the physical plant, and the educational uses of communications media. A comprehensive description of the organizational and management aspects of the three universities is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the context within which each was created is briefly described here.

Athabasca University

Originally conceived as a conventional campus-based university in 1970, Athabasca University was dissolved in 1971 before its planning was completed, due to

a series of political factors. The Minister of Advanced Education agreed to have it recreated in 1972 as a pilot project for "the production, testing and application of learning systems in its undergraduate programs, and to explore the use of new technologies" (Byrne, 1989, p. 50). According to Byrne, who was Athabasca University's founding president, during the pilot project, the University, located in Edmonton, Alberta, had a mandate to achieve two main objectives. The first was to produce materials and procedures that would enhance the quality of distance education; the second was to ensure that there was an expanding market in Canada for these services. At the end of the pilot project the government agreed that the university had produced a model for the development and delivery of distance education courses that could be accessed by adults in their homes, irrespective of where they lived.

The basic components of Athabasca University's original model consisted of packages of print and non-print materials, with student support and tuition provided by telephone tutorials. Byrne (1989) maintained that, "The telephone tutorial, an innovation in distance education pioneered by Athabasca University, at least in Canada if not the world, is one of the most important outcomes of the pilot project" (p. 70). In 1975, apparently satisfied that the university had met its objectives, the Alberta government designated Athabasca University as an open university with a mandate to serve adult students who, for a variety of reasons could not attend campus-based universities. Finally, in 1978, it gained permanent status as a university under the Universities Act through an Order-in-Council. Shortly thereafter, in 1980, it was

directed to relocate from Edmonton to Athabasca, a relatively small northern community in Alberta.

Today the university has three provincial regional centres to provide student counselling and registration services, with the establishment of a fourth student services center in Eastern Canada under consideration. With a student body of over 20,000, Athabasca University offers several undergraduate degree programs, (Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Management), a Master's degree in Distance Education, an Advanced Graduate Diploma and Master's Degree in Business Administration, post-RN Bachelor of Nursing degree and an Advanced Graduate Diploma in Community Nursing Practice. At the time of this writing, other graduate programs were in various stages of development.

The university provides print-based course packages supplemented with a variety of media including telephone, radio, television, laboratories, workshops, computer-assisted learning, audio and videocassettes, classroom sessions, teleconference and videoconference seminars and computer-mediated conferencing. Since its inception, Athabasca University has been unique as a distance education university in Canada according to Paul (1986), as it was staffed with a full complement of academics in each discipline, supplemented by home study tutors, in addition to a cadre of instructional designers, a model that still exists there.

Open Learning Institute

According to Attridge and Clark (1992), Brown and Brown (1994) and Moran (1993), The Open Learning Institute was originally established in 1978 to provide liberal arts courses using various kinds of media. Initially consisting of the Open

College and the Open University, an Open University Consortium of British Columbia (BC) was established with OLI and the three BC universities in 1984. A later amalgamation between the OLI and the Knowledge Network, an established educational television-based delivery system took place in 1988. Once amalgamated, it became the Open Learning Agency (OLA). Quoting from an Open Learning Agency pamphlet (undated), Brown and Brown (1994) described the mandate and composition of the OLA: "To provide leadership in developing and maintaining a province-wide open learning system in order to make lifelong training and educational opportunities available to all people of British Columbia" (p. 25).

To undertake its broad mandate, the Open College, the Open University (with degree granting status), and the Knowledge Network, respectively deal with workplace training and adult basic education, university degree collaboration, and broadcast programming to support school, college, and university instruction. The Knowledge Network offers courses available from other degree granting institutions as well as offering its own. In addition, the OLA introduced a credit bank, enabling students to consolidate transfer credits, obtain credit for non-formal prior learning, and establish foreign document equity to Canadian standards for employment purposes. Through the Open Learning Agency, students can enrol in courses taught by the Open University and Open College, as well as courses taught by Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia and University of Victoria (ICDL, 1998). The OLA uses mainly print-based approaches, audio and videocassettes, some broadband satellite and cable television and the Internet, providing student services through

regional centers staffed by advisors and clerical assistants. In some programs, computer conferencing has become a further option.

Moran (1993) provided an illuminating view of how internal and external political pressures affect policy-making and educational practice in her account of how two powerful politicians, Patrick McGeer, Social Credit Minister of Education and his Deputy Minister, Walter Hardwick, influenced the emergence of the OLI and the OLA. Moran (1993) summarized the situation this way: "[They] were the most influential and politically powerful individuals in BC in the mid-late 1970s who were interested in extending educational opportunities....both exerted great influence over OLI's mission, curriculum, and educational strategies" (p. 64).

Commonwealth of Open Learning (COL)

Although the Commonwealth of Learning is not a university per se, a brief description of it is offered here because of its collaborating role with universities. Created in 1989 in Vancouver, BC. by the leaders of the Commonwealth countries, COL has introduced or enhanced teaching/training programs in more than 40 countries (COL, 1997). "The Commonwealth of Learning has a mandate to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education materials, expertise and technologies, and other resources for students throughout the commonwealth and other countries" (COL, 1998, p.1). Its four main functions -- communications technologies, materials, training and information services -- are accomplished in collaboration with governments, universities, colleges and other relevant agencies. Indeed, it describes itself as the only intergovernmental organization solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning.

Télé-université

The Télé-université in Quebec was established in 1972 as a unit of the University of Quebec, with administrative centres located in Quebec City and Montreal (Marchand, 1982). Guillemet, Bedard and Landry (1986) described the political and social climate within which the university was created. They observed that its mandate was initially to develop an upgrading program for mathematics teachers. In addition, they were responsible for the development of two courses dealing with an introduction to Quebec's economy and an introduction to human cooperation, and an upgrading program for teachers of French and second languages.

It was eventually accorded degree-granting status and like most institutions involved in distance education over the years, its mandate, and the number of courses, programs, and students have changed drastically since its inception. Guillemet et al. (1986) noted, "Like all organizations, Télé-université has modified its organizational structure over the years, to respond strategically to changes in its environment" (p. 158). According to ICDL (1997) it now offers undergraduate and graduate programs in several areas and over 200 courses, and has broadened its mandate in education and research. It is the only French language university in North America dedicated to distance education. Similar to the other open universities, print remains the primary instructional medium, with telephone, television, radio, computers and educational networks supporting course offerings.

CAMPUS-BASED DISTANCE EDUCATION

Most post-secondary institutions in Canada offer distance education through departments of extension or continuing education, and most offer complete degrees or

diploma and certificate programs according to the Canadian University Distance Education Directory (1995-96). Eleven universities listed nursing courses and or degree programs. It is clear from the directory that correspondence study (print-based) continues to predominate, at least in the smaller universities.

Sweet (1986) described the University of Waterloo as being the most representative of correspondence programs in Canada. Operating as a separate entity within the general university structure, the correspondence program is an autonomous unit dedicated primarily to course delivery. Academic departments are responsible for curricular and academic decisions related to course content, development and tutoring. Every attempt is made to make the correspondence courses resemble the on-campus courses, including taped lecture notes, fixed start and duration times, and assignment and examination schedules. Sweet (1986) went on to point out that the program, which began in 1968 with four courses in physics, had grown to become the largest in Canada.

Many of the distance education programs associated with traditional universities began as outreach programs, with off-campus courses being taught using conventional instructional techniques (Sweet, 1986). However, the expense of professors traveling to different sites, as well as student demand for home study, reshaped the way established universities extended educational opportunities to wider geographical areas. While most distance programs continue to be offered through Extension Departments, many employ some form of electronic media along with printed course materials. A smaller number cite computer-assisted learning or computer conferencing as adjuncts.

Few universities rely on one method exclusively for their distance education offerings, although some rely predominantly on one telecommunications medium. For example, the University of Ottawa has teleconference sites in classrooms in communities throughout Ontario, making extensive use of audiographic systems or interactive television, and the recently established College Lac St. Anne uses videoconferencing as its primary medium.

Some, such as Memorial University, have made extensive use of multi-media in distance education. As Sweet (1986) identified, Memorial University has been a leader in the application of technology to distance education, beginning with videotaped lectures, audiotaped exchanges between students and teachers, then two-way interactive satellite transmissions, and audioteleconferencing. More recently, they have begun to use Web-based courses with computer conferencing. The University of Victoria and University of British Columbia used all of the former between 1979 and 1986. Today, most other universities have begun using a variety of media for distance course delivery, each of them approaching it in ways that reflect the needs of their students and their own institutional capacities.

Unlike the autonomous distance education universities, which operate on a system of open enrolment where students may register as frequently as every month, or at least more often than twice each year, the Canadian University Distance Education Directory (1995-96) indicated that the dual-mode universities require distance education students to register on the same semester or term basis as on-campus students. In addition, many of the universities require that students attend some form of on-campus face-to-face instruction or meetings.

NETWORKS AND CONSORTIA

Earlier, the Knowledge Network in British Columbia was discussed in relation to the OLA consortia. Sweet (1986) noted that the Knowledge Network was originally designed to support the communication needs of the educational community in British Columbia, and later took a leadership role in coordinating the various efforts of post-secondary institutions in the province. With its transmissions reaching 95% of the province and distributing 470 of the OLA's credit courses, the Knowledge Network continues to play an important role in distance education in British Columbia according to The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (1994).

Brown and Brown (1994) provided an overview of other networks and broadcasters across the country, illustrating how satellite networks are used for distance education in almost every province. CMEC (1994) and ICDL (1998) also described the research networks, computer networks, and educational consortia available in Canada. The details of each are not provided here; however, some are highlighted to demonstrate not only their diversity, but also their potential significance for distance education at the post-secondary level.

Contact North in Ontario, a provincial government initiative, was established in 1986-87 as a comprehensive telecommunications and educational support system to meet the distance education requirements of colleges, universities and secondary schools in Northern Ontario (Brown & Brown, 1994). Through audio, audiographic, and computer conferencing facilities, as well as audio and videotape players and fax machines it now offers high school, college, university and general interest courses at more than 150 sites (Mackintosh, 1998).

Television Northern Canada (TVNC) is a comprehensive network created in 1992 by the aboriginal people and northern residents of Canada (Brown & Brown, 1994). It broadcasts from the Yukon, through the Territories, across Arctic Quebec, and into Labrador, covering an area of 4.3 million square kilometers and spanning five time zones. TVNC enables its viewing audience of approximately 100,000 mostly native people (CMEC, 1994) to receive cultural, social, political, and educational programming for 100 hours per week. Most recently, the government has announced the implementation of a distributed telecommunications network using satellite and cable to link all communities in the NorthWest Territories and Nunavit.

Other networks identified by Sweet (1986), CMEC (1994) and Mackintosh (1998) include The Saskatchewan Communications Network with their Cable Network and Training Network, Tele-Education New Brunswick, the Manitoba Satellite Network, and Tele-Medicine Canada at the University of Toronto. In addition, there are the University of Ottawa Mentor Networks, the Network of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and Newfoundland's 165-site audiographic, satellite and computer network called the Open Learning and Information Network (OLIN). Sweet (1986, p. 80) pointed out that the majority of programming produced or distributed by many of these organizations was done for their provincial educational institutions. Today many possess the capacity to develop independent programs and other independent activities.

Some federal initiatives listed on Athabasca University's website (Mackintosh, 1998) include Canada's SchoolNet, C-Net and The Canadian Network for the Advancement of Research, Industry and Education (Canarie, Inc). SchoolNet is

described as a cooperative initiative of Canada's provincial, territorial and federal governments, educators, universities and colleges and industry. It aims to link all of Canada's 16,000 plus schools to the electronic highway. C-Net is a comprehensive communications network that links Canadians to each other and the world. It is maintained by Community Access Canada, an Industry Canada Initiative to Support Public Access to Connectivity through Education. (CSpace). Canarie, INC.WWW was established in 1993 as a non-profit organization comprising 56 organizations representing Canada's research, university, business and government communities. Its mandate, according to the website, is to improve Canada's overall competitiveness in the information age.

This brief summary of the history of university distance education in Canada serves as a backdrop to the development of distance education for nurses in Canada. It illustrates that the provinces enjoy substantial autonomy, with no comprehensive distance education system for the nation. Organizational structures range from distance education courses and programs being administered through departments of extension or continuing education in conventional universities to free-standing, independent distance education universities. Similarly, there are diverse methods used to develop educational materials and to design and mediate teaching and learning experiences. Jeffries (1997) observed:

> The history of distance education shows a field that appears to be in a constant state of evolution, that is supported by theory, but in need of research which can fill many unanswered questions. The historical view of distance education shows a stream of new ideas and technologies balanced against a steady resistance to change, and it often places technology in the light of promising more than it has delivered. History shows nontraditional education trying to blend with traditional

> education while striving to meet the challenge of constantly changing learning theories and evolving technologies. (p. 3)

With that description in mind, following is a brief history and the current state of distance education in Canadian University nursing programs.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NURSING

In Canada, university education for nurses was slow to take root. Richardson (1994) described how, "as an academic discipline nursing was viewed with skepticism and suspicion in universities staffed almost entirely by men. Universities were reluctant to admit nursing and demonstrated their reticence by failing to provide the financial support necessary for educationally sound programs" (p. 74). It should not be surprising then that nurses were relatively late to arrive on the scene of university distance education in Canada.

For nurses, interest in distance education began slowly in the early 1980s, prompted to a large degree by the Canadian Nurses Association's resolution in 1982 calling for baccalaureate entry to nursing practice. At that time, of the approximately 250,000 Canadian nurses, approximately than 10% had nursing degrees. A decade and a half later, this figure has remained relatively low with approximately 20% of practicing nurses across the country still prepared at the diploma level.

In nursing, the difficulty in raising the level of preparation for entry to practice has historical roots. Traditionally, nurses could choose different routes to obtain their basic education: either through hospital schools of nursing or college programs for diploma preparation, or through universities for degree programs. Understandably, most chose diploma programs which tended to be shorter, less expensive and more

accessible. However, with provincial and territorial associations, as well as the Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing (CAUSN) (the accrediting body for university schools of nursing in Canada), all supporting the move toward the baccalaureate degree, there has been, and continues to be substantial pressure for nurses to have access to flexible university degree programs.

The demand for degree education in nursing coincides with the changing mandate of universities in general. Writing about changes in nursing education, Bajnok (1992) remarked:

> The increased awareness of universities of the many barriers to advanced education for women, the focus on the adult student as the potential market, and the attention to enrolment in "hot" (popular) programs as a way of maximizing revenue in recessionary times have all affected developments in university nursing education. Consequently nursing has experienced an unprecedented period of growth in professional education programs. (p. 415)

In Canada, one of the most critical issues in the development of educational programs for nurses is accessibility. Factors affecting accessibility include geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic features. The country is expansive, with relatively small populations scattered over large areas, with concentrations in large urban centres, and with major regional socioeconomic differences. Most services, including health services and traditional educational institutions tend to be located in urban centres. Rugged terrain and, in many areas, bitter winter conditions pose challenges in transportation and communication, and in turn have posed barriers to nurses who wish to pursue university degrees but are unable to relocate to do so. In addition, as a female dominated profession, flexibility is required for nurses, many of whom face challenges and constraints associated with family obligations while often

working shift-work. For these individuals, even if they reside in urban centres, attending regularly scheduled classes is not always possible.

Consequently, many universities across Canada have responded to the needs of nurses by initially offering outreach programs, and later developing distance education courses and programs. In most instances they have focused on providing the equivalent of the two senior years of the baccalaureate degree program to Registered Nurses, although this varies in the provinces where college programs have expanded to three years. Following is a brief province-by-province summary of distance education initiatives in nursing across Canada, although the situation is quickly changing.

ALBERTA

The first Canadian institution to offer the entire post-RN Bachelor of Nursing degree program off campus was the University of Alberta, according to Ross Kerr (1996). She noted that the outreach methods used when the program began in 1979-1980, "Were primarily traditional classroom methods, and the instructors went from the main campus to certain designated centres to offer courses on a weekly and biweekly basis (p. 387)". While offering traditional classroom courses off campus certainly expands educational opportunities for nurses in Alberta, this approach is probably more appropriately labeled outreach rather than distance education as Attridge and Clark (1992) also observed. Ross Kerr (1996) noted that tele-conferencing was introduced in the fall of 1984. At that time, it was the only program in Canada offered entirely by distance education. Since then the

baccalaureate program is now collaboratively offered by video-conferencing to three off-campus college sites (CAUSN, 1997), primarily as a basic program by provision for post-RN students.

By 1989, the University of Calgary began to phase out its campus-based post-RN program, and by 1991 offered it exclusively by distance education, using print-based courses and teleconferencing. Recently, Close and Martin (1996) described an experiment at the University of Calgary where faculty used the Internet to deliver one nursing course by distance education, noting that the long term goal was to offer the entire post-diploma program on the Web.

In the southern part of the province, the University of Lethbridge also offers a post-RN degree program. At the time of writing it was offered strictly on campus, but there were some tentative plans to include some distance education offerings in the future. However, this was contingent on the viability of the program, which was in danger of closing due to its continuing low enrolment rates.

Since 1990, Athabasca University has provided its entire post-RN degree by distance. Its initial mandate was to provide access to a nursing degree program to students in Alberta, Saskatchewan and the NorthWest Territories, and to provide students in other provinces access to nursing and non-nursing courses which they could transfer into nursing programs at other universities.

However, course registrations and program enrolments grew quickly and pressure continued to mount from nurses across the country to have the B.N. program accessible nation-wide. Consequently, in 1995, the program was formally declared

available to nurses across Canada and the United States; by 1998 it had close to 900 students enrolled, making it the largest post-RN program in Canada.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia, in terms of what is considered to be "true" distance education, the University of Victoria School of Nursing, was a pioneer in nursing education according to Attridge and Clark (1992), who reported the development of the first nursing course, offered for credit in 1980-1981. Subsequently, in 1982 the University of Victoria engaged in a collaborative program with the University of British Columbia. Simpson (1986) described this initiative as the beginning of the outreach Bachelor of Nursing degree program for Registered Nurses in British Columbia. Using print-based courses, mediated by telephone conferencing and interactive television through the Knowledge Network, all courses in the post-RN degree program at the University of Victoria were available to nurses in British Columbia by 1986.

In 1983, the University of British Columbia (UBC) offered its first nursing course by distance education. Similar to the University of Victoria, courses at the University of British Columbia were developed one course at a time until 1992, when its entire post-RN program was available by distance education. While the program at UBC has mainly concentrated on students within the province, the program at the University of Victoria, originally restricted to British Columbia residents, has been available to nurses Canada-wide since September 1996. The University of Northern British Columbia and the College of New Caledonia recently began to offer some

post-RN courses, but not the entire degree, by videoconference. These two programs are primarily confined to the province of B.C.

SASKATCHEWAN

The University of Saskatchewan, while not offering a distance education nursing program until 1993, has long encouraged post-R.N. students to take non-nursing courses and some nursing courses by distance education from other universities such as the University of Victoria or Athabasca University. Through transfer arrangements with other institutions, the School of Nursing has been able to offer students a certain amount of flexibility in their program since the 1980s. Subsequently, by 1995, distance education formed a component of all of the nursing courses within the bachelor of nursing degree.

MANITOBA

According to CAUSN (1997) both the University of Manitoba and Brandon University offer courses within their nursing degree programs by distance education. At the time of writing both were proceeding with the development of more courses with the goal to have their entire post-RN programs available by distance education. These programs, like others in Western Canada, used mainly print-based course materials with some teleconference and computer communications.

ONTARIO

The most recent data available from the CAUSN Educational Program Database (1997) indicated that in Ontario, eight universities offered post-RN degree programs. Most of them indicated they offered at least some courses by distance education. MacMaster University did not use a distance format for their post-diploma

degree program; however, they used distance methods in varying degrees within their post-diploma certificate programs. Lakehead University, Ryerson Polytechnic University, and The University of Ottawa reported offering their entire post-R.N. degree programs by distance education.

As early as 1980, the University of Ottawa began offering two courses by distance education using audioteleconferencing, with the third course available by 1984. By 1989, twenty courses were teleconferenced to 11 centres (Casey, 1990). Alcock (1996) described how the program began with 15 students in two sites, growing to 300 students in 14 sites in Eastern and Southern Ontario and Montreal in 1996. Though they offered all of the nursing courses by distance education, students were required to take support courses on-campus or through other distance education providers such as the University of Waterloo or Athabasca University. These two institutions have remained an integral part of this and most other nursing programs that use distance education.

QUEBEC

Of the six post-R.N. degree programs listed in Quebec, the CAUSN database (1997-98) indicated no programs were offered by distance education. The Université du Québec à Trois Rivières, the Université du Québec à Rimouski, and the University of Montreal offered some courses by distance education in French. Other than the program available in Montreal from the University of Ottawa, and the program from Athabasca University, which is available to all Canadian nurses, there were no distance education post-RN programs for nurses offered in English in Quebec.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Since the late 1980s nurses in New Brunswick have had access to baccalaureate level courses by distance education from the University of New Brunswick, where courses have been available in printed material and videotapes enhanced by audio-teleconference (Pym, 1990). They also have access to TeleÉducation NB, a network of community learning centres or 'electronic classrooms" established in partnership with local communities, educational institutions, and industry. These centres are outfitted with specialized equipment for receiving and delivering courses (Mackintosh, 1998). In 1997 two post-RN programs were available completely by distance education: The University of New Brunswick offered its program in English and the Université de Moncton offered its program in French (CAUSN, 1997).

NOVA SCOTIA

In Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University and St. Francis Xavier University both offered post-RN courses by distance education at the time of this study. While Dalhousie did not offer a complete degree program, it did have post-RN certificates available by distance. The post-RN program from St. Francis Xavier University included a distance education format in some, though not all courses.

MacDonald (1996) at a CAUSN meeting called to discuss distance education, described the St. Francis Xavier program, which began in 1989. She outlined its beginnings, describing print-based courses, augmented by audio and videocassettes, and local resource centres for group meetings, exam writing and studying. In its first year there were 165 students enrolled, however, MacDonald (1996) reported that

unlike the University of Ottawa, their enrollments had been declining each year since its inception.

NEWFOUNDLAND

Agnew (1986) described the development of the first off-campus course for RNs at Memorial University of Newfoundland in the mid-1980s. A seminar-type reading course was first offered by teleconference to nurses at 48 sites in Newfoundland and Labrador. By 1995, Memorial University was offering its entire post-RN program by distance education using mainly print-based course materials and occasional teleconferencing.

From this brief overview, it is evident that the use of distance education is ubiquitous in university nursing programs in Canada. Nevertheless, despite the activity across the country, there is a paucity of literature concerning distance education for nurses. One recent publication by Ross Kerr (1996) included a chapter on *Distance education in nursing: Increasing accessibility of degree programs in nursing,* which provided a summary of distance education initiatives. In her book, Ross Kerr listed the University of British Columbia, the University of Saskatchewan, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the University of New Brunswick among those offering their post-RN programs by distance education 1995. By 1997 the CAUSN database indicated that distance education has become a component of most university nursing degree programs across the country.

Most of the newer programs collaborated with others, such as the University of Victoria, University of British Columbia and Athabasca University to develop or broker nursing courses. Similarly, most of them did and continue to rely in part, on

Athabasca University or the University of Waterloo for the non-nursing courses. Ross Kerr (1996) maintained, "Cooperation and collaboration with other institutions has been a necessary and important defining characteristic of Canadian distance education programs for nursing" (p. 384). She went on to write that Athabasca University, a post-secondary distance education institution located in Athabasca, Alberta, offered many arts and science courses that provided "the backbone of the liberal arts and science component of an off-campus baccalaureate program in nursing" (p. 384). The availability of these support courses was and continues to be important, however, most programs have developed their own nursing courses.

Developing nursing courses and programs for distance education can be a complex and demanding experience, as was reported at two general meetings of CAUSN in 1995 and 1996, and at the Western Region CAUSN meeting in 1996. This was one of the main issues discussed at those meetings. Another, was the lack of current and accurate information on the various distance education courses and programs available in Canada. There have been many other issues raised by these deans and directors. For example, at a special CAUSN meeting called to: "Discuss the status of distance education among CAUSN member institutions, the pros and cons and lessons learned" (CAUSN Minutes, June 15, 1996, p. 2), it was noted that although the strengths of distance education lie in accessibility, portability, and the focus on the learner, there are drawbacks. Some of those identified were related to the cost of library resources, lack of fiscal resources in general, concerns about maintaining standards, the need for teacher preparation and good teaching skills, and

challenges related to course production, dealing with clinical practical experiences, and the mix of technologies available.

As with any innovation, despite the espoused value of distance education, there appears to be many administrative issues that need to be addressed in nursing, although they have seldom been the focus of distance education literature. Nonetheless, the literature does offer some insight into issues faced by faculty that have implications for administrators. For example, Major and Shane (1991) identified choosing equipment, faculty selection and preparation, and site coordination as issues arising from their experience with the use of interactive television for nurse education in Hawaii and New Mexico.

Bailey (1992) emphasized the need to recognize the tutor's role as facilitator rather than teacher in open learning nursing education. Similarly, Gunawardena (1990, 1992) identified issues associated with student interaction, anxiety and communication protocols, and highlighted the need for faculty support and training when introducing distance education technology.

Others, such as McGuire (1988), Black (1992), and Clark (1993) all using qualitative methods, explored attitudes of higher education faculty toward distance education. McGuire's study took place at a distance education university, while Black's study was at a conventional university, both in Canada. McGuire (1988) concluded that the success of distance education initiatives depends greatly upon faculty resources. However, the faculty in her study, who had come from traditional university settings, had not achieved high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the distance education university even after a four year incumbency. This was

attributed to perceived incongruencies between their expectations and their actual experiences on the job in terms of interactions with students, the process of course development, and the role of research in distance education. As well, these academics tended to have trouble relinquishing old roles, continuing instead to apply more traditional models to a distance education setting.

Black (1992) found that even though the university in her study had been offering distance education programs for some time, few faculty members had knowledge of it from any personal involvement with distance education. In addition, "Faculty tended to be reserved and conditional about voting in favour of distance education proposals" (p. 13). She concluded that there was a great deal of skepticism about the credibility of distance education in universities. Black attributed this mainly to the perceived need for face-to-face interaction and on-campus experience.

Clark (1993) examined the receptivity to college-credit distance education of a random sample of faculty members from fifty-seven higher education institutions in the United States. He suggested that although faculty generally supported access to distance education, particularly if used in appropriate circumstances, they expressed concerns about the quality of courses and interaction, the need for administrative and technical support, and adequate rewards for distance teachers.

There has been other informative work related to women as distance learners undertaken by Burge (1994), Burge and Lenskyj (1990), Effeh (1991), Kirkup and von Prummer (1990), and May (1994), generally indicating that females learn differently from males and may require different kinds of support structures. Nurses have been the subjects of studies by Bray (1990), Cragg (1991), Norris (1998), and Pym (1992)

who published descriptive reviews and studies related to nurses and their reactions and attitudes towards different media and delivery methods in distance education. These researchers noted mainly that strong degrees of academic, technical and social support are essential for learner success when using new technologies.

Similarly, Carr, Fullerton, Servino and McHugh (1996) undertook a study of barriers to completion of a nurse-midwifery distance education program. They found that respondents ranked family responsibilities, work responsibilities and financial barriers highest as barriers to completion. In this study, like Pym's (1992), students cited the lack of understanding of how to use computer technology as a frustration. Further, frustration with the technology was compounded with dissatisfaction with the amount and quality of student/faculty interaction. This resulted in feelings of distancing, which again posed a barrier to completing the program.

The above research demonstrates that though slow in its development, there is a growing body of nursing distance education literature. However, the studies have focused almost exclusively on students and faculty; comparing one educational approach with another. The results may have relevance for teaching and learning, however, there is a lack of research knowledge and understanding about what they might mean from an administrative perspective. Faced with the paucity of research on educational administration in nursing distance education, I searched for literature on nursing educational administration in general, again with less than satisfactory results.

NURSING EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

There are very few published studies on administration of nursing programs. Moreover, most of the research undertaken in nursing administration in general reflects a positivist, empiricist approach to research; a perspective of science as Dachler (1988) stated, that is based on the assumption that the reality to be investigated is concrete and objective, separate from the scientist who is studying it. This was reinforced by Wright, Gross, Kilburn and Smith (1992), who, in their extensive search of the literature between 1986 and 1990, found a mere 19 published research studies on nursing administration with 18 using quantitative methods and one using a qualitative approach. They observed further that the majority (11 out of 19) studied deans as individuals in organizations, looking at role, leader characteristics, and small group behaviors.

These researchers found two studies from each of the following areas: research on deans as individuals based on psychological frameworks such as values, motives and personality characteristics; reporting baseline data about deans; viewing colleges of education as organizations in environments based on organization transaction frameworks; and looking at colleges as complex organizations based on organization, communication, and decision frameworks. Wright et al. (1992) suggested that more research on nursing educational administration is needed, particularly in the area of organizational change and innovation; an area where they found no studies at all.

In the anecdotal literature, deans and other administrators of schools of nursing have been the object of discrimination (Barge, 1986); the focus for change (Booth, 1994); and the hope for transformational leadership (Davidhizar, 1993). More

recently, they have been the subject of a few research studies. Examples are leadership behaviors (Gevedon, 1991); role perceptions and levels of job satisfaction of department chairs (Kippenbrock, Fisher & Huster, 1994); motivation and job satisfaction (Lamborn, 1991); role taking abilities and perceived leadership effectiveness (Mansen, 1993); and mentoring (Rawl & Peterson, 1992); all studied from a quantitative, positivist approach.

However, as Streubert and Carpenter (1995) pointed out, "Problems of concern to nurses researching administration are complex and multifaceted. New generation approaches (naturalistic inquiry methods) can (and should) be used to answer nursing administration research questions and to improve the practice of nursing administration" (p. 275). They went on to note further that Redmond's (1991) was the only published research report using naturalistic inquiry they could find in the nursing literature.

Redmond (1991) studied career pathways of deans in American nursing programs using life history review, document analysis and surveys to identify how deans gain the knowledge and skill necessary to deal with the demands of their jobs. Similarly, in a Canadian study, Thorpe (1989) used naturalistic inquiry in her doctoral research when she studied nursing leadership in administrators of college nursing programs. Three major themes emerged from her inquiry, related to "Mission or goals," Relating to others," and Meanings of activities." Thorpe believed the participants found meaning in their work by "focusing on a mission, holding a vision, and believing strongly in diploma nursing programs, faculty members, student potential and their own personal abilities to administer" (p. v).

In a slightly different vein, Richardson, Valentine, Wood and Godkin (1994) undertook a retrospective qualitative case study to look at leadership behaviours of a task force comprising Canadian nursing program directors in one province. They found there was no single leader identified among the group, and consequently, no specific style of leadership in the sense espoused by traditional positivist theories so prevalent in nursing management literature.

By examining the collaborative process in detail from the group members' perspectives, they discovered instead: 1) leadership was a collective process shared among group members; 2) who led depended on the issue being addressed at the time, rather than a role assumed by a single person; and 3) women lead differently from men--who dominate and are the focus of the traditional management literature. These researchers, like Thorpe (1989) and Richardson et al. (1994), suggested the urgent need for more research on Canadian nursing administrators.

In summary, the literature revealed that while distance education in general has been the focus of much attention, relatively little research has been undertaken, and much remains to be known about the challenges facing administrators in distance education. The lack of research is particularly acute in the administration of distance education programs for nurses, and is cause for concern considering the increased use of distance education in the discipline.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of administrators of Canadian post-R.N. nursing degree programs offered by distance education. By undertaking the study I hoped to learn more about the nature of specific programs and to be able to provide a description and analysis of the complexities associated with administering them. I chose nursing education administration because of my background in nursing and in nursing education, and because I suspected there may be issues associated with administering nursing education programs that are not shared by administrators of other university programs. In particular, I believed there may be specific issues arising from the clinical practice component in nursing degree programs offered at a distance, from the need to keep course content current and accurate, and from the nature of nursing as a predominantly female profession.

I hoped the insights gained would improve my understanding of the various nursing programs offered by distance education in Canada and the various challenges faced by the administrators of these programs. By studying specific cases, I thought I might learn more about this topic in general and learn about myself as a researcher. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested, "By looking at what problems interest us and what questions we ask we may discover an avenue that leads us to a better understanding of what is important and of meaning to each of us" (p. 148).

I hoped my greater understanding could provide direction to others for future undertakings, that it would lead to improvements in the administration of my own program; and, by sharing my study with others, in the improvement of theirs. In

addition, I hoped that by compiling information about various programs across Canada, data that has to date been unavailable or difficult to find, could be made available to others interested in distance education. Ultimately, I hoped that the results of my study would lead to enhanced teaching and learning in nursing programs offered by distance education.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

> Unknowing: Knowing that one does not know something, that one does not understand someone who stands before them and that perhaps the process does not fit into some pre-existing paradigm or theory is critical to the evolution and development of knowledge.
>
> (Munhall, 1993, p. 125)

In this chapter I pose the research question that guided my study and discuss the philosophical basis for choosing a naturalistic, interpretive design. Specifics about the participants in the study and the methods I used to gather data and strategies for analyses follow. Finally, I describe the means used to maintain trustworthiness, the assumptions I made, the limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations associated with the study.

GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The general research question was two-fold: What are the issues faced by administrators of nursing degree programs offered through distance education and what processes have they put into place to address these issues? In seeking responses to this question, I hoped also to obtain a description of the size and structure of the various programs, the distance education methods used, the students served, and their locations. More specifically, I hoped to discuss with the participants the issues they encountered in administering their programs and the strategies they used in responding to these concerns. I expected we would explore issues in the organizational, personnel, curriculum and financial realms; issues related to autonomy; as well as issues specific to distance education and to their particular programs.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR THE DESIGN

van Manen (1990) described methodology as

> the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective. It includes the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human which is often associated with or implied by a certain research approach. (p. 27)

Likewise, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) related the research methods we choose to our views on the nature of reality and what we believe counts as knowledge. For example, they stated:

> Quantitative methods are supported by the positivistic paradigm, which leads us to regard the world as made up of observable, measurable facts. In contrast, qualitative methods are generally supported by the interpretivist paradigm, which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and everchanging. (p. 6)

Further, they explained that since qualitative researchers believe that realities are socially constructed, and "variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure" (p. 7), the intent of their research is "coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 6). Similarly Leininger (1985a) noted that an interpretive researcher "attempts to grasp the essential features of what is being studied so the essence and nature of the person, object, and actions of study are revealed" (p. 5).

My purpose for undertaking this study was to investigate human thought and action--to gain insights into and a better understanding of the experiences of administrators of distance education programs for nurses. Accordingly, I planned to do so by analyzing the descriptions and meanings these nursing administrators attach

to their experiences, both from their own perspectives, and within the context of their work.

Therefore, this study was grounded in a naturalistic, interpretive approach to inquiry; an approach which furnishes an opportunity to focus on context, social interaction and meaning. Streubert and Carpenter (1995) noted that in the naturalistic domain,

> Researchers investigate a phenomena (sic) as it occurs naturally by observing it in its natural setting or by listening to individuals describe their experience of the phenomena as it occurs to them....phenomena are inextricably intertwined with their context and can only be understood in that context. (p. 248)

Researchers that adhere to an "interpretive" or "naturalistic" orientation, explained Lincoln and Guba (1985) "investigate the same social situation expecting to find multiple realities" (p. 220). It is my belief that nursing educational administrators, although they may share similar experiences and situations, are individuals with diversified interests, holding differing opinions and different views of the world. Subsequently Lincoln and Guba have used constructivist inquiry to describe this orientation (Lincoln and Guba, 1997).

It is apparent in the assumptions underlying the five basic axioms and methodological implications set out by Guba and Lincoln (1982) to define and describe naturalistic inquiry, that is has its basis in existentialism and idealism. The subject of the first axiom is ontology, or the nature of reality. For the naturalistic inquirer, there are multiple, constructed realities which can only be studied holistically (p. 237). In this study, emphasis was on the different, subjective experiences of administrators of distance education programs for nurses in Canada. I hoped that by

studying administrators in a holistic manner, in their own settings, gaining insights into their individual realities and real life experiences, I would achieve some level of understanding of their experiences.

The second axiom refers to the relationship of the researcher to the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 238). From a naturalistic researcher's perspective, the inquirer and participant are seen as inseparable, interacting with and influencing each other throughout the inquiry process. I had little doubt that a dynamic relationship would evolve between participants and myself, and perhaps among us all as a group of nurses involved in distance education, and further, that this ongoing interaction would enhance my and even their understanding as the study unfolded. Indeed, this is what I believe transpired during my continued interactions with the study participants.

With some participants there was an almost instantaneous connection both professionally and personally. Additionally, more by serendipity than by planning, I was afforded the opportunity to assume the role of participant observer during my site visits, enabling me to get to know some of my participants quite well. For example, as well as visiting their work sites, two participants invited me to stay in their homes for parts of my study. While together, we shared several extensive informal conversations about our respective experiences in distance education. I also had the additional opportunity while staying at the home of one participant to observe her interacting by telephone with both students and faculty members.

The nature of truth statements is the focus of the third axiom (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 238). Whatever an individual perceives to be true at that time and in that context is considered true. Therefore, multiple realities and differences, perhaps even

contradictions, are expected to emerge because individual perceptions of reality and 'truth' can, and do, differ. "Interpretive scholars consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 19). From this perspective, truth is never singular--there is no one right answer. There is always subjectivity in pursuit of truth. My goal as a naturalistic researcher has been to make every attempt to adequately capture and represent the multiple constructions of reality and truths that I expected would emerge from this study.

From a naturalistic inquirer's view, the fourth axiom, attribution/ explanation of action, is not seen as a linear cause-effect relationship. Rather, multiple interacting factors, events, and processes shape and are part of every action. Explanation can only be inferred by assessing holistically and in context, the patterns and webs shaping each case (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 238). By interviewing several participants at each site and hearing their stories within the context of their work, I strove to obtain a holistic view of the issues raised in each situation I studied.

The focus of the fifth axiom is axiology, the role of values in inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1982) explained that inquiry is value-bound in at least four ways: by the inquirer, by the choice of problem and focus of inquiry, by the inquiry paradigm, theory and methods, and by the context. My values, derived from my upbringing, education and personal and professional life experiences, have affected my interest in nursing administration in general, and in distance education specifically; hence, my wish to undertake study in this area.

Choosing a naturalistic, interpretive approach to the inquiry reflects a value orientation, revealing my desire to gain more understanding of this phenomenon, rather than striving to achieve explanations and predictions about it. In addition, I have been aware from the beginning that my design of the study, the participants I chose, the methods used for data collection, and the conditions within which I gathered data, would be influenced by my values.

Guba and Lincoln (1982), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), and Streubert and Carpenter (1995) all stressed the need for an emergent design in naturalistic inquiry. As Streubert and Carpenter (1995) noted, "The naturalistic domain dictates an emergent design because of a belief in phenomena as consisting of multiple, context dependent realities. Only after the realities become apparent can the most appropriate design for the study be determined" (p. 249).

Owens (1982) described the plan for a naturalistic study:

> Starting with questions of broad scope and proceeding through a conceptual funnel--working with data all the while, ever trying to more fully understand what the data mean--making decisions as to how to check and how to verify as the investigation unfolds. It is important in the design of such a study that the investigator be fully prepared to look for unanticipated perceptions arising from the data as he or she gets closer and closer to the data over time. (p. 11-12)

Burns and Grove (1995) described research design as "a blueprint for action" (p. 34). However, this is not meant to imply the need for a rigid adherence to a controlled research design as required in empirical research. The design or "blueprint" for this study emerged as I proceeded through the data collection and analysis process.

DATA GATHERING

As the researcher, I was the prime data collector. Guba and Lincoln (1982) maintained that the humans-as-instruments are the ideal choice because of their "insightfulness, flexibility, responsiveness, their holistic emphasis and their ability to ascribe meaning to data simultaneously with their acquisition" (p. 245). In other words, only human beings have the capacity to process the multiple realities present in a social environment. As data collector, I tried to make every effort to remain cognizant of the crucial significance of being "human as instrument," consistent with the posture put forth by Guba and Lincoln (1982):

> Naturalists, using themselves as instruments, building on their tacit (knowledge)--intuition, apprehensions, 'vibes'--as well as propositional knowledge, and unrolling the inquiry design as the study proceeds, would find a priori theory uncongenial, preferring to develop the theory as the collection of facts grew and insights into their possible meanings matured. (p. 244)

I collected data for this study mainly through in-depth interviews with participants, complemented by participant observation and document analysis. In addition, I recorded observations, analytic ideas, and reflections in a field-journal throughout the data collection and analysis process. As the human instrument, I attempted to attain what Lather (1986) referred to as reciprocity: "Reciprocity implies give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It operates at two points...the junction between researcher and researched and between data and theory" (p. 263). This required that I engage in the interviews in an "interactive dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher" (p. 266).

Indeed, I believe there was a mutual give-and-take between the participants and me. Often I was asked to share my own experiences or to provide suggestions about specific issues, both of which I happy to do. Sequential interviews were conducted to "facilitate collaboration and a deeper probing of research issues" (p. 266). In addition, the strategy used required "negotiation of meaning....this entails recycling description, emerging analysis, and conclusions to at least a subsample of the respondents" which I did (p. 266).

Finally, as the instrument for data collection, it was imperative that I constantly remain aware of my unknowing self in the way that Munhill (1993) described it: "To be authentically present...is to situate knowingly in one's own life and interact with full unknowingness about the other's life. In this way unknowing equals openness" (p. 125). I tried throughout the study to approach each situation and each interaction with an open mind and with open questioning and listening.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: the programs were well established, they were in dual-mode institutions, they were from post-RN baccalaureate degree programs, and they were in different provinces. Originally I invited as participants, deans and directors from five dual-mode universities located across Canada who were administrators of well established post-R.N. bachelor of nursing degree programs offered by distance education. I chose to interview administrators, faculty, librarians, and support staff who were involved in the distance education programs and those who the deans and directors suggested would be valuable informants. In total, 28 individuals agreed to participate.

Once ethical approval was obtained, I engaged in preliminary discussions by e-mail with participating deans and directors about my research study. I also made initial phone calls to organize site visits and to ask them to think about administrative issues associated with their distance education programs. Without exception, the deans and directors readily agreed to participate and they offered support and encouragement for the study, emphasizing the importance of research in this area.

Formal informed consent was obtained from those who indicated an interest in participating. Every individual contacted was encouraging and enthusiastic about my study. Furthermore, they were very generous with their time. They freely offered their perspectives on issues related to distance education in general, and shared their particular experiences with distance education programs for nurses.

Between February and April 1997, site visits were made to five universities across Canada, with two to five days spent at each site. During the visits, taped interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. Reflections and insights gained from the first interviews provided what Owens (1982) described as a broad-scale exploration, and this provided direction for my next steps.

Originally, I expected that interviews would be conducted over two to three days with deans and/or directors and faculty members charged with administering the distance education programs. However, even before my visits the deans and directors were e-mailing me with suggestions as to other potential participants. These included individuals from educational technology departments, librarians, student advisors, additional faculty members and students.

I intended to listen to the audiotaped sessions after each interview, and list follow-up questions for subsequent interviews. However, I was only able to follow this plan for the first visit, when I had adequate time to review the tapes between each interview. At subsequent sites where I conducted several interviews back to back in one day, I listened to groups of tapes at the end of each day, and planned for the next interviews accordingly. While at the sites, I also listened and observed carefully; studying the settings, taking note of the participants, the events, and the actions occurring within the settings, as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) recommended. Throughout, I kept field notes of my observations and reflections. The tapes and my notes gave me direction for what additional questions to ask the next day or at the next site.

In my original plan I also anticipated that following each site visit I would review all the tapes, program documents and my notes, and write up case descriptions. In reality this was not possible due the volumes of data collected at each site, and because of the extensive travelling that was involved, with little time between sites. However, I was able to begin to draft a rudimentary coding scheme as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) and Merriam (1988), and I identified experiences, issues and reflections as I went along. In all cases, I was able to listen to all of the tapes from one day and identify questions for the next day or for follow-up correspondence.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) noted that "in early days of data collection, coding can help you develop a more specific focus or more relevant questions" (p. 130). I found that even the rudimentary coding scheme I developed in the early stages helped me to reframe and focus my questions later on. Once I completed a draft analysis, I

shared relevant parts of the analysis with a sample of three respondents, offering them an opportunity for input. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested "the task is to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it" (p. 236). The responses from participants who reviewed the data confirmed that my analysis was accurate and demonstrated consistency throughout.

INTERVIEWS

The interviews were mostly of a semi-structured, open-ended nature, with questions related to organizational, personnel, curriculum, financial and autonomy issues loosely guiding the study. The questions I developed to frame the interviews were not all used with all participants, nor were they necessarily asked in the order or the manner in which they were developed. In keeping with naturalistic inquiry, I expected other questions to arise from the responses to these questions and from my review of the documents and my field notes. This is what Patton (1990) described as a general interview guide approach, where an interview guide serves as a checklist to make sure all relevant topics are covered, although the actual wording and ordering of questions are not determined in advance.

In the pilot interviews prior to the study I learned that Patton's suggestion would serve me well in the actual study. I entered the practice interviews with my first two participants with a list of focussed questions and soon concluded that I needed to change my approach. Although the questions were helpful to guide my thoughts, I realized I needed to use a fairly unstructured approach to interviewing in order to enable the participants to more freely express their views. I kept thinking

throughout the first experiences that these people had such profound stories to tell, but I just kept bringing them back to the interview questions so I could "get my questions answered."

Fortunately, after those pilot interviews we joined each other for coffee where I had an opportunity to learn what I would have missed if we had not had a chance to converse further. Both participants shared the most intriguing stories about their experiences with distance education. I remember wishing I had taken my tape-recorder when we went for coffee, as I frequently wanted to stop them and ask if I could write down parts of their conversations; thinking all the while "this is really good stuff." Later, I wrote in my journal:

> I can't believe how open those two were and how much time they spent with me. It's a good thing we went for coffee! Their stories about their experiences were a lot more interesting and informative than what I got from asking them my specific questions. Yet my questions did help me get over my nervousness and helped make sure that topics I believe are important were addressed. For the next interviews, I'll need to make sure I have enough time with people so they can answer my questions but also have a chance to talk freely about their issues.

The topics and questions I used to guide the interviews in the study can be found in Appendix A. The questions did prove useful in terms of gaining information about specific topics, and many times they triggered participants to reflect on things they may not have thought about. Moreover, my first experience taught me to use an open-ended approach that would allow participants to tell, explain, and interpret their experiences in their own way. Talbot (1995) supports the use of intensive, in-depth interviews using an unstructured approach or "conversation with a purpose." She maintained:

> Interviews should produce interesting and prolific "stories" and narratives. The participant is the knower, the expert, the teacher; the researcher is the learner. A good interview is conducive to openness. The participant feels comfortable and talks freely about his or her ideas, opinions, and feelings. A good interview produces data rich in detail and examples and reveals the participant's viewpoint. (p. 476)

I found the unstructured method resulted in many stories and rich discussions of diverse issues associated with distance education programs. The use of an interview guide helped me enter into each interview with an idea of the domains that I wanted to explore. It also helped ensure that the topics were addressed by at least one of the participants at each site. If I was not clear on a specific aspect, the guide served as a reminder to seek clarification from someone before I left the site. At all of the sites I was able to glean the perspective of more than one participant on their understandings of administrative issues.

The individuals originally identified as key participants or their delegates helped organize an interview schedule for me. Interviews were conducted at times and places convenient for the participants and to the extent possible I made every attempt to provide a comfortable, relaxed environment. Two individuals who had initially been identified as study participants were unable to meet with me in person due to health concerns. Also, two other participants who were selected on the basis of previous interviews and on the suggestions of the program administrators, were not present at the universities at the times I was at those sites. Nevertheless, all four of those participants agreed to be interviewed by telephone and to have the telephone conversations tape-recorded. The 28 interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by me as soon after the interviews as possible.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Owens (1982) suggested that using "multi-data gathering techniques ensures the potential for cross-checking and verifying data" (p. 15). Therefore, besides the

interviews and my observations, data about specific programs were gathered from a variety of documents. Participants freely shared and recommended available documents or referred me to locations where they could be accessed. Documents such as nursing program brochures, minutes from the CAUSN meetings, university calendars and other university documents provided information about curriculum, faculty, and how nursing programs offered through distance education were organized within the universities.

PERSONAL JOURNAL

Throughout the study, I used an audit trail as outlined by Owens (1982). I wrote memos and kept a personal journal or reflective field log as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested, where I recorded all contacts made during the study, the reasoning and logic behind decisions, and hunches, feelings, reflections, and perceptions I had as I went along. I originally thought my journal would be a neat, orderly account of my activities, thoughts and feelings. However, as I progressed through the study I found myself scribbling notes here and there, and although this is characteristic of me, it was more of a challenge to keep the papers in order than I expected. Nevertheless, going through the different items in the way I had naturally documented them served as reminders of where I had been and what I was thinking at those times when I wrote them.

DATA ANALYSIS

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the process of data analysis in naturalistic inquiry as "a synthetic one, in which the constructions that have emerged (been shaped by) inquirer-source interactions are reconstructed into meaningful wholes. Data

analysis is thus not a matter of data reduction...but of induction" (p. 333). They emphasized that data processing is "a continually developing process, in which each stage provides guidance for the next throughout the inquiry" (p. 340). They stressed as well, that the outcome of the analysis is not to generate a theory that will enable prediction and explanation, rather a case report of the study describing what has been learned.

Merriam (1988) also noted that qualitative inquiry is inductive, and that qualitative researchers focus on process rather than outcomes or products. These researchers are concerned with understanding and interpretation; they "are interested in meaning--how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret their experiences" (p. 19). Since meaning is embedded in context, and mediated through the researcher's own perceptions, what emerges is a local theory; theoretical formulations that apply only to the study situation and are not necessarily generalizable to other situations.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) described the process of data analysis in naturalistic inquiry thus:

> ...Organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned. Working with the data, you create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns and interpret the data you have collected. (p. 127)

Therefore, data analysis was a dynamic process in this study, continuous and ongoing from the outset. Guba and Lincoln's (1985) four criteria were used to inform the decision to stop collecting data; exhaustion of data sources (no new sources of information available); saturation of categories (little or no information emerges about

a category); emergence of regularities (researcher and participants feel a sense of integration); and overextension (new data are too far removed from the categories and do not contribute to the understanding of the phenomena being studied).

As previously mentioned, some data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. Beginning with the contextual information I gathered about the programs, I started to develop a description of each program. After the interviews, I planned to build on my initial case descriptions, and when completed in draft form, I intended to provide the participants an opportunity to review them for verification purposes. Once the process of simultaneous data collection and analysis was completed, I planned to sort all of the data and organize it topically or chronologically into case records for more intensive analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1988).

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) pointed out that some sorting of the data into analytic files and developing preliminary coding schemes should occur early on. Later, when most of the data have been collected, analytic coding takes place when the focus is on classifying and categorizing data (p. 132). They described coding as:

> A progressive process of sorting and defining and redefining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e., observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature)...by putting like minded pieces together into data clumps, we create an organizational framework. (p. 133)

Following their suggestions, I first sorted the data from each site according to identified issues, then coded the contents of each of these into subcodes. I then placed the various subcodes into what seemed to be a meaningful sequence, finally deciding which issues belonged in the final code arrangement to be used to guide the presentation of my findings. I did this more in-depth data analysis from all of the

participants' transcripts rather than focusing on each program. I believed this would serve to highlight commonalities and differences among the programs and also preserve the anonymity of the participants. For example, many issues related to students emerged, such as difficulties recruiting and tracking students, meeting the needs of post-RN students who are perceived to be adult learners, and the need for flexibility. I identified the broad category of student participation as the main topic, with subcategories of issues related to recruiting and admitting students, distance education students as adult learners, and creating flexibility versus sticking to rules. I then reread the transcripts and my field notes to discover patterns underlying the individual descriptions. These themes reflect the insights I gained in analyzing the data.

When it came to presenting the findings I struggled with wanting to provide information about the various programs on one hand, and concerns about revealing information about participants on the other. Therefore, I had a difficult time trying to decide the exact form in which the findings should be presented. In the end, I decided not to undertake case descriptions of each program, but to focus only on discussing the administrative issues. I made this decision partly to preserve the anonymity of the participants and partly because the substantial amount of data I accumulated required that I put limitations on what I could reasonably do within the time available. As well, I used pseudonyms when referring to participants to further preserve their anonymity.

The 28 interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length, which, when transcribed, resulted in over 540 typed pages. As well, I had approximately 30 pages

of hand written notes and documents from the sites. I found that even in the shorter interviews there was almost instant rapport between the participants and myself. In some cases it may have been because of our common interests in distance education. With nursing faculty members and administrators I believe there was a greater connection established because of our shared commitment to post-RN education.

Glesne and Pleshkin (1992) while remarking on the considerable breadth of outcomes of qualitative research, stated, "Data analysis accordingly, is the prelude to sensitive, comprehensive outcomes that make connections, identify patterns, and contribute to greater understanding" (p. 146). Lancy (1993) observed, "One of the essential problems that a qualitative researcher faces is to combine description which is engrossing and convincing with analyses that go to the heart of the phenomena" (p. 22). I made every attempt to do accomplish this and I believe that my participants' agreement provided confirmation of its veracity. However, because of the large number of issues identified in this study I found this to be a particularly onerous undertaking.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Member checking was an integral part of the study. I did this by sharing the interpretive process with participants and inviting their reactions throughout the study. The importance of this was underlined by Glesne and Pleshkin (1992) who noted that participants may 1) verify that I have reflected their perspectives; 2) inform me of sections that could be problematic for personal or political reasons; and 3) help me develop new ideas and interpretations. Upon checking with participants they confirmed that they were able to find themselves in my study, and verified that I

presented a consistent portrayal of them and their programs in my presentation. In addition, they expressed agreement that they were comfortable with the way I had identified and couched the issues. They offered only minor suggestions for changes, mostly related to grammar and presentation of the issues, but not with respect to the issues themselves.

Owens (1982) maintained that the process of member checks is perhaps the single most important means available to the naturalistic inquirer for establishing the credibility of the inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggested that the conclusion of the categorization process is an ideal time to conduct a member check to determine whether the description is a faithful reconstruction of the respondent's construction. As stated previously, I checked back with my respondents at this and other points to ensure they agreed with my constructions.

In addition, a number of other techniques were used to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of my interpretations. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) identified time as a critical factor in achieving trustworthiness: "Time at your research site, time spent interviewing, time to build sound relationships with respondents--all contribute to trustworthy data" (p. 146). Similarly, Owens (1982) suggested spending long enough periods of time at the selected sites to "learn the language" and to become accepted and trusted (p. 14).

I had spent time in the role of Acting Director of a distance education nursing program and attended CAUSN and other deans and directors meetings, where I had become acquainted with participants prior to the study. As well, from the beginning

of my study I intended to build on my past collegial relationships with the deans and directors.

I used e-mail and telephone discussions, the time at the sites, and multiple repeated interviews to establish a stronger, trusting relationship with them. The extent to which that I was able to do this is attested to by the encouragement I received from the deans and directors themselves, two of whom invited me to stay at their homes during the site visits. This time afforded us ample opportunity to visit and become better acquainted. Also, our talks inevitably turned to distance education and the conversations were rich with anecdotes and stories about our respective experiences. Not surprisingly, these times were the most fulfilling and enjoyable parts of my study.

In terms of enhancing credibility, I collected referential adequacy materials and used triangulation which Owens (1982) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) consider important in this respect. I used multiple data-gathering techniques that enabled me to cross check and verify data between sources. The documents I collected from the different programs, minutes from meetings, my field notes and audiotapes all served to preserve a sense of context and assisted me in recalling events when making interpretations. In addition, I was able to spend enough time at the sites, and in two cases at the homes of participants, to informally obtain feedback-and conduct member-checks throughout the data collection period.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Owens (1982) suggested enlisting friends and colleagues to raise questions and concerns with, or to assist with developing codes or interpreting field notes, to check perceptions, and promote trustworthiness. I did this

by consulting with my friends and with colleagues familiar with distance education at different times throughout the data analysis process. In particular, I asked a colleague knowledgeable about distance education and qualitative research to conduct an audit of my decisions and activities. She read selected transcripts, reviewed coding categories and with my field journal as a guide, sought to reconstruct my decision making, acknowledging that my decisions and actions made sense to her. She verified also that all five sites were used and included on each issue throughout the description of the findings.

The likelihood of producing trustworthy interpretations will be enhanced, reminded Glesne and Peshkin (1992), if we recognize and continually remain aware of our biases and subjectivity. I tried to do this by asking myself questions along the way about what I was seeing and hearing, what data collection means I was using, what might have been lacking, by consciously searching for negative cases, and by keeping notes along the way.

Owens (1982) stated that the nature of knowledge and truth is related to the particular context, making generalizations impossible. Differences, from this view are deemed interesting and valuable, as it is important to know the ways in which fit does not occur because of differences in terms of context. Therefore, it is not intended, nor desired that my interpretations are generalizable.

On the other hand, as Guba and Lincoln (1982) noted, there may be some degree of transferability to other similar situations if my description is "thick" enough that others can reasonably judge the sameness of this situation to theirs. In other words, I hope I have provided enough information about the circumstances and

context of data collection, including the limitations of my study to "impart a vicarious experience of it" (p. 248).

ASSUMPTIONS

There are several assumptions upon which this study was based. First, I assumed that the administrators of distance education nursing programs knew and understood the issues associated with their respective programs. Secondly, I assumed that all participants were credible and would speak openly and honestly about their programs and their concerns. Finally, I assumed that any data gathered from institutional and CAUSN documents would be accurate.

DELIMITATIONS

The study was delimited to volunteers who were involved in some aspect of administering five well-established distance education post-R.N. nursing degree programs in Canadian dual-mode universities. Due to time and financial constraints, the duration of the data collection process was limited to three months and only two students were interviewed. Visits to more sites and a longer period of time for data collection could potentially produce further insights and meaning.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

Kember, Lai, Murphy, et al. (1990) pointed out that "a clear advantage of the naturalistic paradigm is that it enables respondents to focus on issues of real concern to them" (p. 49). It also enables the researcher to gain great insights into the concerns being addressed and to provide thick descriptions of findings. Understandings to questions can have great depth and can be illustrated with specific examples, including quotes. However, my ability to gain such insights and to afford reasonably accurate

interpretations of them has depended on my ability to listen empathically, and bracket my own understandings so as to hear what the respondents were really saying.

My ability to do this was of particular importance, as my research was on a topic about which I am quite knowledgeable because of my seven years experience in a distance education nursing program, during which a significant portion of the time was spent in an administrative capacity. My past experiences may have contributed to biases on my part about nursing administration. In addition, I was aware that I might hold other potential biases, as I was coming from an autonomous distance education university where issues may be different from those I was studying. As well, I realized that since participants knew my background they might perceive me as a competitor. This might not only have affected the participants' willingness to be open with me, it may also have posed, as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warned, a substantial risk that this could shape the nature of my inquiry.

I strove to continually remain aware of my own biases and to remind myself that I was the learner in this study, and the participants were my teachers. To diminish the effects of perceived competitiveness, I chose deans and directors who knew me from previous personal contact and with whom I had a positive professional relationship. During the study not once did I have the sense that I was perceived as competition by them or by the other individuals within their institutions who participated. On the contrary, the warm reception from all participants gave me a sense of fellowship and support. At all times I tried to be open and honest with participants throughout the study, answering the many questions they had about my own experiences with distance education.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to beginning the study, ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate sources and committees at the University of Alberta. The participants were invited to be part of the study on a volunteer basis, and were asked to provide formal written consent (Appendix B). In obtaining their consent, I clarified the aim of the investigation, the potential steps in the research process and what their involvement might be. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, that they had the right to refuse to participate, and that if they agreed to begin the study, they could withdraw at any time during the study.

I made every attempt not to exploit the participants. My intent was to treat everyone with respect and dignity, presenting their situations and perspectives as honestly as possible. I hoped that by developing a collegial, reciprocal relationship and sharing my findings as I went along, participants might gain new insights into their work and would benefit from the experience.

Steps were taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants throughout the study by heeding the advice of Glesne and Peshkin (1992) of "not discussing with anyone the specifics of what I see and hear" (p. 118) and by not using actual names in the written report. The tapes, transcriptions and my field notes have been secured and not made available to anyone other than my auditor and me. Data were analyzed around general administrative issues to maintain anonymity of individuals.

When written up, a sample of participants had an opportunity to review my descriptions for verification. If anything of a sensitive nature emerged, or if anyone

was worried or uncomfortable about something being reported, and the balance between telling the story and protecting the participants was in conflict, protecting the participants took precedence. Ultimately, the experience gained from the "continual communication and interaction with the participants" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.125) guided my ethical behaviour during the study.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

Previously, I described the approach and design I used in seeking answers to the research question: What are the issues faced by administrators of nursing degree programs offered through distance education and what processes have they put into place to address these issues? After transcribing the data, I read through every page of each transcript several times and focussed on what participants identified as the administrative issues. I began by listing the issues identified at each site, then went back through all of them to identify similarities and differences on these issues between and among the sites. I then grouped the issues into categories as described earlier. At this stage, I whole-heartedly agreed with Talbot (1995), who said of qualitative data analysis: "Like art, it is both creative and inductive:...However, it is also a scientific process that requires much time, critical thinking, and emotional and intellectual energy" (p. 480).

I identified the six major categories which were: student participation, student support services, faculty participation, program development and delivery, interaction, and bureaucratic systems. Although they are described and discussed as separate concepts, all of the categories and all the issues within the categories are naturally interrelated. Each category and its issue are described in a separate chapter. In

describing the issues, I have also drawn from related literature to provide other perspectives on the topic. Because of the focus on issues much of the findings describe concerns and problems. However, these issues and concerns come from individuals involved in programs that are generally regarded as well established and successful.

In order to ensure the anonymity of my participants I have not provided detailed descriptions of each of the programs. However, in order to assist readers to understand the general context I provide the following brief overview. The institutions in the study:

were located across Canada;

ranged in size from less than 50 to approximately 900 students;

at the time of the study generally used a strong print-base and some teleconferencing (although this varied across institutions);

all of the faculty were involved in traditional as well as distance education teaching, or sessional instructors were hired specifically for distance education;

there had been incremental development of the programs; and

some used their regular teaching faculty for course development, with or without instructional design assistance and others used a centralized distance education unit.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS: STUDENT PARTICIPATION

> The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.
>
> Carl Jung

Issues related to student participation in distance education stemmed from a broad range of interconnected concerns and frustrations and so were grouped into recruiting and admitting students, distance education students as adult learners, and creating flexibility versus sticking to the rules.

RECRUITING AND ADMITTING STUDENTS

Various issues emerged with respect to recruiting students and admitting them into the distance delivered post-RN programs. Recruiting students was identified as an issue at all of the sites; however it was not problematic to the same extent, or for the same reasons. On one hand, recruiting and admitting students was a concern from the perspective of attracting sufficient students to certain programs or to certain sites. On the other hand, it was a problem when there were large student numbers in certain courses or at certain sites.

Among other factors, the method of funding distance programs contributed to their ability to recruit students. A paradox emerged in some instances in that funding was contingent on student numbers, but there was inadequate funding to offer the number and type of courses that students desired. The effects of recruitment issues on the different programs, and the plans in place to deal with recruitment differed immensely from one place to another. For example, some participants acknowledged that low enrolment was the most pressing issue they were facing as it could lead to

closure of their distance education post-RN program. One such participant, Kelly maintained,

> My main concern is the decrease in numbers. And I think that's true of all nursing programs in the province and not just distance ones. I think the major issue to be addressed here is the decrease in numbers....We are anxious to get our numbers up. My personal opinion is that if our numbers continue to drop then [the provincial department of education] is going to cut--just drop our program.

In this instance, there were several plans underway to try to recruit students, albeit with a limited marketing budget. Therefore advertising, though planned, was not expected to take place on a large scale. The participants here identified two short-term and two long-term plans as possible approaches to increase enrolments. Short-term solutions were based on feedback from an informal student survey that pointed to the need for more flexibility in the existing program. One of their plans to provide more flexibility for students was to offer more non-nursing electives.

Another plan was to introduce the option of taking courses in a block format--referred to as a "summer institute model." This model would enable students to take courses within a condensed period of time. In other words, they would be offering on-campus summer sessions similar to regular traditional university offerings--an idea that had been approved at the faculty level, and was waiting for senior administrative approval at the time of my interviews.

However, a related issue that had yet to be dealt with was that summer sessions are typically funded through the Department of Continuing Education, which reportedly had no funds for this project. Therefore, it seemed likely that faculty workloads would need to be accommodated to enable them to have compensatory time

off in the fall semester in order to teach summer courses. The concern expressed by one participant, Mary, was that this would produce a domino effect, as the faculty members who would normally teach in the fall semester, would then need to be replaced. She reflected, "When you think you have the best solution, it has ramifications." The long-term solutions included a plan to mount the courses on the World Wide Web and offer them to students out of province, and to look to foreign markets to supplement the local one.

The issue of recruitment was experienced quite differently for other participants. In one program where audio-teleconferenced courses were provided to groups in diverse locations, while the overall number of students in the program was high, some sites had too few students and some had too many. In this case, participants described the difficulties teaching when either situation existed. For example, one participant, Nicole, who incorporated group-work into her teaching, cited this problem:

> I have 25 students in [one location] and two in another site. We have group discussions, and those two are going to finish a lot sooner than the other groups. And then I break the large groups into small groups and they come together to share information within the sites. So you've got two students and 50 students [overall] in different classrooms. So you've got those [problems].

Joanne referred to the small sites as "dying sites." Nicole agreed with this analogy saying, "We are trying to close some of these sites....we decided we're not going to admit students into the post-RN program unless there are five at a particular site." However, the number five was chosen because, besides the difficulties teaching to smaller numbers through audio-teleconferencing, five seemed to be the lowest

number that would make it financially feasible to keep a site active. These participants explained that fifteen students at each site was actually the preferred minimum number in order to achieve cost effectiveness in the program, but it was difficult to consistently attract or maintain that number.

Establishing a range of acceptable numbers at the sites was troublesome as there was no way to predict whether the numbers would remain stable, or whether, if a course started with five, the students would remain. Participants related that it was common to have the required number of students register in a course to make it worthwhile to offer it at a particular site, however they might not all show up when classes commenced. One participant, Nicole explained it this way:

> But that doesn't mean that if they put in the application that they are going to come. So you might still get stuck with one or two...if we get five and bring them in and only two show, when do we stop offering courses to [a site] when its not cost effective?....And the pressure is on to bring in the money.

It was apparent from her tone and her facial expression, that the inability to predict student enrolments caused frustration for her. For Nicole there was a constant tension between meeting the needs of the students and funding concerns at certain sites. Similarly, another participant, Joanne, though laughing, seemed exasperated with the situation, as she observed:

> Students have learned that you sign up and then drop the course, and by the time we figure out that you don't have five students in the course any more, we are half way through. So we are teaching the course to two people, and that becomes problematic.

Participants discussed various methods they used to recruit students. In some situations where numbers were decreasing, administrators were making attempts to

recruit students by sending information out to hospitals in surrounding areas, and by encouraging current students to recruit others. At other institutions, student advisors and program coordinators would travel to various sites to recruit and register students in courses--a practice referred to as "the road show." However, in recent years, poor turnouts and a perceived lack of interest on the part of both existing and potential students, had led many participants to discontinue the site visits.

In most programs, recruitment was mainly undertaken by program coordinators who generally placed advertisements in professional journals and attended career fairs and conferences with display booths. Participants emphasized how the ability to attract new students to post-RN programs is influenced by a number of factors, not the least of which are the external conditions affecting nursing practice. For example, the power of nursing leaders was identified as a major force influencing nurses to seek their degrees, which in turn, influenced recruitment, as Joanne pointed out:

> ....We thought [one site] was going to die...I mean, they were fossilized to the point of being moribund. And then [the hospital] got a new director of nursing who valued education, and this woman swept in and said, "We are not going to be like this anymore. All head nurses have to have their degrees and all supervisors have to have degrees. We are going to preferentially hire grads with degrees." And all of a sudden [that site] took off and everybody was wanting to get their degrees there. So, the local leadership, and what is valued locally is very important in terms of how recruitment goes.

The effect of this influence was significant for this nursing program, given that if a minimal number of students could not be recruited at certain sites, decisions would need to be made about whether or not the course would be cancelled at that site. Cancelling a course had severe consequences for students as it could mean they would

not be able to complete their degree at this university. Hence, this option was considered to be a last resort. Nicole, when describing how she used journaling in her classes to get to know her students, read me this excerpt from a student's journal, which clearly illustrates how stressful the possibility of cancelling courses was for students:

> Oh my God! There are only two of us left at this site. There are only two of us left! The others have dropped out of the course out of fear of the assignment. That means that maybe this course will be cancelled. [Here, Nicole stopped reading and said to me, "See, they have concerns at this site for lack of registrations." Then she read again]. Then I won't have any courses this semester. That means I don't think I am going to be able to finish my degree!

It was clear that maintaining sites with low enrolments was a multifaceted concern with financial and pedagogical implications. On the other hand, teaching to large numbers of students in several sites was problematic in different ways. Joanne, clearly concerned about students, explained:

> I think it is hard to give students a good educational experience through teleconferencing. I am particularly concerned about [one site] where we've had to severely limit enrolments because there were too many students for us to deal with. Every course we offer, there are 25 students in the room--so audio-teleconferencing--that's terrible!
>
> I think a lot of us try to develop strategies for interaction and communication. But when you are teaching 100 students or 150 students? I mean, when you've got them in front of you it's hard to stimulate discussion, but when you've got them in four different sites, its really hard to get much of a contribution from some of the sites.

In one sense, aside from the difficulties experienced when teaching to groups of students that are either too small or too large, one would expect that most distance programs should be able to accept an unlimited number of students. "The more the merrier!" as one person exclaimed. Indeed, most programs had no difficulty

attracting students, as there was a generally a demand from nurses for post-RN educational opportunities.

However, there were other factors that influenced the number of students admitted into the programs. For example, Joanne noted, "It's the size of the classroom that limits the enrolment. You know, so we teach 180 instead of 160...." [Meaning the number they could accept should not be a concern]. Yet, in this particular situation, the size of the classroom at the sites limited the number of students they could allow in any one class.

Programs that relied primarily on paper-based individualized home study as opposed to audio-teleconferenced sessions to groups were also faced with concerns of space if they included any form of face-to-face group meetings. Speaking of the need to incorporate group activities such as workshops into students' learning experiences, one administrator, Rita noted, "space becomes a major problem." In her institution they were required to limit the number of workshops in the courses due to space constraints.

One common barrier to admitting large numbers of students emerged. Many participants expressed concerns about the inability to accept large numbers of students, whether in particular locations or in a program generally, because of demands associated with courses that have clinical components. The concerns ranged from finding clinical opportunities to workload issues for faculty. Most schools were forced to limit enrolments based on the capacity of the community to provide adequate and appropriate clinical placements for students. Melanie identified this as a troublesome issue, observing, "There is a major squeeze on clinical placements and I

suspect that is happening everywhere." Certainly, I discovered during this study that limited clinical opportunities was a concern to the extent that it severely affected programs across the country.

In all of the programs, the "required" clinical courses were described in terms of being impediments of one kind or another. For instance, in Lou's case, there was pressure from students for the school to offer all of their courses each term. She observed that they could likely meet this demand in all the courses with the exception of the clinical courses, which they were forced to sequence. Consequently, when she referred to the clinical courses she noted "that is a bottle-neck for us," because it was so difficult to arrange clinical placements.

Lack of accessible clinical practice opportunities in their community health course also made it a "bottle-neck," in Joanne's program:

> That's what tends to determine the number of students we can take in--it's the number of students we think we can actually place in Community Health....We still can't meet the demand in [one location]. We could have 100 students if we were willing to...if we had the community health placements.

Similarly, as Nicole put it:

> That's how many [students] we are going to take in--how many placements....We are not going to have preceptors all over God's half acre! There aren't that many. They just don't exist!

Bev illustrated how, on the other hand, in their non-clinical courses they were able to accept an unlimited number of students:

> If I hire a tutor to do a course...they are uncapped....the only reason I would ever cap a distance course is if there was a lack of textbooks or something like that. So, otherwise they are uncapped. First we look at the registrations. And if a faculty thinks she can handle that number of students, if it's a non-clinical theory course, and she can handle 65 or

> 85 students in that course, if she feels secure with that, she will take that load.

Clearly, while in terms of the theory courses most programs could accept any number of students, clinical courses were notably different. This difference was eloquently described by Lou, who echoed much of what other informants said about the challenges the clinical courses presented, and how they influenced the numbers of students they could accept:

> When I think about the issues and the problems that arise for us it is largely around the practice courses. They take much more time. They take much more consideration, they require a lot more care, I think, to get students linked up in ways that they feel supported out there in agencies, and that agencies feel like we're here to help support them too, if a problem arises.
>
> We had a problem last time and its like--you have to be on top of that immediately, to make sure this is not going to blow up in your face. And I think a little problem in one place can sort of have a ripple effect in many others. Practice placements are really, really precious, and we can't afford to blow them.

On the other hand, like Melanie and Bev, Lou observed that the non-clinical courses did not give rise to the same restrictions on the number of students they could recruit:

> It would be a lot easier if we just had theory courses to offer. It's much cleaner, it's much easier. You can just stack up those students, you know... Does it really matter if you've got 60 or 40 or 80? I mean it's just a marking thing. But around those practice courses it's not so easy to manipulate the numbers. That's probably the biggest challenge I see.

However, despite the challenges, Lou was committed to maintaining the practice component in their program:

> So, I think that's something that is an ongoing challenge as far as I can see. I think there is a reasonably good commitment within the school to maintain that practice link. I know its something I am very

> committed to and needing to sort of keep people aware of, because I think we could very easily kind of slip out of it.

Listening to her speak, I reflected on the issues and challenges I had faced when managing clinical practice courses in my own work. In my experience, which I later shared with Lou, clinical courses do require more work and it is becoming more difficult to arrange appropriate and willing preceptors for students. Nevertheless, I believed as she did, that the clinical courses, as difficult as they are to manage in distance education, are paramount to a practice profession such as Nursing. Creative solutions would be needed to resolve the problems associated with clinical practice in these programs. As Ross Kerr (1995) maintained:

> The clinical component in nursing programs sets them apart from other university programs in traditional and non-traditional settings. A commitment to providing high quality clinical instruction in regional and rural settings may seem to present insurmountable difficulties in developing off-campus programs in nursing. However, a variety of arrangements is possible for supervision of clinical learning experiences. (p. 385)

In one participant's estimation, the ability to arrange clinical experiences was the only major concern she could identify that she believed affected the quality of distance education programs for nurses. Ava expressed the issue this way:

> I think the only concern I have is the extent to which students--distance students--are able to acquire clinical placements that they like, given where they are in the province. And given the fact that it's very difficult for us, other than working through tutors, to access clinical experiences for them. So I worry about that.

Students were required to participate in clinical practice courses in all of the distance education programs I visited. It was apparent that individuals responsible for clinical placements in these programs have striven and been challenged from the

beginning, to find innovative ways of arranging clinical experiences. The way one pioneer of distance education described it, this has been one of the major challenges since the inception of their program. Sherry reflected on the difficulties associated with the availability of clinical placements to support the curriculum, saying,

> Of course there aren't so many of those. There weren't when we started. And so, one of the things we had to do was to acculturate clinical facilities where students could practice. The issue of clinical supervision -- now -- that was less of an issue for us at the beginning because they were all licensed for safe practice; they had to be licensed.
>
> But even so, when a healthy part of our clinical courses was community, and there weren't experiences in community work, it took a lot of interaction between the distant professor and the agencies (because these were placed all over the province), to keep problems under control, and to really help students and field guides have a profitable experience.

Bev's story below reveals also, how managing clinical placements is not without some adversity:

> I do all the clinical placements. Hell of a job! But our numbers are such that it's manageable. But if you had large numbers it would be very hard. But you know why we do that? When we first began our clinical courses years ago...we decided we would let students go out and find their own placements, which was a disaster for us. It wasn't so much of a disaster for us. It was a disaster for the students, who really felt not linked to the program anyway.
>
> And so, when they walked in off the street and said "I'm Joe Blow from [her university] and I need a placement," they were not very well received. And they were brown-nosing the whole time trying to get in. And it seemed for us like a not very educationally sound way to do that. So we quickly changed that.
>
> And now what students do is they phone me immediately as soon as they register in the nursing course and say "I'm going to live in [a certain location] and I want to do this course next week." And I will say "Great! Between you and me we will do this together." And they will go out and find out what the name of the health unit is. Obviously,

> I know those things now. But often they are very familiar with who works there.

In most programs clinical preceptors were not paid but rather volunteered their time as part of their professional responsibilities. However, in Bev's program it was different, as she explained:

> We hire our clinical facilitators, which I know is really different. We can hardly get a student in anywhere for a clinical placement without some kind of instructor. We call our people clinical facilitators instead of preceptors so as not to confuse the issue.
>
> They are people that are hired to do four major things. They are responsible for the orientation of students to the health unit or agency; they help the student find a client or clients, whatever the requirements might be; they must give ongoing feedback to students (they must be in touch with the student for 30 minutes a week at least); and they must do evaluations midway and finals.... Students...I feel strongly that they need somebody who really knows the system. So what I am trying to do is hire facilitators that work in the agencies part-time.

It was obvious from her expression when she spoke about this that Bev, like Lou, felt passionately about the need to arrange quality clinical learning experiences for students, and like other participants, she struggled with this issue. While Bev's placement system seemed to work for her, Joanne had developed a slightly different system to facilitate clinical experiences for students. She noted, "We have both preceptors in the agencies that students are placed in, as well as clinical supervisors who meet with them regularly and discuss content....So, we hire local people to do that clinical coordination." Despite the established system, Joanne too, had experienced difficulties securing clinical placements, especially in rural areas. She believed that the problem for distance educators is compounded,

> Because you are cold-calling [a rural agency] and saying, "Hi, I'm from the University of [her university] and I need a clinical placement for

> three students who are going to be taking community health in your area. Wouldn't you just love to have these three students?" And they say, "No, goodbye!" You don't have the same moral suasion you have in [the city where the university is located].
>
> So they have to be willing. And there are some health units that are very willing and there are others that are awful.

Joanne, demonstrated how participants had developed their own innovative strategies for securing placements:

> Somehow, I am not quite sure how, but [her previous Dean] got me doing clinical placements for the community health course the first couple of years I was with the program. In some ways, it was a good experience, because it meant I figured out how it works, and what you do, and what the problems are, and why you are likely to be turned down and all this kind of stuff. And I developed this technique of saying, "Well if you can't take any students, can you suggest a community agency who might be interested?" And in fact, that proved to be a really good way of getting some really weird placements that turn out to be really good.

Ross Kerr (1995) suggested, and these administrators demonstrated, that managing clinical placements can be difficult for distance delivered nursing programs. In any nursing program "preceptoring is a demanding activity particularly in light of increasing demands, pressures and uncertainty on a diminishing workforce" (Yonge, Krahn, Trojan & Reid, 1997, p. 65). Moreover, although processes can be implemented to facilitate this, according to participants in my study, the process of garnering appropriate clinical placements and finding preceptors to ensure students have a positive learning experience is complex.

With the exception of Bev, who managed this herself, most schools had clinical placement coordinators to handle the placement process. As Nicole indicated:

> We have a network in place. I don't. But I know the system does. And I don't want to get involved with that! That's way beyond my

> ability to cope.... Somebody here in the school handles that. I don't want to know, frankly. I don't want to know. I can't! It's above and beyond what I can handle!

Besides the administrative issues associated with arranging the practice experiences and preceptors, the clinical courses placed limits on the number of students accepted in them for other reasons. Lou had illustrated in her earlier story that the workload in clinical courses was seen to be much greater than in "straight theory" courses. Therefore, class sizes needed to be smaller due to the extra work associated with contacting clinical preceptors and facilitators, and with marking extra assignments in those courses.

In addition, in one program, whereas the clinical coordinator dealt with local [urban] placements, the faculty members who taught the clinical courses were also responsible for contacting the rural preceptors to ensure the placements were appropriate. Thus, these clinical courses entailed additional work, but there was no formal mechanism in place to adequately compensate instructors who teach them. Corrigan (1992) noted that nursing faculty experienced role strain related to their involvement with preceptor programs. This was related to the need to integrate new responsibilities into their existing workload, the need to travel more, and new demands on their time.

Melanie had experienced difficulties hiring instructors in the clinical courses because the number of students had to be kept lower as a result of the greater workload involved. Consequently, payment was also lower as faculty were paid on a per student basis. In order to attract instructors for these courses, she admitted handling the situation by 'fudging' the numbers:

> What it means is, if you have a big class you make more money and if you have a smaller one, you make less. And frankly, I fudge the numbers, because there is no way they would make enough money with the small number.

Another barrier to admitting large numbers of students was generally not having enough faculty members to match the demand from students wanting to take the distance courses. Depending on how the university established faculty workloads, this issue was more or less a concern. Where faculty workloads were established on a set number of students per class, participants reported that it was difficult to accept extra students. In some cases, it was not possible to create more "sections" to accommodate the demand; either there were no faculty members available to teach, or there was no funding available to hire them.

Melanie, noting that there was no externally imposed quota on the number of students they could take into their program, went on to discuss the limits she set because of the lack of instructors:

> That's one of my challenges. It's really the limitation I would set because of how many people we frustrate because they can't get into courses, and how many courses you can afford to run. I want to run the full schedule of courses, but I don't want huge waiting lists for courses....Last fall we ran three or four distance courses, and I had to add extra sections or ask somebody who was teaching on contract to take more courses.

However, adding more courses or sections had funding implications. Indeed, this was seen as one of the most challenging issues Diane faced:

> Funding is a big issue.... Particularly in the area of getting faculty. Right now what we do is rely on current faculty who are teaching in the undergraduate and graduate programs to take on a distance course. Many of them are more than willing and eager, but not everybody is. So that's one big issue--how do we get qualified people? And there

> are qualified people in the nursing community who would love to be involved, but the money isn't there to get them.

Funding appeared to be a double-edged sword in many ways, when it came to recruiting and admitting students in programs offered by distance education. For instance, when funding was tied to student numbers there was pressure to increase the number of students recruited into the program. However, as described by the participants, there were certain barriers to admitting large numbers or to offering more courses at one time. In addition, there seemed to be a complicated relationship between funding and numbers of students. At least in one case, where funding should have been an incentive, it seemed to be a disincentive to accepting larger numbers. Melanie noted with frustration:

> They have, just this year, shifted the faculty salary for distance into the academic units. Now presumably, they also shifted the funds to us, but what they've done when you take all the cutbacks in, it doesn't feel like you did get it. If your registrations go up, presumably you get more funding. If they go down, presumably you lose. But of course, when they first tried it we did supposedly got a bonus in Nursing for increased course registrations, because we had them in Nursing. However, in those units where they went down, they didn't take away money--it's very hard to do.

Even when the funds were available, faculty workloads, collective agreements, and the way faculty members were paid for teaching distance courses all influenced the ability to accept distance education students.

In summary, because of the flexible nature of distance education, theoretically, an unlimited number of students could be recruited to participate in most of these nursing programs. However, barriers to unlimited admissions included difficulties recruiting and admitting students in some instances, lack of classroom space,

difficulties arranging appropriate clinical experiences, establishing workloads in clinical courses, and limited availability of and funding to pay for instructors.

DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS AS ADULT LEARNERS

In these distance education programs, the need to recognize post-RN students as adult learners with busy lives emerged as a significant challenge. Conversely, it was also a factor that attracted faculty to the post-RN programs. As Jane described it:

> Folks who teach in the post-diploma do that because they like that level of learner. They really like the adult learner. It's the experience the post-diploma student brings I think, is what captures a lot of the faculty. It's not the distance--it's the adult learner. Once we went distance, we all suffered the same growing pains.

Nicole was among others who obviously enjoyed working with post-RN students whom she referred to as adult learners. Lamenting on the complexities and frustrations of her work, she suggested that this attraction toward adult learners was essential to her in her job:

> Anybody in this position has to love working with post-RNs--adult learners. I love it. I was a post-RN, and that's a lot of what drives me. It was the worse part of my education. They did not know how to treat me, and I will not do that to students.

Another participant, Helen, noted that the post-RN students are more mature and hence easier to work with:

> They have more practical experience in terms of classification schemes and how you organize information. They tend to have less experience with computers or with using libraries, but they catch on much quicker, and you can almost see the little lights click. I suspect it is just a combination of practical experience, plus life-experience, plus a certain level of maturity.

In Bev's determination, "People who have done a fair amount of work with adult education and really recognize the principles of adult learning do much better

with distance learning than do traditional educators." Those that do not understand the needs of adult learners, she indicated, have a more difficult time dealing with the need for flexibility inherent in distance education.

While most participants referred to post-RN students as more mature, many of them pointed out that this is an issue in itself. More than one individual observed that responsibilities such as work and family obligations associated with mature students often makes studying difficult for post-RNs. In particular, those involved with student advising found these students challenging. Rosanne, a student advisor explained it like this:

> The post-RN students are often students who come back to study after quite awhile. Often their last studies go back to their diploma program. Their needs are completely different than the other students who have transferred directly from high school, or who have transferred from another university program and have less responsibility. And just dealing and explaining to students--the post-R.N. students will question more. They won't take no for an answer, you know.

Rosanne went on to say that while she enjoyed post-RN students, she believed her most significant administrative issues were related to:

> Trying to keep post-RNs happy. And that's not a small feat! Because you are dealing with professionals. You are dealing with mature students who are quite demanding. And I don't think university administration appreciates the work that goes into counselling and administering post-RN student files; especially distance education students.

In a similar vein, Alice pointed out:

> The post-RNs take most of my time. They have more questions. They want to challenge the system more, and they have more problems because they are trying to work around their own workloads....and they are the most interesting.

> Nursing is really complicated I find. Real complicated!...In most cases, they are not real happy having to come back and get a B.N., because they feel they know basically what they need to know in order to work. They are the students who tend to look at the calendar and try to change the rules slightly, which is fine. They tend to try to find quicker ways of getting through than the other students do. So it's a bit of a challenge.

Most participants echoed the notion that post-RN students are different from other nursing students. This difference was not attributed exclusively to their being mature students. The difference, and the concomitant challenges associated with this, were more by virtue of the complex and problematic nature of their lives. Landstrom (1995) also observed that faculty in her study believed distance students had more complicated lives, with more personal problems that created barriers to learning than students who attended conventional classes.

Many participants in this study echoed concerns about the personal lives of their post-RN students' and the implications this had for them as learners in the context of the university. Alice summed up her perception of their students' personal situations like this:

> Everyone of them is different and they all have problems. There's not a person that comes in here that doesn't have a problem--a personal problem. Every post-RN student has a problem. Everyone does--they are all trying to get over something.

In a similar vein, Lou shared her poignant view of the post-RN students:

> As far as administrative issues, I think one main concern is the characteristics of students and their lives that come to us in this program. For the most part they are working either full time or part time, for the most part they have families, and very often very complex family kinds of situations.
>
> And I don't know if there's some kind of correlation between people wanting to do a degree and maybe getting themselves out of a day-to-

> day struggle with work, and maybe they think getting their degree will get them to a place where they can get a better kind of job. And maybe help them sort out their day-to-day life kinds of situations.

She went on to observe that the university needed to be responsive to the complex lives and concomitant needs of their students, saying:

> We seem to have an awful lot of students that have got very, very complex living arrangements. They are in and out of relationships, so we're against the sort of desire to keep things moving, and to live to the regulations the university sets up around students getting through in a certain period of time.
>
> We have these students who come to us with the most heart-wrenching stories that just don't fit. I think that's partly why they're in distance. They wouldn't fit under normal circumstances. But even to extenuate those a little bit, with the distance program its still not enough. And you kind of have to give them more allowances, and give them more deferred grades, and give them more opportunities to back off and withdraw out of the course and then come back in again.

Their choice of words, their tones, and their expressions revealed genuine empathy and concern as these participants described the nature and needs of post-RN students. They were obviously committed to providing high quality educational opportunities to these mature adult, mostly female students who were perceived to have complex, problematic lives. They were endeavoring, as Rosanne said, "To make university education for distance as challenging as for the students on campus."

Heaney and Horton (1991), cited in Wilson & Cervero (1997), described adult education as, "A commitment to adult learning as a means not only of empowering individuals, but also changing the conditions of everyday life" (p. 78). The participants in this study demonstrated this commitment. Furthermore, they expressed a conception of adult education as a "human activity" of adult learning,

such as Cunningham (1989) suggested is required, in her argument for an adult education for social change.

However, despite the commonly held view that post-RN students are mature adult learners, there is much evidence that on admission to programs, these students may be much younger now than they were in the past. The notion that student demographics have been changing quite drastically in the past few years, in terms of age and experience, was raised as an emerging issue by several participants. Budget cuts in health care have led to many students completing their RN diplomas then being unable to gain full-time employment. Hence, they have begun to return to university for post-RN degrees at an earlier age than usual and with little or no experience. Ann noticed, "The population entering the post-RN program is at a much younger age than they used to." Likewise, Mary observed, "They were coming into the program with no background and no real experience, so that was a major concern."

The lack of experience was of particular concern in the clinical courses, especially since preceptors were assuming they would be supervising\mentoring experienced nurses, when in fact they were often receiving younger inexperienced students. Mary relayed feedback she had received from preceptors who were community health nurses. They reported, "These kids are so naive. They don't know how to go into a family, a single mom, a single parent, and dealing with the Welfare system." Consequently, Mary noted that the preceptors had to do relatively more teaching than they had in the past, which was a concern. Lewis (1990) has identified students who required more direction as a great contributor to preceptor stress. Likewise (Yonge, et al, 1997) in their survey of 295 nursing preceptors in Alberta,

found that preceptoring "students with poor nursing skills" was identified as the most common problem for preceptors.

In this study, participants identified distinct differences between what they considered to be the mature (older) and the younger students. Diane described the older nurses as "high achievers," saying, "The older graduate brings that critical thinking ability, which has been translated, that maybe the new graduate doesn't have." She observed, "The younger students we find here, because of the work situation, they just come out of the diploma program and come right in." And, from Ann's perspective, "They don't have the maturity to be self-directed."

In Nicole's estimation, this trend toward younger inexperienced post-RN students is problematic because her program [like all of the post-RN programs] was:

> Set up with the adult learner and practicing nurse in mind, which has caused unending problems with immunizations, because it was setup to assume that if you are working, your immunizations are up to date. Fifty percent of our people are no longer working and the majority of these students are fresh out of school now. Which a year ago, was not the case! They are stalling for time, hoping that something's going to happen.

The change in student demographics in these distance programs for nurses may prove to be more of a concern over time in terms of course design, program development and instruction in distance education. This concern has received little attention in the distance education literature where it is evident that a persistent assumption exists that students who choose distance education are part-time adult learners, engaged in multiple other roles. Moore (1985), Bates (1989), Holmberg (1996) and Spencer (1995) are among those who support this view. Moore (1985) for example, maintained that because distance education is concerned with the education

of adults, " Our research plans should be informed by the theories and research about learning in adulthood, adult development, program planning, instruction and evaluation in adult education" (p. 36).

However, Wallace (1995) suggested that the commonly held views about student demographics may no longer be accurate. In her study of Canadian university students she found a growing trend toward younger full time students engaged in distance education. Wallace's results indicated that the age of independent study students had decreased markedly over a ten-year period, and the number of them studying full-time rather than part-time had increased.

This suggests a need to examine further the assumption that distance learners are adult students as most of the literature implies, and raises questions related to the appropriateness of applying adult education concepts to distance education without verifying the appropriateness of this approach. For the nursing programs in this study, the trend toward younger students was shown to have many implications, particularly in terms of how clinical experiences are organized.

CREATING FLEXIBILITY VERSUS STICKING TO THE RULES

It is not surprising, given the student demographics in nursing programs, that a flexible teaching-learning environment is required. On many occasions participants identified the necessity for flexible systems to accommodate the needs of students. This issue was often raised within the context of the pressure they experienced to abide by conventional institutional rules. Clearly this paradox added to administrative stress for those people trying to advise, teach and support students.

Lou, one of the individuals who described the complex lives of students, questioned, "How do you support those students through this program constantly being faced by institutional rules about the length of program, numbers of courses that you can withdraw from, and all that sort of thing?" She went on to elaborate:

> It's an issue within our school. I can hear it. I can feel it in the school. A real tendency to try and shut down the possibilities, so that we can gain some control over the situation--which, I know is necessary. But it tends to affect the distance students, I think not equitably. And it's hard to keep raising this issue, to say we need to make this rule for the on-campus continuing students, and we need to leave this rule flexible for the distance education students.

Lou was worried both about the students, and about the problems this issue posed for student advisors:

> And that's really a hard place for advisors to be in--to be able to distinguish between. So I think, for me, where I see us is in a very sort of specific situation right now. It's around some of those discretionary judgements that people in those positions [make]. Those are difficult decisions for them to make.

Then, discussing the implications for her as an instructor, knowing the needs of the students on one hand, and feeling the pressure to conform to traditional routines on the other, she observed:

> It is becoming increasingly difficult from a faculty perspective to justify why I am giving these extensions. There's this push back against saying "You can't give that many extensions, you can't give that sort of space to these people--these people have got to finish these courses."
>
> And its kind of hard for me to understand as an individual instructor, because it's like, I know I have these five students outstanding. I know I have to assess their work as it comes in--in January, February, March, maybe. I need to work that into my workload and trust me I can do that! So quit hassling me! But I can just feel this constant push--like, it's not a good thing to be carrying these students.

For Bev, the need to allow students more flexibility was cited as a significant challenge for new faculty members--especially for faculty who came from more traditional settings. For example, she noted,

> One of the most difficult things for traditional educators, from what I've seen, is that they are so accustomed to deadlines that never change, and those types of things. And so, when they start to deal with distance learning, they have a lot of trouble with that. Some people just aren't designed for it, and it's quite obvious right off the bat. And they usually drop out after the first time.

Elaborating further, Bev observed that people who are more experienced with distance education and know the issues, handle deadlines differently:

> People are more flexible with distance students. The print material identifies exactly when the assignments are due and most profs--tutors--that are dealing with distance are really good about letting students know that that's their expectation. But they are really prepared to consider individual differences.

Ila, who taught both on-campus and distance courses, considered the differences, and maintained that there was little difference between teaching in the two modes. However, she went on to further qualify her view saying, "The mechanisms in terms of flexibility are different." Consequently, Ila admitted,

> Certainly in some of the courses that I've done, yeah, I've had to be flexible, and maybe I've bounced the lines a bit. But I take full responsibility for that, and I feel comfortable with it. And as a tutor, I think it's my responsibility to make sure that they are getting out of the course what I believe is necessary for them to get, in the same fashion as they would get off-campus as on-campus.

In addition, this tutor emphasized the need for flexibility to enable faculty to treat students as individuals. She observed, "....You know the rules and regulations are there for guidelines, I think. I don't think always they are carved in stone. And I mean, there has to be flexibility and some merit given to individual cases." The

notion that rules could be broken, or at least bent, was echoed by other participants. For instance, Nicole stated, "The way I see our program here, is that we've got rules. And I would say the rules are carried out about 15% of the time." Melanie too, expressed the need to extend the rules. She expected flexibility on both the part of both the learner and the teacher when it came to meeting deadlines for marking assignments and exams. In her experience,

> Although you have that rule, there is flexibility on both sides. Because, if it doesn't get in to you on the date, and you have to accept it--it's late, and therefore, it's late getting back to them.....Unlike campus, we don't have the marks in on the same date we have the campus marks in. It's just different. But that's more or less accepted now. You just get an incomplete until you get it in. So there's more flexibility than on-campus.

The participants in my study shared a common view on this need for more flexibility and even with constraints imposed by their traditional settings, they were attempting to increase the versatility afforded to their students. For instance, in one program where enrolments had dropped, students had provided feedback that they were taking courses elsewhere because the program offered at that university was too rigid. Kelly outlined how at that university they responded to this feedback by becoming "even more flexible than we were previously," in an attempt to increase enrolments.

Flexibility is an attractive feature for students who choose distance education as evinced in another program where enrolments were high [even though students had other distance education options]. Indeed, in discussing their high enrolment numbers, Nicole maintained, "Students are coming because we are flexible." Participants indicted that post-RN students require flexibility not only in completion

times, but also in course sequencing and the ability to transfer back and forth between on-campus and distance courses. Bev, Lou and Rita all identified this as an advantage that their programs offered to students.

Lou, who was worried that their distance education offerings might get cut back if budget problems persisted, reflected on the importance of this flexibility, not only for their students, but for their school as well:

> In tough economic times I don't think we are on the map. I think there are many other pressing issues that come way before distance education. And that's a little worrisome, I think, to people. Because in so many ways, it's where we get our flexibility in our program, because with the post-RNs you can slip out of distance and on-campus. If we lose that, I think we will lose a large portion of our population. So, it's really important for the survival of our school that we can maintain that-- that we can work within that flexibility.

As it important as it was, this type of flexibility caused some administrative concerns related to accounting for students, as Bev identified:

> It's so difficult for us to have numbers on distance education, because so many of our students mix and match distance with on-campus. Now it's becoming increasingly popular for everybody to do--not just summer--but to do a mix-and-match throughout the year.

Similarly, Rita who supported the notion of a "seamless" system where students could easily transfer back and forth between campus and distance offerings, recognized the inherent problems in doing so. For example, she indicated that since distance education was funded at least partially on a cost-recovery basis, whereas the campus-based program was not, there were budget implications attached to such flexibility. She also identified the lack of space to accommodate students as a major problem, as well as student eligibility for financial assistance, which is tied to Revenue Canada guidelines.

Paul (1998) spoke of the growing number of younger students who are combining classroom study with distance education to attain maximum flexibility in scheduling. However, Pacey and Penney (1995) addressed the issue of educational institutions wanting to provide distance education opportunities, but not changing their systems to accommodate distance students' needs. These authors maintained:

> In the production or industrial model of education, the learner is viewed as the product and is therefore adapted to fit curricular goals and outcomes. The practices remain entrenched in conventional institutions and the production model persists in our educational system. Thus students are forced to fit the system, rather than the system adapting to fit the learner. Interestingly, distance educators have fallen into the same trap because of their need to conform with traditional practices in order to be credible. (p. 43)

The participants in this study experienced first hand the lack of flexibility and the pressure to conform to traditional practices. They concluded what Kearsley (1996) has professed: "For distance education to work properly, we need more flexibility in learning schedules so that students can take as much (or as little) time as they need for a given activity or course" (p. 58). In addition, participants promoted the need for flexibility in terms of switching back and forth between campus-based and distance courses. They expressed concern over institutional pressures to stick to conventional rules and policies governing traditional university programs, and identified barriers to developing a seamless, flexible system for students in dual-mode institutions.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

> Neither is one person or one people better than the rest of humanity. The same principle is everywhere. One person is as worthy as the next. Why play favorites?
>
> (Heider, J., 1985, p. 9)

For students to participate effectively in distance education activities there is a need to have infrastructures and supports in place to facilitate their entry into and progress through programs offered by distance education. Participants in all of the institutions identified various support services required for distance education students. Terri included in these services: "A system for making exam arrangements, paying tutors, providing advisory services, and providing a location where students could pick up course packages and discuss what courses to take and what we will be providing next." Most individuals commented on the need for improvements in student services.

For example, when discussing administrative issues, Maggie identified one of the main changes they would like to see in their institution: "More of--better--whatever student support issues you can bring up. We would like to be able to deliver high quality products to students and to be able to support them as much as possible." Most participants focussed mainly on the extent to which they perceived they were able to provide adequate support in terms of library services and student counseling and advising services. The issues they raised with respect to their provision of these services for distance education students are described in this chapter.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Many issues emerged in relation to library services and many dilemmas to be resolved were identified in this regard. Questions surfaced related to the ability to provide distance students with opportunities similar to campus-based students, the dilemma of providing too little or too much service, and of providing different services for urban versus rural students. Melanie described her concerns regarding student services, saying:

> A big issue for me is how do we compensate for some of the things the students don't get that you have when you are on campus and part of the university experience? What is it that is missing? How do we try and compensate for that? You can't make them equivalent experiences, but what can you do? ...And one of them is the whole area of the library.
>
> They still don't have a good orientation to how to do a search. And it makes it more difficult for the library then to respond to their search request. We can get some of the students to come in to an orientation, but some can't come in. Even if they could, they don't see the value of it until they are starting to do a paper.
>
> So that whole area of support that a student on campus would get--library orientation, computer orientation, counselling services, just an orientation to the university community. If you are on-campus, you can go to public lectures we are having and all these other things they miss out on. And can you compensate for that?

Most participants maintained that the library services were as good or better for the students in the distance delivered courses than what was provided for the on-campus students. Indeed, Bev refuted what she believed is a faulty perception that distance education is somehow inferior because students do not have access to adequate library resources: "The whole notion about library resources doesn't hold any water anymore, because everything is available to everybody all over the

province. So we are okay with that." She described their library services in a positive light:

> Library services have been excellent. It is under the umbrella of Continuing Studies. So we have a budget for the library, and when all of the budgets nowadays are being slashed, theirs are not. So we are keeping money for that. Mainly because they make up such a mega component of our program. So they work very closely with us and they are very good.
>
> All the students, regardless if they live across the province or four blocks away from the university can phone the library and have them do all that work (the library work) for them. They are excellent. They do a wonderful job for our students.

Melissa too, believed they had an excellent library support system dedicated to distance students in their university. She noted:

> They have very good service. For all of our courses they have any article that is optional that the instructor wants them to have. They can get that sent to them free, although now there is talk about a charge. And they can have searches done for them. They can borrow books and there is a librarian dedicated to distance students.

Accordingly, Terri observed, "The library provides a terrific service for our students. They are going on-line increasingly, they provide full-text access increasingly for students on-line." Similarly, Jane maintained that student support services in their university are "Wonderful! Wonderful! Particularly the library! When we went distance, truly the students that were distance got wonderful service, I think [with] the turn-around-time for getting articles out to students, and the phone line." However, she indicated that the expectations of the students were somewhat unrealistic:

> I mean the service they were getting was more supportive than the service on-campus in some ways. Because the students here, yes, they can access us, but they have to walk around and find the articles.

> Whereas, the distance students get them sent out. So you don't have to walk, it just arrives. And you don't know how long it's taken someone to search that out for you, it just comes. Whereas, the students on campus had to walk and find that the article wasn't there, and where was that journal? It could be anywhere in the library.

Joanne also indicated that their library services were of high quality; perhaps better than for students on campus. Indeed, she was worried that the library was providing almost too much, or the wrong kind of service to students:

> The library is really quite good. They [students] can log both into the book collection and journals by modem if they have the capability to do that. They can call (whenever the 1-800 number is not being used by the professors, it is on the library) and they can call and place a request and material will be sent to them.
>
> And in fact--and we stopped this, but not only was the library doing searches for them and sending out searches, they were also choosing the ten best articles and sending them out, too. And so, they asked if they could stop doing this. And I was horrified to find out they were doing it at all! And [I] said, "Yes, they need to get the abstracts and figures out for themselves, find what they want, and then request it."
>
> Now this means they have to be organized, because they do courier the stuff. It is an expensive service. But the student gets it, makes a decision, calls in, tells them what they want. They do charge them for the photocopying, but they do the photocopying for them and send it out. So in fact, the distance students get better service than the face-to face students do.

Some participants, such as Lillian, identified the need for equity, in addition to the need to provide opportunities for distance students to learn how to use library services:

> One of the difficulties is the expectations, and the requirements. Because obviously for the people who are in the city, the expectation was that they would come into the library and they would work with the indexes. And they then had access to the reference staff, who were able to guide and assist them.

> Whereas, for those who did not [come in], they were very much on their own. And, although they were welcome to contact us, if you can't have that one-on-one working with an individual, it is very complicated.

In an attempt to deal with this equity issue, Lillian had developed a worksheet to help guide students through search strategies. She noted,

> And the understanding then, was that every student really should at least complete the worksheet in terms of, "This is the topic, I divided it down into these issues or aspects, there are some key words, this is the time frame, etc., etc." Trying to guide them how to structure their search strategy. Because the feeling was that we were expecting them to show some sort of analysis and thinking across the board.
>
> It didn't quite work out that way....They are still lacking the ability to analyze a topic and put it into terms that one could even create a computer search. There was still a lot of interpretation being done by the librarian before they performed the search, and assistance in terms of identifying within the result of citations--identifying those. Because the question would come in, you know, "Do the search and pick out a few articles for me, and send them along."
>
> All of that was exacerbated by time constraints because everything, the mail, the phone, it all takes time. And they are trying to work within a fairly restricted number of weeks. So I guess my greatest concern at the moment, is how to teach library skills, and not only library skills, but research skills.

Similarly, Helen identified the issue of students not learning library and research skills as one area that she would certainly be concerned about. One of the ways they were trying to address the issue in her university was to provide more on-line instruction: "Essentially what we need to do is to help people help themselves, and the best way we can do that, I think for the distance education students is on-line." She outlined the services provided to students to help orient them to the library system. Students were sent a handbook with an overview of all the services on campus, including the library, a handout describing all of the on-line databases that

were available, and encouragement to contact library staff for more information on particular databases.

However, Helen believed more was needed than simply providing information to students:

> There's an incredible amount to be done, in terms of making information accessible to distance education students. You know it's one thing to just slap a database up there. It's quite another for students to actually be able to sensibly and usefully access that database. And that's where I see one of our big areas in terms of a library contribution. And the other one is, we are starting a project to look at electronic reserves and to see what we can do for students.
>
> And the other thing we've done as well--we've just put it up--actually today, we put up a set of web pages of all our services. And again, that is the first time that's been accessible in that kind of format. But I think one needs to get to these students in all sorts of different ways. Whether it is on-line or in print, you have to make the same point over and over again, because people only pick up on them at the point where it's important to them.

Concordantly, Mary, who had been involved in distance education as an administrator and teacher for many years, contended:

> The library, I think, in distance education this is an area of major concern. And if not, it should be! We were very fortunate in that--having library support at the lower end--people who were actually hands on with students--we were very fortunate that they were involved. We got books out to the students. We had a travelling library for each course. We went out to the sites to deliver extra books to them. And later, when the project went on in its development, we had our distance education hotline to the library where they could call in, and there was a distance education librarian available for them.
>
> This was really--we were the only ones who were getting this type of service. There were other students who found out in other faculties, other schools, who were envious of this, because it was a wonderful opportunity. So if you lived in [a small town] and you were doing a term paper on an ethics issue, you could call in and talk to the distance education librarian, and she would pull up so many articles for you that

> you'd get that information. Then you would have to come in or get someone to make copies for you. So it was very one-on-one.

Sandy, a student who had taken her courses by distance education, expressed appreciation about having access to library services without travelling to the campus:

> Library services were great, because you don't have to actually go there and do your hours of research. I can use the Internet....I had to pay to do my own online searches, which is fine. I don't mind that. And then I could request whatever article I wanted from the library, and they actually would mail them to me (or the book). So I would say, off campus, library services were way, way better because for me to have to drive in there, and then pay to do the research, and that's really hard.

Lillian distinguished between services provided to students such as Sandy, who were located outside of the city and those who lived in the city. She observed that inequitable service was problematic for students:

> We have traditionally distinguished between distance students located within the [the city] and those without. Our feeling was that we provided sufficient access for those people within bus commuting distance, although that has obviously created some concerns among the students.
>
> But we were really concerned about access for people outside of the area. There are not a lot of really good library sources; outside of here and [one other city] library resources are minimal. So that started out fairly smoothly.
>
> We also offer one free computer search a month for each student. That originally grew out of more of--in terms of students wanting to get some supplementary information. And in part again, just because of limitations in computer remote access that some students were experiencing.

Gail was also troubled by the differences in services provided to students, compounded by the fact that some of them may not have the opportunity to learn library skills:

> Now in the extension library, they have made a rule that its only people who are geographically out of town, so somebody who is in town will learn how to use the library and how to do the Medline searches and that kind of stuff. And I don't know how to get around the student who really, truly, does not have access to library resources close by. They do finish the program, probably--no, not probably--yes they do without, you know--library skills that other people do have.

Diane also observed that the inconsistency in what was offered to urban students versus rural students was problematic. Like Gail, she was concerned both in terms of inequitable service, and in terms of what is lost when students don't learn to conduct their own library searches:

> Students outside the city can contact the main library free of charge, have a lit search done, and have the articles sent out free of charge. But that library has to contact the med. school library, so you know in the course of time, the delay, and probably the loss--or, if the message ever got through.... Whereas, students from [the city] can enter this library and access the resources, no problem. So right away, you have a disadvantage.
>
> If students who live outside the town call in here, they have to pay long distance charges--so you see the sorts of things? And then the students in the city are expected to do their own literature searches, which I think is a skill that needs to be developed. Students outside [the city]--the library personnel will do it and end up interpreting what are good and not good articles.
>
> So you see these are the kinds of inconsistencies. The supports are there. I think it's a question of them having to be coordinated a bit more.

Nicole found the inconsistencies in the way distance education students access and learn how to use library resources especially troublesome in her program, as students did not receive any standard types of course materials for the distance courses. This meant that some students could easily access required readings much

more quickly and easily than others, leaving some students disadvantaged. She offered this suggestion to help overcome some of the inequity:

> This distance stuff! I want them to have their whole package. It's so hard for some of these people to get stuff to do library research. They are not going to learn this! They are going to be dependent on the library. And the library is good that way.
>
> But they are not going to learn research skills, realistically. I'd rather give it to them, and then make use of them learning how to do a lit review within what I've done. You know, just critique the article. I want you to do a proper lit review, getting ready for publication. Because at least a half a dozen people in that class should be publishing when they finish, at least, if not more--because of the quality of the end product.

Lillian struggled with the type and amount of library services that ought to be provided to distance students. She questioned, as others had, whether providing too much service could have negative long-term consequences for students. Lillian expressed concerns about trying to balance the need for students to learn library skills on one hand, and the desire to provide them with the service they required on the other. In addition, she raised issues related to the integration of computers, and whether students might actually be hindered by their lack of understanding of how to use them correctly. Lillian made these compelling observations:

> Ideally from my point of view I would like my role to be two-fold: Teaching and educating them on how to do it themselves, but also doing it for them. And the difficulty is of course, that we don't really have the resources to do both. And are we really doing them service by doing it all for them? Certainly not in terms of long-term life education, and that sort of thing.
>
> Realizing at the same time, often they are struggling with holding down a job, often they have a family, and they're trying to take these courses at the same time. And I have a lot of sympathy. And I think that the understanding has to be there that just asking them to learn one more set of skills--and these days it's not just print, it's using the computer.

> And that's one other whole avenue/direction of knowledge and understanding.

Lillian also commented on the use of computers and how they might actually hinder, rather than help students learn library skills.

> And one of the difficulties I think Librarians face, is that computers tend to make it look too easy. I can't tell you the number of times we see students sit down at the keyboard and they type in their topic, you know, "Ways to prevent falls in the elderly." That is their search strategy! And they find stuff, because the computer will do--it will parse it down. They won't understand this, but the system will do some processing and it will come up with stuff. And often it is right on topic, because it has got exactly their words there. But they've missed probably 80% of what's available to them.
>
> At least if they type in a topic and they get zero they will come and ask. What worries me are those people who think they understand it and know how to do it, and they just go through their career doing that. And so, in a way that has made our job more difficult, because of that impression, as I mentioned.
>
> That, and of course, anybody who has watched the latest Star Trek program would have, with the computer, think it is much smarter than it really is. And [they] don't understand that they still have do an analysis in their own head, and use their language skills to interpret that, and put it into something that will get them good results.

Despite the view that library services for distance students were generally of high quality, there was a sense that library services for distance education were somewhat marginalized in terms of funding and resources. The issue of marginalization was broached by Helen, who commented on library resources for distance education in her institution:

> When I started here, it was clear that this was, you know, a little mail order outfit in the back room--that you did extremely useful work, but it was a backroom operation. And I think in practice, it still is that.

Nevertheless, she expressed optimism that this perception and the role of distance education in the university would change in the near future:

> There are certainly areas on campus where the perception is that distance education is the way of the future, and that's what people will want. And if we are going to survive as a university, that's the area we have to get into.
>
> There is a realization within the library, as there is within the university, that there's going to be more and more distance education based students and courses, and therefore, a need for library support. I've started various planning initiatives within the library to get distance education higher up on the agenda. And you know, things will happen in that area.

In summary, notwithstanding her perception that library services for distance students remains marginalized within the larger university system, participants expressed appreciation for the library services provided for distance education students in their facilities. Nevertheless, serious issues were raised with regard to inequities between urban and rural students, and in relation to students who may not learn the required library and research skills. At most universities there was an expectation that students will learn these essential skills. However, in this study it appeared to be common practice for librarians to conduct searches for distance students in the spirit of helping them deal with the distance factor.

Others such as Goodson (1996) have reported similar practices by librarians in their institutions, promoting the notion of librarians conducting library searches for students. As this author proudly announced, "Off-campus students simply have to send in their requests--Campus Services will do the rest..... If time is short, we will even choose what seems to be the most useful items from the search ourselves" (p. 2)

It is little wonder that Goodson (1996) receives "effusive and unsolicited expressions of gratitude" (p. 5) from the distance students.

Conversely, Ruess and West (1995) emphasized the need for distance education students to acquire literacy skills in preparation for life long learning. These authors described an initiative introduced throughout Alaska where distance education students were taught library and literacy skills by audio-conferenced classes with positive results. They suggested that strategies such as theirs could be useful remedies for the lack of opportunities many distance students have to acquire these important skills. Similarly, Oladokun (1998) discussed inadequate library services as one cause of failure and high dropouts rates in distance education and called for collaboration among libraries in order that services can be shared and the quality of learner support can be enhanced.

COUNSELING AND ADVISING

Student access to counseling and advising services varied among the institutions. Some sites had a straightforward system for student advising; others were more fragmented. One site originally had a comprehensive program, which later was dismantled. Mary outlined the components of that program which she believed was a valuable support for students:

> We had a project through Counseling Services. We had a program where we offered a course "Making the Transition" and that was done by teleconferencing. It was optional. Students didn't have to do it. We thought it was good....It lasted all year at various intervals, where students were making the transition from being a practicing nurse into the role of student. And then help them at the end, from student out, kind of an exiting thing. So that type of counseling was available. ...And I know they made use of counseling services.

She went on to point out that distance education students later had access to all general counseling services by virtue of being university students, and "advising, as far as curriculum or courses," was done by faculty. At the time of this study, the secretary to the associate dean, as well as an administrator of the undergraduate programs both assisted with student advising. As Kelly explained it, while the bulk of student inquiries was handled by these individuals, "When there's an issue that requires an associate dean's decision, then that's when I see the students."

Student advising in Joanne's school was mainly the responsibility of an academic administrator and three additional academic advisors. These individuals maintained student files, kept track of what courses could be transferred, and arranged for letters of permission for students. When site visits were made, one of the advisors accompanied the coordinator of the distance education program to answer questions students might have about their files, and to advise them about course selection. Joanne described the process of student advising, highlighting some of the issues:

> Every student has a list of [what is in] the program and what's necessary, and as they come in (I mean, I can't believe this isn't computerized), but, as the marks come in they indicate on this what people have, so they can tell. We don't have a degree audit on the computer system. They keep promising this but we don't have it. So, essentially they keep a degree audit by hand themselves. So if the student calls up and says, "What do I need?" they can pull the file and say, "You need two Nursing electives and two Humanities, and we've given you credit for your Developmental Psychology" and that sort of thing.

One student advisor, Rosanne, spoke of the post-RN students' needs for support, and the increasing difficulty meeting their needs in their institution: "Post-RN students need a lot of help getting registered for courses. When it comes to applying

for admission, they require a lot of help getting their stuff together, their documents. And they need a lot more support." She went on to observe how their program had grown, and commented on the implications of that growth on the extent to which they could provide adequate service:

> When I first started here in the post-RN program, we had maybe less than 100 students. And you could meet then, on an individual basis with each student periodically, at least once a year. That reassured them tremendously. Now we just don't have time for that. Now post-RN students have to be just as autonomous in registering as other students.
>
> ...Another thing that really requires a lot of time with post-RNs is assessing the courses that they have completed prior to admission. And they are not always university courses. They are hospital courses, [or] they may have been taken through community colleges. And that requires an awful lot of time. What also takes an awful lot of time is assessing the courses they want to take in other institutions for credit in our program.

Explaining that the number of students in their programs had increased to three times what they were a few years previously, with basically the same staff, Rosanne lamented, "We just cannot provide the same services as before." Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, she reflected:

> Just as it can be frustrating, the greatest rewards come from the post-RN students. Because when they get to the end of their program, they are the most appreciative of what you have done. Even though sometimes it's been hard, they are the most appreciative of the work you've done for them, or the help you've been able to provide to them. You know, making course selections and advising them how they can get another course out of the way by getting a letter of permission. And students in other programs will not, or very seldom take the time to come and say "Thank You!" when they graduate. But the post-RN students do.

From Nicole's perspective, the system for advising and counseling was not adequate in their program. Like Rosanne, she attributed the problem that "there is not

really good academic counseling" to the large number of students and too few staff. She explained, "They do all of the counseling for all of Health Sciences--all the different schools and all of the different programs....So that's a tremendous limitation in terms of being able to work intimately with post-RNs here." Furthermore, Nicole expressed frustration with respect to role confusion, because along with the administrative staff who counseled and advised students, she also participated in counseling. Therefore, she noted that she was sometimes "not totally clear" about their respective responsibilities. "And that's the problem," She explained, "Because of the jurisdiction.... We just try and do the best we can."

In another institution, Alice, who experienced the same frustrations as Nicole, was convinced that student advising ought to be carried out by one or two individuals to avoid confusion:

> I really feel that advising, as a role in each school is incredibly important. What I find is, if its only one of you or two of you--it can be two--but at least you are there to do advising, you learn everything yourself. You know the information that you've been giving out. You know if you give out something wrong you can contact the student and say, "Hey listen, I told you this, but it's this." You are kind of in control of making sure that every student knows exactly the same thing. And you are consistent with everyone.
>
> When it comes to faculty they're going everywhere. And what students will do, they will go to each person until they get what they want to hear. And they'll go to all of you right?

In Melanie's program, advising is shared among academic advisors, admission officers and faculty members. In addition, she noted, "Advising for real problems, aside from the routine, is done by the associate director for the undergraduate

programs." One advisor in this program shared her views of the challenges associated with advising post-RNs:

> With the post-RN program, I advise students on the requirements to get into the program, and help them start on their way getting into it. And once they are in the program, I help them through the program as we make changes, and that kind of thing. And if they decide--with the post-RN program, it's a little tricky because they tend to be full-time, part-time; full-time, part-time. And they are all over the place, and we tend to make several changes as they go along as well, with the curriculum. So, as we make changes, I make sure they know of the changes, and help them planning their program and getting through as quickly as possible.

In most programs, advising was done by telephone or by e-mail, but according to participants, whenever possible students would make a point of attending the campus to meet with advisors in person. As Alice indicated, "They want to look at their files. They want to see exactly where they sit. Are they on the right track? That sort of thing." Like Rosanne, Alice believed that post-RNs, though challenging, were the most rewarding as far as student advising was concerned.

Alice recounted a story of a previous post-RN student, who graduated and later entered the Master's program. This story exemplifies both the challenges and rewards she experienced:

> I always get cards after, because they give you a hard time when they first come in! And after, they are apologetic all the way through. After they graduate, you get a little card saying "Thanks you for all your patience," and that sort of stuff.
>
> [One student] said to me, "Do you remember the first time I walked into your office? And I said, "Oh Yeah, I remember it!" And she said, "Gosh, I wasn't very nice, was I?" And I said, "You actually left your coat!" And she said, "You remember that?" And I said, "Yeah, I remember it!"

Alice rendered a picture of post-RNs as working professionals--"managers of hospitals and wards," and "supervisors with big jobs," who were trying to adjust to the role of student, and "being treated like everybody else." She maintained that an important requirement in her advising role was the ability to understand the students:

> You have to look at them--be sympathetic to them, be objective, always objective. Not to take anything personally--nothing! The main thing is to say, "They are mad at the system, they're mad because they have to do this, they are not mad at you."

In her advising role, Alice also expressed a yearning to have the power to influence change, saying,

> Probably the biggest barrier is being the source of information, but not the person who sets the rules. And that can be a little stressful....It's not astronomically frustrating, but when you are working with a program and you are working with students constantly, and you are dying to be able to change certain things, but you realize you are not the person to do that.
>
> And also you tend to be an advocate for students. For sure, you have to be! And most times, I can see their points of view. So, you tend to be labeled as pampering the students on occasion. But that's okay.

Whereas some universities provided substantial support to distance students, Ava was not pleased with the limited support provided to these students in her university. She noted that the coordinator of the distance education program provided the only support available to the post-RN students, carrying out the counseling and advising services for students, with part time assistance from one faculty member and a half-time secretary. Ava commented, "The distance students do not receive any specialized services, the only other support services distance education students have is "access to the electrophonic library and all that sort of stuff."

From a student's perspective on student support services, it was not only the quality or quantity of services available, but the lack of knowledge that they even existed. Without this knowledge, these services were not accessible for use; hence this reply when I asked this student, Sandy, if she made use of the student services available in her university:

> I guess you would have. I never had the opportunity to use them. And I guess there's a lot of the things you miss by not being on campus. Like the sorts of things that people who go to university all the time sort of take for granted. Like that you have to apply to get your degree after you finish and all those little things. You don't really know any of that stuff. And like before, when I did four courses and then I didn't have time to do them--well, I didn't know that it mattered that you actually have to withdraw! Yeah and no one ever said that.
>
> And whereas, people who are on campus, people would go--"Well why didn't you withdraw from the course?" Well, I didn't have any time because sometimes that's how it goes when you're working. But had you known that it actually mattered you would have dumped it. So I didn't find that out.

In summary, participants identified several issues related to the provision of support services to distance education students, particularly in relation to library services, and counseling and advising services. Counseling and advising issues included the intricacies of dealing with post-RN students with their unique situations and demands; the frustrations associated with trying to provide quality services to students with limited resources to do so; dealing with role confusion when more than one or two individuals were involved in these activities; and the need for students to be aware of what support services exist.

Although most participants expressed positive views about the library services provided, there were issues raised with respect to students' interactions with the library. Inequities between rural and urban students in terms of the amount and type

of services provided, and the extent to which students are disadvantaged by the reliance on librarian staff to conduct searches were raised as issues.

Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) maintained,

> The area of student support services is central to the success of any distance learning program. Often overlooked, student service policy issues directly impact prospective and current distance learning students. In particular, institutions need to develop distance learning policies on student advisement, counseling, the library, marketing, materials delivery, textbooks, training and proctoring. (p. 5)

From this study it appears that such policies ought to address issues of inequities between on-campus and distance students, and among distance students, such as the difference in services provided to those who live close enough to the university campuses and those who are remote. As Taylor (1997) suggested:

> We may have to acknowledge that the quality of educational support provided to an elite cannot be provided to the masses but....the challenge for us as educators is to ensure that efforts to increase participation and success are matched by efforts to develop practices which help *all* learn what has traditionally been learnt by only an elite. (p. 130)

Chapter 6

FINDINGS: FACULTY PARTICIPATION

> In flying, you get your freedom only when you obey the laws of the sky. If you don't feel like obeying them, you are chained to the ground for the rest of your life. And that, for airplane pilots, is what we call 'hell'.
>
> (Richard Bach, 1975, p. 297)

There were many issues raised in this study in relation to faculty participation in distance education offerings. These issues are significant because as Olcott and Wright (1995) suggested, distance education's most important resource is faculty, as faculty members are responsible for instructional quality and control, the improvement of learning and the effectiveness of distance education. These authors also suggested the need to recognize the work in distance education and to ensure adequate training and compensation for faculty who participate in distance activities.

Yet, participants in this study voiced concerns about these aspects in relation to the integration of faculty into distance education in their institutions. In particular, many issues emerged related to the availability of instructors who were willing and able to teach the distance courses. Contributing to this problem were issues related to attitude, workload, orientation and training and the reward system in distance education.

FACULTY ATTITUDE

Some administrators indicated that one of the most difficult issues they faced was attracting faculty members who were interested in teaching by distance education. While most reported that the situation was improving, there were still many faculty members who did not care to teach classes any way other than by face-to-face. Even

in situations where they taught face-to-face at one site and audio-teleconferenced to remote sites, there was faculty resistance. Joanne identified some reasons for this:

> It has not the greatest reputation in the world. And there are people who go around saying "Oh, teaching by teleconference--that's awful! I don't want to do that!" But on the whole, the expectation is, if you are teaching this course, you are teaching it by teleconference.
>
> I think it is the frustration of equipment. I think it's the waste of time at the beginning of class trying to get people on. It's the anonymity of the students that you are teaching. It's that lack of contact and rapport. It's all those things that are problematic. I don't think there's a fundamental belief that students aren't learning.

Ann believed faculty attitude toward distance education was at the root of the problem. She described the situation in these terms:

> There are no lukewarm people in distance education. Either you love it or you hate it. There are some teachers who just simply would not touch it with a disinfected barge pole! And there are others who have been teaching this way for 13 –14 years. Some of the teachers saw it--well the distance education, of course there was a barrier--and that is because it is two-way interactive audio-conferencing. The students cannot see you and you cannot see the students.

Ann went on the explain that student behavior often negatively affected the teacher's perception of teaching using audio-teleconferencing:

> Some of the students tell us for example, that in some of the classes, some of the students get up and either leave, or carry on conversations. And the teacher has no way to monitor that--other than to just more or less hope that doesn't happen.
>
> Also, it's the luxury that the distance education students have of anonymity so that they can make a fairly snarky comment (if you will excuse the unprofessionalism of that term)--to the teacher, and get away literally with bloody murder, because the teacher has no idea of who is talking.
>
> You may know it's a certain centre but she's really not sure unless they identify themselves. Now of course, the teacher has the remedies. You

> can say, "I simply will not respond to a question unless you identify yourself and the centre where you are." It's simply etiquette.
>
> But the distance students sometimes fancy themselves more or less second class citizens. And we strive--we turn ourselves over and upside down to eliminate the possibility of giving that impression. But, nonetheless some of the students do feel--particularly if something goes wrong with the electronic equipment--they feel more or less at the mercy of the technology. So that can sometimes create tension.

Filipczak (1997) raised a similar concern about etiquette issues when using audio-teleconferencing in distance education. He noted that instructors often encounter problems with students at remote sites talking among themselves in a way they wouldn't if the presenter were actually in the room. Like Ann, he suggested that the instructor's role in these situations is to bring the students back into focus. However, participants in this study indicated that student behavior at remote sites is not always easy to gauge or to control.

Likewise, Willis (1993) maintained that unlike teaching in a classroom, it is more difficult when teaching by distance education as there are few, if any, visual cues for the distance teacher to analyze and respond to. The cues that do exist are usually filtered through some technological device. He went on to note:

> It is difficult to carry on a stimulating teacher-class discussion when spontaneity is altered by technological requirements and distance....The teacher might never really know, for example, if students are asleep, talking among themselves, or even in the room. Separation by distance affects the general rapport of the class. Living in different communities, geographic regions, or even states deprives the teacher and students of a common community link. (p. 1)

Tiffin and Rajasingham (1995) also observed that in a conventional classroom the teacher is aware when groups of students are carrying on parallel conversations. However, in teleconferenced classes,

> The teacher can be totally unaware that students have shifted fractal levels and are carrying on their own conversations. It is a startling experience...to drop in... and find that people are making cups of tea and conducting running critiques of any speaker they find dull, uninteresting or irrelevant. (p. 122)

Whereas in one institution distance classes were taught solely by weekly audio-teleconferenced sessions, most programs used audio-teleconferencing infrequently. In the latter programs, participants reported problems with the equipment, but this was not considered a major issue as far as hiring faculty was concerned. However, there were other issues identified in relation to hiring instructors to teach the distance courses at these sites. Participants who were involved from the beginning stages of the development of their distance programs reflected on the attitude of "regular faculty" toward distance education in general.

For example, Mary explained that in their program there were no new people hired specifically to teach distance education courses. Rather, they were drawn from the regular faculty and not all of them reacted positively to teaching by distance. She recalled,

> There were people who said, "I am never going to do that. I am never going to teach in distance education. I don't believe in that, and I won't do that." But they did. I guess when push comes to shove, if you were teaching in the post-diploma program and that's the only way it's being offered, you either get in on or get out.

Rita noted that in their institution faculty attitudes toward distance education had changed considerably: "A few years ago it used to be that very few faculty members did teaching in the distance program. They all wanted to teach on campus." Then laughing, she exclaimed, "But now it's almost a reversal! They really like

teaching in the distance courses and the distance program and it's hard getting on-campus, full-time continuing faculty."

Similarly, in their school Melanie observed that an increasingly large number of faculty were teaching distance courses. "Anybody I've approached about it has been interested in doing it. And nobody, from any feedback I've had, has said, "I will never do that again." There are some who say, "I really like to be in a classroom with students. I much refer that.' But most of them are quite willing to do it." She went on to reflect further on faculty members' perceptions toward distance education saying:

> It's interesting. Because you will have faculty who first arrive and say, "Oh, I will never teach distance. I would miss the classroom... Never will I teach distance." And now that's their favorite way of teaching. Because they are so much freer in their own time. As long as they fulfill the requirements and they are there for office hours. They don't have that clock that they have to commit to. I think if anything, it might be easier because you don't have those dynamics in the classroom.

However, in Ila's estimation, faculty members who had never taught distance education classes had a distorted perception of it:

> I think those who don't always teach in it think that it's easy and students are getting a break. And that maybe there's not the same rigor as there is in an on-campus course. Those who teach in the distance courses obviously disagree with that.

She proceeded to illustrate that the courses offered both on- and off-campus were identical. Students were evaluated according to the same criteria, therefore there was no difference in the two as far as academic rigor is concerned. In addition, they had opportunities to interact with the professor in both modes. In Ila's opinion, "It is the

environment that the instructor...fosters, to make it a comfortable environment for learning to occur so students feel comfortable to ask questions."

Shannon, a student who had taken courses both on- and off- campus also disputed the notion that distance education is easier:

> When you tell people you did your degree by distance, people think you actually got a far better education than on-campus. They think it is harder. Everybody knows that going on campus you are hand fed. Everybody knows that. They know that if you have to do it by distance, you are not going to have a chance to cheat.
>
> They think the ones who go on campus actually (like, the perception in the work force is that, "Oh, they had the money to go on campus, and also they get an easier degree)." Whereas, the ones who do it by distance, you did it that way because you had to work.

One participant Glenda, offered this opinion, implying that regardless of the mode of delivery, the quality of the educational experience is a reflection of the teacher:

> In a dual mode institution, you are very much reflecting the teaching practice on the campus--the same professors. And some professors are absolutely superb teachers on campus and off; some are mediocre on-campus and off, frankly. And some instructors are very slack on campus, in terms of supplying students with feedback, correcting exams, assignments and what not. And those same people will likely do the same thing off-campus.

Beaudoin (1990) referred to various studies on faculty attitudes toward distance education that revealed how faculty were either apathetic or hostile toward non-traditional programs. Even those who did support distance education had reservations about it. These same sentiments were echoed by administrators and faculty members in this study. For example, Joanne highlighted many extra activities

associated with distance education that contributed to faculty reluctance to get involved:

> You have to be more organized because you have to get your stuff out there. Now if it works, tele-education can be really quite good. If you get the stuff to them as much as--as late as--a day in advance, they will send the stuff out by courier to the sites and it is supposed to be put by a liaison person into the rooms for use by the site. So you have to have your act together so you can get the stuff to the people on time.
>
> One of the glitches in organizing all this is that we are on one campus and tele-education is on the other. We used to teach on our campus but then if something went wrong it was a disaster, because they were downtown and there was no sort of panic button. You were out there in the moonlight with no communication to anybody.
>
> And so they finally moved all the distance teaching down to the main campus. So at least you can go thundering across the hall and bang on the door and say, "Hey we just lost [a site]." And so we have to get our stuff from the Health Sciences campus down to the main campus in time for them to reproduce it if it needs to be reproduced and sent to the various sites.

Other participants agreed that when faculty attitudes toward teaching by distance were negative, it was often largely related to the time and effort involved with preparing for class, with the frustration of using the equipment, and difficulties trying to interact with students. The exceptions were in situations like Melanie's, where students received all their learning materials through the mail, and the instructors, who tended to be regular faculty members, needed only to have established office hours each week for students to call them or communicate by e-mail. The instructors were not expected to call students and were not required to offer teleconferences, although some instructors held optional teleconferences in their courses. In these situations, administrators reportedly did not have any difficulty recruiting instructors to teach the regular theory courses. However, as noted earlier, in the clinical courses where there

were smaller classes but greater responsibilities, it was more difficult to recruit instructors as the rewards faculty received did not compensate for the extra time and effort involved.

FACULTY WORKLOADS

Participants indicated that methods of defining workloads and compensating faculty members who developed distance courses were both problematic. Most faculty were expected to develop courses for distance delivery above and beyond their regular faculty workloads, which proved to be a contentious issue, as Kelly observed,

> There was an awful lot of work done by faculty, which was extra to the normal workload. But we weren't compensated. And I was one of those faculty members at that time, and I swore then that I would never do that again! I would never take that on. It was a huge project. I said I would never do that again unless I was released specifically to do that.

Jane noted as well that there was no money in their system to pay for faculty release time to develop courses:

> We've been able to get money for technical support but not for faculty release time. So any of our courses that we've done have been done on faculty extra workload....It is time consuming, so in order to do it properly, we need extra money. And to my knowledge there is no money to do that.

Mary reflected on the perception of faculty members toward distance education course development:

> Some thought it was very labor intensive. And it was! There's no doubt about that. Because faculty who were teaching distance were also teaching on campus. So there was a heavy burden and there was no extra money to pay for that. In talking to a course developer at [another institution] he's saying that its around $10,000 per course or plus, where we were way below that.

Melanie was in a more fortunate position. While the Nursing Faculty had control over who developed the courses, the funding for course development came from Continuing Studies. Melanie was responsible for hiring individuals to develop courses, and she made those hiring decisions in consultation with the undergraduate associate director and the distance education coordinator. She noted,

> Sometimes they are faculty members and sometimes they are people outside. Most often they are faculty members. There are two ways. They will normally do it for extra pay on a contract basis with Continuing Studies. If they are faculty members, there are collective agreement provisions about that. If they are not on faculty, it is still on a contract basis with Continuing Studies.

Melanie went on explain that if faculty members undertook course development, it was done in addition to their regular work and they were compensated with extra pay. However, if any particular person was the only one available, the course development work was made part of the regular workload and the school was reimbursed by Continuing Studies. Laughing, she commented, "The salaries are so lousy here that I don't have a problem having them do it for extra pay."

Linked to original course development was the issue of course revisions. Most schools had policies on how often courses ought to be revised after their original development--usually every three to five years. In one institution, if they wanted to make changes in the course within that time frame, permission of the original author was required. Diane remarked,

> It is a copyright issue. That is apparently sacrosanct. But it is a big issue. From my perspective, it is a big issue. So what we are doing now is we have come up with some strategy on how we can get copyright for the school versus the individual faculty member. That's how its been and it is very difficult to get around it because it's a union

> issue....We have encountered faculty members who have refused to let you change the course.

Another, more serious implication of academic freedom was raised by Maggie in relation to course development and revisions:

> Faculty members own copyright to the materials that they develop, so this makes it very difficult to develop a course with one faculty member. It makes it very difficult to put that level of support and production values into the course if one might want to do that. Because, hey, you are putting a large amount of investment into a course that somebody else owns, and materials that they own. And they can decide next year, "I'm going to take my ball and go home. I am not going to offer this course any more." And then you are stuck with this investment.

More commonly, it was understood that all course materials developed for distance education belong to the university. As Bev noted, "They [faculty members] sign a contract and the contract is very specific. And one of the things it says is, that any materials that are designed during the time of construction of the course belong to the university." She added that when faculty signed the original course development contract, it included being a tutor for one year, and revising the course as required. The addition of the revision clause was viewed as important to administrators, as often the universities received government funds to convert their campus-based courses into distance format; however, they then had no funds for ongoing course revisions.

Rita was "struggling with how we try and build it into people's workloads so that those revisions happen." She went on to explain that the need to revise courses was based not on an established schedule, but was undertaken according to feedback from students and instructors. "It's more of an ongoing thing, based on trial, testing, and feedback." Others relied on feedback from students and faculty members to

direct their course revisions as well. For example, in Bev's program, if students and/or faculty believed a course needed to be revised, the faculty member went through the course with a revision guide. "They identify on the guide whether or not they are talking about a moderate, or a small or a huge revision," she noted.

Lou recently compiled feedback from students that indicated the courses were "way, way too big--way, way, way too much work for students, given that they are 1½ and 3 unit courses. Just too much work for them to do." Based on that feedback, they were contemplating "paring them back to make them a bit more reasonable." In this instance, similar to Bev's situation, the first revisions of the courses were the responsibility of the faculty member who originally developed them. Lou described the process like this:

> The person who wrote the course received three units of release time, which is basically two course releases to write the course, and as part of the contract that we all signed to do that, we agreed to do the first major revision. So that's taken care of. It is kind of assumed I guess, that writing the course and the first revisions are part of the main contract.

However, she went on to discuss the difficulties fulfilling this obligation in terms of trying to find the time, saying, "Oh God! It's really hard! I think it's going to be exceptionally hard to keep people motivated to want to keep their courses up to date." Lou pointed out that some faculty members could be counted on to carry out their obligation, whereas others were less motivated to do so. Referring to a particular faculty member, she noted,

> She is very committed to the program, she is very committed to keeping herself up to date....But there are other faculty that just don't feel that way. And if they can't be given any kind of incentive, you know, I mean--we looked at financial incentives--I am highly suspect they'll do it. I just don't think people are motivated in those ways. I

> mean, I find it's hard work to revise a course. I just don't think $500.00 in your research account is really going to do it.

Sherry, who was recently involved in course revisions for their program commented on how much work it entailed.

> People were exhausted because we did it as part of our regular work instead of hiring people to do it. We got release time to do it. But still, it's exhausting work! But that's the problem. Release time is really only teaching release time, nothing else is released. All your committee work, all your research, and all the other things that are bombarding you! There's no release time from those. So it's pretty well exhausting for almost any of us because we all have had heavy research projects going on at the same time.

Having little or no other option but to hire individuals from the regular on-campus faculty group clearly posed administrative problems and led to workload issues. Bev described the dilemma she faced when her main option for hiring distance educators was to recruit from full time "regular" faculty. She outlined this process:

> You are paid extra. Which is a big issue. And the reason that happens in our school is that our outreach program is funded by an external pot of money, and that money has never been allowed to come into the school, and so in fact that's why it works that way.
>
> It works quite smoothly here but it could be an issue all the time. People have a little bit of hard feelings about that. And if I could change anything, that's the one thing I would change. And that's because I need faculty here to do that, and sometimes I tap the best faculty who can't say no and they are carrying a full time load. And so, I worry about that.
>
> Some faculty feel "nose out of joint" about that because they feel people are being paid, and they are not quite sure if it's always on their own time "quote", you know? That's an issue. We seem to have resolved that. People are better about that right now but it's always one of those volatile issues.

One faculty member, who had been active in the distance education offerings as far as teaching and course development, was in the process of revising a distance education course when I interviewed her. Ila described her workload as "bizarrely heavy!" She proceeded to identify the different activities she was involved with over one term. This included her regular campus-based work which involved running three lecture courses, doing course leading for a clinical course taking care of a number of clinical instructors, doing all the academic administrative stuff in terms of exams, dealing with clinical problems with the clinical instructors, doing most of the lectures, prep work, teaching clinical two days each week), and marking papers for 33 students. "In between," Ila added, she was teaching one distance education course and rewriting another one. Rewriting the distance education course meant: "Holding regular meetings with the group, and reworking, and photocopying, and library searches, and all that sort of stuff that goes along with rewriting." To complicate matters, she noted she had a much larger number of students than expected in the distance course, which meant extra marking, and she was also faced with a number of clinical problems. Not surprisingly, she exclaimed, "By Christmas time I was ready to shoot myself!"

Ila's experience is shared here to illustrate the difficulties faculty members have when they try to juggle their full time on-campus workloads while participating in distance education offerings. Clearly, developing and teaching distance courses entails a great deal of work. Indeed, Beaudoin (1990) and Moore (1995) have contended that distance teaching takes more time and is more intensive than face-to

face teaching. Similarly, Metcalf (1998) asserted that teaching by distance requires significantly more faculty time than conventional teaching. He stated:

> Courses offered by distance require extensive arrangements to ensure that students at remote sites have necessary books, assignments, and other course materials. The instructor has to make sure that all students have access to needed library and electronic resources. Visual materials need to be adapted to the distance environment. Instructors need to adapt their teaching and learning strategies to distance education. They need to try harder to actively involve students at the remote site(s) both during class sessions and in between classes so that they feel like full members of the group. Finally, instructors are often responsible for operating cameras and microphones whole teaching in order to maximize student participation. All these things require additional time and training, and must be dealt with by institutions or they will become barriers to effective distance education. (p. 125)

The situations described in this study where faculty members were mainly teaching distance education courses as an add-on to their regular work, are symptomatic of the way distance programs have been developed in dual mode universities. Because most programs have been developed as add-on's to the existing campus-based programs, faculty have become involved in distance teaching and course development as add-ons to their "regular" work. However, as will be seen below, this work is rarely counted as "real" work, nor is it considered part of their professorial workload. Either external part-time individuals are hired, or regular faculty members undertake distance education work in addition to their regular faculty activities.

ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

The issues related to faculty workloads indicate that teaching in distance education is substantially different from conventional teaching and this is reflected in faculty attitude. In addition, the literature suggests that faculty participation in

distance education is different in many ways from teaching in a conventional university. Olcott and Wright (1995) contended that distance education requires faculty to perform beyond the fundamental role of teacher, and instead are expected assume a considerably broader role and provide more instructional leadership as part of a course team. In their conceptual model "Institutional Faculty Support Framework" they placed faculty at the core of the educational process where they are involved in the instructional design process, student support services, student advising and evaluation of technologically-mediated instruction.

Yet despite the unique and different roles faculty play when they enter into the distance education terrain, there is often little or no orientation and training provided to help them learn and become accustomed to their new roles and responsibilities. According to participants in this study, most faculty were provided little or no orientation when they began their work in distance education in their institutions.

Indeed, at least one participant believed that distance education was not significantly different from traditional education and therefore did not warrant any special orientation. For instance, Kelly mentioned that when new people are hired in their program, they learn by a "buddy system" where, "You work along side the course coordinator and course professor and pick it up this way." Kelly then professed,

> Maybe I am wrong in saying this, but my approach to distance education is that it's "education," you know, I don't see it that much different. You know--the mode of delivery--but people can adapt to that type of delivery.

However, this same participant reflected that when new people have been hired to teach by distance, "Initially people said...'I have no experience in distance education. I don't know what it means, what I am meant to do'. Clearly, when faculty members first encountered distance education in this institution they believed, contrary to Kelly's opinion, that there was something different about it.

Other participants indicated that most faculty hired to teach by distance education had never participated in distance education previously. Jane noted that they had never "hired anyone with a distance education bent per se." Nor did they provide any special orientation for new staff. "It's basically, as you do it, you learn it," she explained. Likewise, Mary, reflecting on her own experiences when she first started teaching by distance education, exclaimed:

> We were just in some instances flying by the seat of our pants! But the people who were in it kept stressing, "It's not the same. It's not the same as the classroom except done at a distance or by print-based packages." So there was always an emphasis by those who were really committed to it to come and listen to a couple of sessions. There was always, "It's not as it sounds!"

She exemplified the importance of understanding that teaching by distance using teleconference was different from teaching face-to-face in a conventional classroom. She said, "You know people going in cold were even gesturing or looking, because you got no response from anybody." Mary would try to encourage other new faculty members to attend teleconference sessions so they would understand what it was like for the students and so they could experience first hand any difficulties they might encounter as instructors. She believed that in this way new

faculty could gain some insights into the skills required to use the technology successfully.

Melanie agreed that in distance teaching, "Your communication skills may have to be stronger, your telephone skills." Ann also believed that specific skills were needed to teach by distance. She suggested,

> You have to be somewhat of a ham....you tend to come across as a little flat unless you project, unless you are very animated....and I mean you don't have to emote all over the place but....if you stand up and deliver it in this monotone--you are going to put your class--you are going to put them to sleep anyway (laughing)--but you certainly have to be a little more animated when you teach by teleconference.

Ann identified other differences that need to be considered when participating in distance education. She emphasized the importance of good planning skills:

> You can't change horses in midstream the way you planned the course, because you have to have your materials out well in advance to the centres, which means you pretty well have to stick to the script.... Planning is very, very important. You just can't say "This week we'll do this and next week we'll do that," because you just don't have the materials out to the sites. So it's difficult that way. I would say probably that your delivery has to be planned in advance. You have to have very good planning skills.

From her experience, Joanne concluded that compared to conventional teaching, distance education required making "far more decisions about things, like what will be offered when, whether we cancel courses for limited enrolment, which courses are going to fly and which are not....There are things around planning." She went on to say that there was an orientation program offered once a year where new faculty were shown how to use the technology. However, she added, "It's probably not as detailed as it should be." Furthermore she noted, "Dealing with distance is one of the topics that comes up frequently within the meetings of the post-RN faculty.

Nicole observed that new faculty in their institution were provided one and a half hours of orientation in the educational technology department learning about what she referred to as, "The swan song--wonderful dance--this is great stuff." She implied that new faculty received an inaccurate orientation to what the experience of teaching with technology was actually like. Nicole described her own approach to showing new faculty members the ropes:

> I say, "Go over there and get your orientation and then I will meet you" (to give them the real story and what they need to be prepared for and how they need to prepare). But I want them to go over there, because if I told them this stuff first, they are going to come back and say, "Oh this looks good, I've got this down." And I say, "Okay now, what are you going to do when you put your pen on the board and there is no pen on the board, or you try and type something in and the letters go like this [slanted and squiggly] or the technology just fails.

Nicole's preference was to have new faculty spend time with more experienced distance teachers, however, she noted that they would not be paid to do this. Consequently, she said "People can't afford this--they don't want to do it." Diane was also convinced of the need for staff development and for more adequate faculty orientation in her institution:

> There is a lot of information available to faculty but it is in four or five different places. So, subsequently, you went into it without really knowing everything you needed to know. So, I kind of brought significant information, complied it together, sit down, review it with them, and then I am available for them to call if they have any questions. Or I clarify issues that may arise when they are teaching a course.... We are also going to do an in-service with the entire faculty about just what distance education is.

Rita believed that participating in distance education required "continual skill development of...how you keep in touch with students, how you make sure they feel that you are giving them all the feedback that they need?" However, in their

institution there was no formal orientation for new faculty to help them learn these skills. As Melissa wistfully described, new faculty were not provided orientation or training: "Much to their dismay....There is no formal orientation and it's something that needs to be addressed."

Similarly, Sandy reported that there was no formal orientation in their institution either:

> No, its pretty much "fly by the seat of your pants"(laughing). Actually, I would have to say from my experience here that we are getting better as a university--as a school, but we are certainly not good at being supportive in helping other people move into that [distance teaching] role. A lot of it comes on the onus of you as a tutor to dialogue and say, "This isn't working. Do you have any suggestions?"
>
> But I have to say, in saying that, that the two people that I did take these two courses over from were very helpful in terms of giving me some idea as to how they had structured things. But I pretty much--after I ran it the first time around and what worked for me I capped on. What didn't work, I threw it away.

Most participants expressed concern about the "flying by the seat of your pants" approach to learning how to move into the world of distance education. They clearly preferred improved orientation and staff development for new faculty. The literature also supports the need for faculty orientation, training and development. Moore (1998) in her case study of one professor's experience of teaching at a distance, noted that interactivity and integrity of the teaching/learning process were the two major concerns raised. Consequently, Moore emphasized the importance of faculty training on the use of distance technologies, "Allowing them time to develop their materials, develop a process to fully interact with their students and allowing them to

participate in administrative policies to ensure integrity of the educational transaction" (p. 142).

Chia (1996) and Willis (1992) both suggested that distance education requires new strategies and additional preparation time and therefore, more planning. The latter maintained that although distance teaching may not require new abilities, is does require "enhancing existing skills such as strategies for student reinforcement, review, repetition and remediation" (p. 3). Beaudoin (1990), Dillon and Walsh (1992), Olcott and Wright (1995) and Jeffries (1997) all emphasized the need for faculty orientation and training in distance education.

In Beaudoin's (1990) opinion, "Faculty engaged in distance education must be adept at facilitating student's learning through particular attention to process, unlike classroom-based teachers whose traditional role is largely confined to selecting and sharing content (p. 21). With few exceptions, participants in this study raised concerns about the lack of faculty orientation and training in distance education in their institutions. Most of them identified this as an area that would or should receive attention in the near future.

FACULTY REWARDS

Participating in distance education in most institutions meant little in the way of faculty rewards according to these participants. At most, faculty were paid extra for the additional distance work, which they were expected to conduct outside of their regular work hours. Such was the case for Melanie, who maintained that in most cases she had no difficulty hiring faculty members to teach the distance courses. This was true particularly if that faculty member had developed the course in the first place.

In addition, in some cases faculty were provided an added incentive of extra pay to teach distance education courses based on numbers of students. Therefore, they would accept large numbers of students in the courses.

The biggest drawback that Melanie experienced was that while faculty members might agree to accept a large number of students, the extra marking involved had become a contentious issue. Central to this issue was the question about whether they ought to be paid more for the extra marking. Melanie observed,

> There is a lot of dispute about how payment is made for distance teaching. If faculty members are hired to teach distance education courses, because no one else is available, they are paid extra for each student they take. On the other hand, if they teach a campus-based course they are paid per course....

The way faculty members were paid raised many questions and concerns for Melanie: "I always have to ask myself questions. You know, what's fair for the person teaching? What's fair when you compare it to regular faculty teaching it? And that sort of thing." She was also clearly troubled about questions related to, "What is a reasonable number of students to teach? How much marking could they handle? And do they receive extra pay for marking?"

In most instances distance teaching and course development work were not considered part of faculty activities that are normally used for promotion and tenure. However, there was an exception in one institution where instructors teaching by distance were evaluated the same as those who taught on-campus, and the courses they developed were treated as scholarly work. Rita explained that she adopted this approach to faculty evaluation when it came to distance course development activities because:

> People have invested so much time in the last years doing this...I take them forward for tenure or promotion. These things are put forward... in the form of publications, if you will, to at least recognize that these are papers and works that are peer reviewed works.

However, this practice was not accepted in the other universities for various reasons. In one case, faculty members did not wish to have their distance education teaching included in their performance evaluations. It was perceived that problems with the technology resulted in faculty receiving less positive student evaluations from students at distance sites versus those in the on-site classroom. As Joanne put it:

> There was a perception among the faculty that they were being creamed by the evaluations from outside. And in fact the feeling was so strong that...they managed to persuade administration not to keep their distance forms as part of the evaluation methods.

In another institution, distance education work simply was not considered as part of the faculty workload but rather was an "add-on." Ava described it this way:

> Right now any faculty work done in the distance program is over and above their professorial role. They are paid separately so I don't have any control over it. I cannot ask people to teach in the distance program, nor can I discourage people from teaching in distance.

Therefore, the distance education work was to be performed outside of "work time," which made it seem invisible within the context of the university setting. It was not evaluated in terms of faculty performance nor was it considered to be scholarly work. It was questionable whether the exclusion of this distance education work as "professorial work" worth considering for promotion and tenure was a deliberate attempt to diminish the importance of distance education. From Ava's perspective, "It has not come up in the past. I am not saying that it might not be considered, but it simply has not come forward." Nevertheless, when asked whether

distance education work was taken into account for tenure and promotion, Gail, a faculty member from this same institution maintained, "It was asked, and distance does not seem to be seen as scholarly writing. There is no recognition at all by the university that [a course developed for distance delivery] is considered publication."

This reluctance to accept distance education course development and course delivery as scholarly activities may have contributed to reluctance on the part of some faculty members to participate in distance education endeavors. In Maggie's estimation:

> Distance education efforts are not normally tied to promotion and tenure, which are key rewards in a regular on-campus institution. And what we do is we have to sort of bribe people to do work that maybe they should be doing anyway. And again, that goes back to the earlier question about how it is perceived within the school. And I think part of the problem too is the time that you take to write a course manual, you have to take away from your publishing in "quote" scholarly journals, and when you are on the tenure track, you know, that's a major personal implication.

Participants' concerns over and the issues related to the extent to which, and whether faculty ought to be rewarded differently for distance education efforts in mixed-mode universities have been experienced by others. For instance, Martin, Richards & Smith (1998) have found faculty to be indifferent or overtly hostile to distance education undertakings. They attributed this attitude to the fact that "faculty tend to not want to change the way they have always done things and there are few rewards to do so" (p. 1). From their experience with implementing a new distance program, these authors concluded, "Make no mistake, the faculty, not the administration or the students, are the most serious impediments to the acceptance of educational technology because they see few rewards" (p. 1).

Guernsey (1997) also found that institutions do not always treat substantive work with electronic media as a form of scholarship and service. Furthermore, she reported that faculty believed their involvement with distance education technology was risky to their careers as far as tenure is concerned. Similarly, Olcott and Wright (1995) maintained that inadequate compensation, training and incentive measures all affect faculty participation in distance education. The disincentive of the promotion and tenure process, in addition to increased workload, lack of time, fears of reduced student interaction and spontaneity, and technical and administrative problems all emerge as salient barriers to faculty participation according to these authors.

Consequently, they suggested that institutional support and leadership are critical if distance teaching is to be integrated into the mainstream academic culture. Nevertheless, they cited research that indicates that many institutions view distance teaching as peripheral to the central mission of the institution, a notion that is supported by the responses of participants in this study. Dillon and Walsh (1992) also suggested that the lack of leadership that supports change in higher education is at the crux of the concern about the lack of faculty interest in distance education. This is compounded by the fact that there are little or no supports or incentives for faculty to embrace change.

In summary, participants in this study indicated that the extensive work involved, the lack of orientation and training, and inadequate rewards could all affect the attitude of and willingness of faculty members in conventional universities to become engaged in distance education teaching and course development. Those who did become involved were often asked to do so as an "add-on" to their regular or

"legitimate" work; their distance education work did not count as real work in most situations, but was considered to be peripheral to the central mission of the organization. In addition, new faculty members were provided little or no orientation or training and ended up learning about distance education by "flying by the seat of their pants."

Chapter 7

FINDINGS: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

> Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of things.
> (Ondaatje, M., 1987, p. 163)

The instructional models used in the post-RN programs varied from school to school. Some hired home study tutors as part-time sessional instructors, while others had the course professors teaching the distance courses. However, the underlying premises and processes for developing the programs were basically the same. Historically, the programs in this study were not developed as planned, comprehensive programs. For the most part, individual courses were developed through trial and error, one course at a time. The tendency was to hire people to develop and teach courses on a sessional basis, with no long-term faculty or program plan.

The unsystematic process of course and program development in these dual-mode universities had long-term implications for the distance education programs in this study. In some of the newer programs participants reported the lack of adequate policies, procedures and processes to administer their programs effectively. Program development and delivery issues, mainly related to course production, curriculum delivery and quality assurance emerged in this study.

COURSE PRODUCTION

Students in all of the programs received some type of print-based material, whether course outlines or complete course materials. To complement this, regardless of the model in place, the students had access to an instructor during established "tutor" or office hours each week. In addition, all of them incorporated

audio-teleconferencing to some extent. In most programs print-based course materials were sent out to students, with the name and availability of the course professor, and times when teleconferences or workshops were scheduled. Student were not required to attend teleconference sessions in most cases, although in one institution where students did not receive a "course package," it would be difficult to complete the courses without attending the weekly teleconferences. Nevertheless, in this institution, as in the others where teleconferences were used, each session was tape-recorded so that if students missed a class they could request a copy of the audiotape.

Participants raised many concerns with respect to the way courses were developed and delivered, beginning with what Melanie referred to "production problems." She pointed out that there was pressure within the university to reorganize and restructure the "production and delivery mechanism" for distance education because:

> We have had production problems. Students not getting materials at the start of the semester or before the start of the semester. Those kinds of things are major problems. It means you start the course and students don't have material and you have to give them extra time. And that's fine. We do it. You have to be flexible.

Another participant described production issues in a similar vein. Diane, although commenting on the strengths of their program noted,

> They are well-developed courses [and] the faculty support of the student, working with them, availability to them, I would think is a big strength. What I find to be a problem is timing. Availability of materials to students, turn around time--delays with the mailing system. These are areas that need to be improved.

Similarly, Alice, who advised students maintained, "Their main concern with us is not getting their material on time. Basically, that is their main concern. And at one time we didn't offer all of our courses by distance, and that was a concern." Rita also complained that they have experienced difficulties with course materials not being sent to students on time. However, in her case the delay originated with problems in the registration process which resulted in students not being admitted in a timely fashion.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY

Earlier, problems were identified in relation to having courses developed one-by-one and hiring instructors on a part-time contract basis. In particular, Nicole expressed concern about having all part-time sessional instructors and no designated distance education faculty. This was compounded by the practice of each individual professor making unilateral decisions about course outlines and course delivery. Consequently, Nicole observed how difficult it was to administer and plan in her program and lamented: "We don't have a cohesive program. It is a loose, a very loose network."

Sherry described the long-term consequences of developing programs on a piecemeal basis:

> One of the weaknesses, when I look over development, was that we developed course-by-course instead of having a notion of a whole program. Because we didn't really see it as a program right at the beginning. We though it might work or it might not, and we'd try a course. Then we tried another course and another course and so on. So, without viewing it holistically as a program--the kinds of features you think about with a program, we didn't really consider until way later.

> For example, preparing students for distance study, doing all the things you might do to orientate them and bring students into an on-campus program. So I think if holistically in the beginning we had thought about it as a program we would have done things differently a far as preparing students. Making sure that a wide variety of resources were available to them as much as finances could afford and so on.
>
> Distance was always cost-recovery so we never had the kind of student counseling service for students as they do on campus. And we've never really been able to get them either because of the cost that that would entail.

One repercussion of developing courses in the unplanned, sporadic fashion described, was that often the person who was teaching the course was not the same person who developed it. While this was not considered an issue in some institutions, it was in others. Melanie for example, stated: "What we have here is that, while I may develop a course, I might never teach it." Furthermore, she noted that the faculty member who subsequently taught it might not agree with the content. According to Maggie this was a major problem in that:

> Faculty members have academic freedom. And even though we have gone and purchased or produced an excellent package of materials, the new faculty member who is assigned to teach this particular course, will say, "No, I don't teach that way, I teach from a different point of view. I don't like these materials, I want to develop my own. So "buy in" is another problem.

Diane observed that they were trying to resolve this issue of "buy in" by creating a course team to develop courses. With one of the core group of faculty members who were involved in the development of the course later teaching it, she hoped "they will know where we are coming from, and you won't get them saying, "Well, I don't agree with your style and I want to change it."

Dillon and Walsh (1992) suggested that "the issue of ownership is crucial in the development of distance education" (p. 17). In their review of research on faculty participation in distance education they found several studies that supported the notion that ownership is a key issue in the adoption of distance education methods by faculty. Furthermore, they maintained that the quality of the programs and the integration of faculty are negatively affected by the presence of institutional approaches to distance education that are "characterized as piecemeal, half-hearted attempts at extending educational resources to new populations of learners" (p. 17).

Kaye and Rumble (1981) observed that a major issue confronting universities is how to resolve the conflict between academic freedom and the necessity to maintain effective production mechanisms which are necessary for distance education course development and distribution. In this study these appeared to be key issues related to program development in distance education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The course design aspect of course development emerged as a quality assurance issue, the nature of which differed according to the type of distance education strategies used in the particular setting. In the situation where students did not receive a standard "package" of course materials, faculty members made independent decisions about what was sent to students before each teleconference class. One participant, Nicole, described the process like this:

> The course material we provide the students is just a course outline. Some will give them all the handouts and all the overheads to students so they don't have to copy anything down. I do that. But I do it in two packages, one at one point in the first part and one in the second. So they have everything I put on the overheads. So they can just take

> notes accordingly. And I think that's really important, so they are not copying stuff down--they are listening. The problem is it really limits your spontaneity because you have to prepare in advance.

Nicole did not enjoy teaching this way. She preferred to have a package of material sent out to all the students, so that "they could see from beginning to end how to pace themselves." She was also concerned both about the quality of materials students received and about the diversity among instructors. Another participant, Joanne, observed,

> Some professors have very detailed course packages that have a lot of stuff in them. But we are now beginning to sell those as opposed to when we used the basics of the course outline, these are the expectations for evaluation, and that kind of stuff. But because we don't use those print-based packages for most of our courses, if you are teaching a class and you are going to use slides or overheads, or what have you, just like you would an ordinary class, you make up your overheads. Only instead of just showing up on the day clutching your overheads, you have to make sure a paper copy of the overheads goes to [the sites].

Joanne went on to explain that they had the option of having electronic slides sent out to the sites by disc to be inserted into the computers on the different sites and "theoretically, you push the forward button and the next slide appears magically at all the sites." She added wryly, "My experience with this has not been great!" She cautioned that the way their system operated, the professors needed to check with each site at every class to ensure the materials had been received. She noted, "And of course, one of them didn't. And so you say, "Well we'll just have to compensate."

With or without complete packages of print materials, course development and ongoing revisions were considered a strenuous but necessary endeavor. Joanne noted that they had recently undergone a major quality review and revision of the courses in

their post-RN program. However, she believed that for the amount of work entailed in the process, they were not fairly compensated compared to other nursing programs in their school. She explained,

> We really got snookered on that one because a lot of us wound up with new courses to teach, both by face-to-face and by distance, and we didn't get any special dispensation--but in the master's program and the generic program they have.

Joanne specified that the significant effort in course and curriculum revision was undertaken due to concerns raised about the possible lack of cohesion in their program. At her site, the curriculum was revised at the instigation of the post-RN program director who was responsible for both the campus-based and distance education post-RN programs. She remarked on the cumbersome process they encountered in making changes:

> There is an unbelievable process you have to go through, because you have to go through the school curriculum committee, the school council, the undergraduate program committee of the senate, and finally, the senate of the university to make any changes to rewrite course descriptions or any of that stuff. So you have to decide if it's really worth it before you do any of this stuff.

This same sentiment was echoed by Kelly. In their program, courses were reviewed and revised every year by the course coordinator and the course professor responsible for that course. Course and professor evaluations were taken into consideration and courses were adjusted according to that feedback from students. In addition, they underwent an annual program review when all course coordinators met to discuss their courses. Kelly compared the review process in Nursing with other Faculties, saying,

> It's interesting. Other Faculties don't do that. I find in this Faculty, it is almost ongoing--at the end of each semester, when we have program review, and then when the course coordinator is getting her course outline and syllabus ready from the start of the new academic year, there are changes made. There's an update of the articles, if we have case studies, we up-date them. So there is regular, ongoing curricular review from this faculty.
>
> The downside to that is that people are always reviewing the curriculum! And so a part of me says, "Can't we just leave it for a year or two, and just go with what we have?" On balance, it is important we do this ongoing curricular review. It's just at times it can get a little bit nit-picky.

Kelly reflected on the reasons why the Nursing Faculty carried out this extensive process of curricular review:

> It's because we are so obsessive and anal. Because we have to have everything 100% correct all the time (laughing). That's why I think we do it. And also, not wanting to sound sexist, but because most of them are female, our faculty, you know? And I think it is one of those characteristics. I have no problem letting things go for a year or so. So it's interesting when I meet some of the other associate deans, if they are in those faculties with the majority males, it's those faculties that look at the curriculum every five years or whatever. So there is certainly part of me that says, "Yeah, you know that would be nice."
>
> Other faculty keep up with what's going on in the discipline as well, but do they have to remove a comma and put a colon in instead when they are writing up their syllabus? You know, I think we carry it to the nth degree of fine detail.

On the other hand, Melanie was concerned because they did not have a sufficiently rigorous course review and revision process in their program. There was no process in place for on-campus courses either but this did not appear to be a concern. She explained, "We are doing it for distance because I think quality control is an important issue. For the first time we are going to do a solid peer review process for input of the development of those [new] courses." Melanie observed that with the

new technologies being incorporated into distance education, its image is changing and "there is not that old 50s image of correspondence courses on a matchbox cover." Nevertheless, she pointed out, "I think people are still very concerned about quality."

Therefore, because of these concerns and in an attempt to introduce stronger quality assurance mechanisms, they had established an advisory committee to act as peer reviewers in an advisory capacity for individuals developing new courses for distance education. In terms of revisions, Melanie believed that by having more diverse faculty input into the development of a course, the courses would need to be revised less frequently than in the past. She noted,

> You have to produce a course that last for a few years. You have to set up a regular schedule for revisions and you don't want to be redoing the whole thing every time. That's a big issue--the quality of the courses, regular revisions, some kind of peer review process.

Melanie's concerns about quality reflect Beaudoin's (1990) suggestion that distance educators are haunted by many prevalent myths that call their credibility and effectiveness into question. Some of these myths he identified are that distance learning is too impersonal, there is minimal need for faculty, and there is absence of quality control. Participants did raise issues related to quality control in the method of course production and delivery, as well as in course design.

As far as quality issues in course design, the main concerns and questions raised by those who were using print-based courses were summarized nicely by Diane:

> How do we create a really student-focussed course where a student has the opportunity to interact, to be really challenged to think, using print-based, knowing she may never be able to see another colleague face-to face? That, I think is a really big challenge. How do you develop those critical thinking, analytical, debate type skills by distance?

Furthermore, she maintained that although she did not believe it was being done to any great extent in their courses, it could be accomplished with print materials by providing "exercises where the student is required to analyze, or synthesize the information." Beaudoin (1990) agreed that distance education revolves around a learner - centered system, which includes study materials augmented by explanations, references and reinforcements on the part of the teacher to facilitate learning.

In summary, the distance education programs in this study tended to be developed in a sporadic, piece-meal manner, with no overall program plan. This was problematic from the perspective of participants who identified the need for a more cohesive system within which faculty are more integrated into the program planning and course development and delivery process. The need for a more student-centered system also emerged.

Chapter 8

FINDINGS: INTERACTION

> Reach out. Learn to reach out. You and I together are much stronger than you or I alone, and I like to think that when we are together, I'm not only giving, I'm getting. I will now have four arms, two of yours and two of mine, two heads--that means we've got all kinds of new creative ideas--and two different worlds, your world and my world. And so I want you to come in.
>
> (Buscaglia, L., 1990, p. 427).

Participants advanced the need to have opportunities for interaction in distance education. Identifying with their university, becoming socialized into the profession or into baccalaureate education, and enhancing learning were among the reasons participants gave for their beliefs in the importance of student interaction. They believed in the need for face-to-face interaction as well as interacting across distances. They also identified strategies for creating interaction among students and between students and teachers.

NEED FOR INTERACTION

One participant, Jane, identified as her main interest the need to find strategies for creating a university identity for students. To accomplish this in their program, they had integrated different types of group activities such as study groups and tele-resource centres "where students had to go to interact around something, so at least they could see each other." However, she indicated that these attempts enjoyed dubious success:

> One doesn't know how popular or useful that was for some students. I do know groups where there were difficulties because they had to do group work. They were assigned according to the resource centres, and that was not always a popular thing. The groups did not always work well together.

In Jane's program they had originally offered workshops in some of the courses, where professors travelled or teleconferenced to various sites to interact with students. This contact with students was seen to be important from the perspective of participants in this study. As Mary observed, "Because we found there was a sense of isolation.... It was nice for them to feel part of the campus, and really feel like they were university students." Because of the campus-based activities integrated into their program, Kelly referred to it as "a hybrid method of distance delivery."

> We are not truly distance in the sense that students never come on campus--they do. For example, in [one course] they have a package of materials, we call them modules and each module has a number of units, and students work their way through them in conjunction usually with textbook readings and journal article readings. And then they come on campus maybe four or five times a semester when they have opportunities to meet the course professor. Usually there is a presentation involved as well, where the course professor may present.... It's not mandatory, but usually they come along. And then it gives them an opportunity to ask about aspects of other courses as well.
>
> We also have telephone tutoring where students can call. We also encourage students to make use of e-mail because we find that it's a very efficient way for students to get a-hold of the course professor as opposed to coming into the office.

Participants had mixed views on the importance of providing opportunities for students to have face-to-face contact with each other. Bev reported that she had encountered many people who "really question the whole socialization process and how you can learn anything without having a discussion....People really do believe that nurses must really get together and have eye contact in order to be able to discuss issues of nursing." However, she was not convinced that face-to-face contact was always necessary for socialization of post-RN students who tend to interact on a

regular basis with other nurses, although she believed that some students do enjoy being on campus.

Rita believed that the opportunity to spend time on campus is important for students. She remarked, "Some students really do appreciate coming on campus and having a course or two. And I think that for some courses and some students that's important." As a result of this belief they were trying to incorporate more workshops and study circles into their program. Nevertheless, Lou admitted that professional socialization was an area they hadn't attended to closely enough. Consequently, she made the observation that, "The students do a lot of that work of the socialization and the identity building to the university, I think, largely on their own." This is how she surmised that process takes place,

> Even in really small communities, there tends to be usually two or three students, and they get started together and they take all the courses together. And they form their own little cohort. And, I think in that a very small way, they do that sort of socialization of being a student--being a post-RN student and doing it through this particular institution.
>
> So, it's amazing to me. It is really quite remarkable and really quite heart wrenching in its own way to see how much of that work they've done. And how committed they are to their own learning, and to the program, and one thing and another.

Gail, concerned about socialization and worried about what she referred to as a lack of "connectedness that happens to students," declared, "It's easy to lose a student through the cracks." She suggested that this is a problem on campus as well, and wondered whether students should be assigned to a specific faculty member who would assist students. She believed that distance students in particular, would be better served if a faculty advising system were established, where:

> That's how those people connect, and they interact, and make sure that things are happening for people. I think we could do a better job sometimes. You know, we make a real effort to get out newsletters, even reminding people about certain deadlines that are coming up in the newsletter. But then again, not everybody reads it either...

Sherry maintained that there are many educational issues in nursing, not all necessarily related exclusively to distance education, but related to interaction, and compounded by distance education. For example, she advocated closer supervision of students, whether in distance or in campus-based programs. Her reasoning was related to her belief that faculty ought to be in a position to cultivate professional socialization:

> I think we are trying to teach students a different way of nursing at the baccalaureate level. And if you are not out there with them, helping them see opportunities, or at least being close to them, you don't know what they are facing in their clinical practice area. You can't know.
>
> And so consequently, the opportunity to change perspectives which is so critical, isn't going to happen in the same way as though you are going to be elbow to elbow. But that's true of on-campus as well as distance students.

In a similar vein, Diane expressed concern about how perspectives could be changed when "there are some of them [students] that we will never see." Furthermore, she posed many questions about the assumed value of baccalaureate education. For instance, she remarked, "One of the questions I always ask is, how does this baccalaureate education differ from their basic diploma education? What is it they are trying to achieve? Reflecting for a moment, Diane went on,

> I just believe it's probably a different perspective as to how we look at nursing. And it is professional. And it's attitude. And it's a professional attitude. But what is it we are How do we know? And what are we doing to find out? What is it we are trying to achieve here?

Then, in response to her own questions, she offered:

> I think it is probably more in-depth knowledge. Hopefully it's a different way of looking at what it is they do, a different way of thinking about what they do. And to me, it's a professional attitude. It's the values, and how we articulate them, and how we live them out in our practice.... You know, many of these nurses--post-RN students will come to you, saying, "I know all there is to know about nursing." But if that is the case, why is it we believe it is important for them to participate in this program?

Bev was also concerned that students perhaps miss out on professional socialization in distance education programs, despite their attempts at forming study groups or study circles to facilitate this. She claimed, "They miss that context where they can talk among themselves." On the other hand, she noted that one could argue, "If someone does a program by distance, they can learn to be self-directed. And they learn to be fairly good problem-solvers. And I think that can transfer itself very nicely into professional skills in the work setting."

Bev, like Sherry, did not see the issue of socialization as being peculiar to distance education. She explained,

> I tend to have the view that if you are in a lecture hall and you are lecturing to a student for an hour or something, and it's strictly lecture and there's no interaction or anything, I don't see that as promoting professional socialization. I think that's just contributing to a passive person. You know--sit there, feed me.

Sherry was very experienced in, and a strong supporter of distance education. When asked whether she believed that the post-RN students in their distance program felt part of the university, she responded thus:

> I wonder. I don't think they can. They might not see that as a loss. But I see that as a loss. There are probably exceptions to this. I don't want to generalize. But I don't think they truly have the sense of a

> university as a "temple to learn." I mean the rich resources of the libraries, and the ability to go and browse through the libraries, and the opportunities to discuss all manner of things with your fellow students and teachers. All of that living, which is just as much a learning opportunity as the class-work. No, I don't think so.
>
> And that's why, if I had my druthers, I would insist that the distance students come to the university and engage in an immersion experience. Maybe a week, something like that, where a lot of those things are attended to. And where critical (I am very interested in professional socialization) where critical things that we know are associated with perspective transformation can actually take place, or at least begin to take part in their learning.

One student Sandy, whom I interviewed, lamented about her distance learning experience and her sense of belonging:

> I didn't feel much like I belonged to a university. I would say I felt more like I belonged to my colleagues at work, because I would bring all my stuff and talk to them. I mean for having people to interact with, you would actually have grass - roots nurses right there at the bedside who you could talk to about stuff. Like, I didn't--I wish I felt like I actually belonged to a university.

This is keeping with Edwards (1996) who discussed the traditional notion of student with a clear role and identity. He noted, "If we are a student, we are part of something, we belong to an institution. That sense of belonging is important in establishing a sense of identity" (p. 7). He went on to suggest that when participating in open or distance education the sense of identity is challenged: "The focus shifts from being a member of an institution to being an individualized learner" (p. 8).

Sandy clearly felt the need to feel like a member of the university and believed that spending some time on campus could help create a sense of belonging:

> One of the courses we took in the summer time, we came on campus a few times. And that, I think, is something that really makes you feel like you belong to a university. Because you can take one day a month and come on campus, and have that opportunity to network with other

> nurses in the program. You do everything by correspondence and then you come just once a month to campus.

This student proceeded to describe another course she took where students were required to attend campus every two weeks. When asked if she found that to be a burden, she replied,

> No. That was a great course to take! Every second Friday we went in. And actually, that I think would be the most ideal way to do it now, looking back. Because all of your books were 100% by correspondence, but yet you got tutoring once every two weeks. That worked out pretty good. Because once a month, I thought it was good. I thought it was really good then.
>
> But I find every two weeks, that that really pushed you to keep up to where you have to be. You also had that time-frame pressure. You knew you had a lot to do in that two-week period.

When I asked Mary if she believed students felt a sense of belonging to her university, this was her response:

> That has always worried me. I really wonder when some of them have been able to procure their degree without ever setting foot on campus--whether they ever get a sense of ownership, or whether they see their degree as merely an aggregate of courses rather than a program at large--whether they ever see the whole or just a little a pile of pieces. I think that's an issue.

Jessie, a part-time off-campus instructor in one of the programs emphasized the importance of having some face-to-face meetings:

> It is preferable to have some time with colleagues and with a guide, a mentor, or a teacher, or whatever you want to call it. I think that that is an experience that the students who don't have it, miss. I don't believe an entire program has to be done that way. I believe there are other ways that we could get at some of that. Like if there are enough people in a region to get together in groups, or certain courses are probably better offered through outreach type methods, than some other distance methods.
> I am for distance. But I would like to see more group activities built in more than I think they are.

In summary, the need for more face-to face group activities and interaction among students and between students and teachers was echoed by most participants. The notion of peer interaction is supported by Abrami and Bures (1996) who cautioned that,

> Without interaction with peers, learners at a distance have few, if any, opportunities to experience complex problem solving in a collaborative environment. Thus, they may fail to develop and refine those cognitive and interpersonal skills increasingly necessary for business and professional careers.

Similarly, Attridge and Clark (1992) identified the visibility of other nurses as role models and peer interaction as important factors affecting students' socialization and reflective thinking. They stressed the importance of providing opportunities for this to occur in distance education programs. Concordantly, all participants in this study indicated that when nursing programs are offered by distance education, some classroom sessions on campus are the ideal way to increase interaction among students and between students and teachers in order to facilitate a sense of identity to the school, transform perspective and enhance professional socialization. However, these opportunities for on-campus attendance were not available in most programs, and were sporadic and sparse in the ones that incorporated them. Other methods were used in attempts to link students together when attendance on campus was not possible.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION

Issues related to the need for students to interact with peers, preceptors and instructors were discussed by participants mainly in relation to group meetings on

campus. However, they did raise issues related to creating other opportunities for interacting at a distance. Most commonly, teleconferences were used to facilitate interaction, albeit not so much among students but more to facilitate interaction between the teacher and learners.

Some institutions in this study included workshops and teleconferences in addition to access by telephone to professors during designated hours to facilitate student interaction. Some had all of these opportunities available. For example, Melissa described how in her program, "They've got their class lists, they are encouraged to form study groups, they'll have their teleconferences, and they phone their instructor during office hours if they want to." In this institution, students from within the province paid a port charge, but the telephone costs for teleconferences were free, whereas students from outside of the province assumed the costs for long distance telephone charges. Participation in teleconferences was not mandatory for these students, and as Melissa stated, "They are expected....but in actuality, there are no consequences."

She outlined their approach:

> We use teleconference to some extent....The difficulty even with teleconference, as you probably know, is that students who are working shift may not be able to get to them. So we've decreased the number of teleconferences. And we have to indicate in the catalogue of courses if they are mandatory or not. And if they are mandatory, it makes it more difficult for nurses working shift, so they tend not to be. They tend to be optional. So you are not introducing new material, its sort of a supplement, and a discussion, and another point of contact outside of telephone.

Diane also spoke of the need to accommodate working nurses in their attempts to offer opportunities for interaction:

> Tutor hours are all set in the evening. Teleconferences are all set in the evening. And the reason that's its done is, it's cheaper for telephone hours, so it gives people not a lot of extra expenses. And the other thing, a lot of the nurses who participate in the distance education program are also working casual. And generally, they are either going on shift at eight o'clock or they are coming off at eight. So we try and plan around their hours, so that they can participate.

In most of the programs where students were provided opportunities to interact with other students and instructors by audio-teleconferencing, participants reported that certain aspects of using this medium were problematic. For example, in Sherry's experience, "Teachers, over and over again talk about the use of teleconferences and how poor they are. And I think that even though we have been doing them for a long time, we could learn a lot more about how to do them." She went on to explain that they were trying to make improvements in their use of this medium:

> We're structuring teleconferences so students know in advance what they are expected to do for the teleconference. And [they] can be expected to--or are supposed to be able to contribute in a way that they have been invited to during that period of time, to make a much more efficient use of teleconference.
>
> There are always some technical difficulties though. There are places where the sound is very bad or the lines are very bad or whatever. And its' very frustrating for students. Sometimes they go superbly well and sometimes they don't....
>
> We are also using more and more, the ability to divide teleconference groups into sub-groups so they can do some work on-line, on telephone-line. I think it provides a good opportunity. The problem is they are only an hour and you can't do much in an hour. So, how do you make use of that time more effectively. I think it still takes alot of thinking. And novice teachers often feel very strange on tele-conference. I find it exhausting myself. Because I want to see and I can't, so I am trying to discern everything that is going on through my ears. So it's very tiring.

Despite the general consensus among participants that students needed to connect with each other, they noted that students participated to a limited degree when afforded the opportunity to do so. Diane identified this problem when she described how she incorporated group activities in her teleconferences to facilitate critical thinking, noting with disappointment, "But then over half the class wasn't there to participate! So rather than have them disadvantaged you send out a memo to try to summarize, you know."

Likewise, Jessie indicated that in the last course she taught, even though she encouraged students to phone her, only 14 out of 25 students actually called. Furthermore, she said the others did not contact her throughout the entire course:

> The others I only had contact with through writing. I really enjoyed having the contact with the students. And once they started calling me, I think they must have, because I got the repeaters, you know. I thought I could be a more effective guide in their program--to challenge them to go in a certain direction or get them thinking through the telephone contact. But there were certainly people who didn't need me.

However, the assumption that students did not need her because they did not contact her is called into question, particularly when students were required to pay for their own long distance telephone calls. Rather than need, the extra cost may have influenced students, posing a barrier for those who were not willing or could not afford to assume the cost. Recognizing this, Jessie argued for the need to have a toll free telephone number for students so that contact with the nursing program would be more open and accessible. She suggested, "I think that should be an integral part for tutoring...That definitely would be an ideal, or a good option." Without a toll free number she believed that students did not call as frequently as they might wish to.

Similarly, Lou related how their distance students could proceed through the entire term and have very little contact with faculty. She indicated as well that cost was a concern:

> We don't do the thing of phoning on any kind regular basis. That is for the students to do. They are to phone in. But they don't have to phone in. They don't have to come to teleconferences. They are charged for them, but they don't have to attend the teleconferences. In the past, there were marks assigned for class participation. But now, it is optional because it is so expensive for students. They now have to start picking up those long distance charges. So we can provide a port for them but if they don't chose to take that opportunity up...

On the other hand she identified the positive aspects of being able to study independently without the restriction of "required teleconference sessions, saying,

> And I think for me, that is the beauty of distance education. If you do well on your own, if you are a very private, self-directed learner, if you want to take this package and do the readings, and do the activities with that, and if you hand in a paper at the end of the term, and that's a very good paper--I mean, I think that's great. Then this is a nice option for you.

However, Lou also observed that for some students the lack of regular contact could be problematic if they are having trouble:

> But is does mean for those students who are struggling and not contacting you and not connecting to the teleconference....and they are phoning you saying, "You know, I'm in a lot of trouble here, and my husband's left me, and the kids are screaming, and I've lost my job, and all these things are happening to me! Could I get an extension?"

The scenario that Lou described points to the need to have options available for students to easily interact with their instructors, and perhaps for instructors to take some initiative to contact students intermittently to assure them that support is readily available if they do require it.

Gail discussed the issue of student contact and the need to find ways to facilitate ongoing interaction between students and the nursing faculty members. She commented on their faculty planning meetings and how they have "looked at ways we can improve the program, looked at how we can better connect with the students....How are we better able to serve the students? Like getting information out to them, doing a newsletter."

In a similar vein, one of Diane's main concerns was the need for distance educators to know how to provide opportunities for group discussions and to stimulate critical thinking. In addition, she stressed the importance of recognizing different learning styles:

> There are some students who come here and they just love the distance mode--and I can see myself being one of them. They work exceptionally well alone, they are very self directed, that sort of thing. Then you have the other students who positively struggle because they need that kind of group interaction and support. So I think you have to build in the mechanisms and I think the Web computing conferencing is one opportunity. I think interactive teleconferencing is another way. There's plenty of technology out there that allows us to simulate classroom learning experiences if that' what we want to achieve. But it's the funding to do it.

She noted that as long as students have the print-based course materials as the basis at least they all have the same material. However, she maintained that some students need more than the printed material:

> ...Many of them just learn so much by the exchange of ideas. Now, I found when I do teleconferencing and we've all found this--when we do the teleconferencing and the majority of us have used them purely for an exchange of ideas--to kind of talk about expectations with regards to the assignments, these sorts of things, to give them the opportunity to raise questions. But I just completed one where they just finished an assignment on critical thinking. And just the exercise

> of saying--talking about how they should have approached it and issues you know? They just sort of fed on it, sort of thing.

Most participants, such as Nicole, firmly believed that students needed varied means for interaction. During her teleconferenced sessions she employed several different teaching strategies toward this end. Nicole described how she used overheads that students could access at each site and then involved them in group activities to supplement this. She explained the rationale for this strategy, pointing out some of the difficulties using it:

> I am a process person. So, I want to deal with process. I actually do small group activities and the students love it. But it takes so much energy and then all of a sudden you are trying to get the attention of the people on site. You have to click on to the computer and say, "Alright, get back into your groups again," until you get their attention. Because there is so much racket with the four classrooms plus your own. So it's not all that satisfactory to me. What I find difficult is to have part of your population sitting in front of you, in the traditional sense and the rest at four different campuses.

In other institutions the non-mandatory teleconferences were sporadic and infrequent, consisting mainly of class discussions of particular topics, clarifying issues and answering students' questions. There was no new material introduced in these sessions because not all students joined in. Indeed, the attendance rates were reported to be lower than expected, presumably because students who were working shift work were unable to connect. In most programs the number of teleconferences offered had been reduced due to low attendance. Likewise, although instructors had office or tutor hours available, most reported receiving few calls from students. This is consistent with Landstrom's (1995) research findings where instructors also reported receiving few calls from students, despite the perceived need for interaction.

Melissa expressed her concern about the quantity and quality of student participation in their teleconferenced sessions, saying they were less than satisfactory. Consequently, there was growing pressure from students for access to email and list-serves and it was evident that their school was in a transition phase in terms of using these technologies to facilitate student interaction. She reported the results of a survey she had conducted which showed that approximately 50% of their students had the capability of accessing email and listserves. Recognizing the implications of this she said,

> Fifty percent have access, and if they have access they want the goods. Or 50% don't. If they don't have access clearly it's going to be a barrier. So they will still need teleconferencing. So we are going to have to run with dual delivery for I'd say probably the next five years. It's going to be a challenge. But we have to do it--there is no doubt we have to do it.

Melissa believed that most students wanted contact and needed more opportunities to participate in discussions with others. Furthermore, she saw the use of computer technology and listserves as being superior to teleconferences in terms of facilitating student interaction. Her reasons for thinking this way were twofold:

> You can only do so much in an hour of teleconference when you've got so many people on line. And some people just can't communicate. You have to be a very aggressive person to even speak on a teleconference, depending on how it is structured. Whereas, I think this [use of computers] will give opportunities for reflection and giving feedback.

Attridge and Clark (1992) called for distance educators to use "creative methods of creating teacher-learner interaction and to encourage and enable reflective thinking and professional socialization" (p. 459). Several participants emphasized the need to provide students with opportunities for interaction with faculty through the

way they marked assignments and by using journals in the courses. Nicole, who used journals regularly, had this to say about their use:

> I like the journals because it gives me information about where they are at and how they are processing stuff. I mean, I find I have to have the journals. It takes me a day and a half--no about 16 hours just to read the journals, and I don't even comment on them. And that's six entries because [with] the paper flow back and forth you can't do it on a weekly basis. It's just too confusing. So I only have the stuff coming in twice during the semester for the journals.
>
> But the feedback is that at first they wonder what does everything have to do with everything else? But now, half way through the semester they are seeing very clearly how it all relates and how its really challenged them to take a look at where they are at, and move them forward. That has nothing to do with the post-RN program. This is the kind of attitude that has to be in the post-RN program--we may not all have it.
>
> And keeping the journals is important because we have to keep on reminding the students on a weekly basis that the technology is not perfect.

Nicole believed the journals were crucial and served several purposes, one of which was to provide a forum whereby an intimate student-instructor relationship could develop:

> And by distance it at least allows the student and you to have some intimacy through a journal. There is no intimacy otherwise in our relationship. I don't know these people. I never see the majority of students. I will only know them through their paperwork, and the journal allows us to have some intimate contact even if it's only twice a semester.

In addition, she professed the use of journals contributed to reflective practice:

> I use it as an evaluation tool. The journals that I use in class are focussed on the content--I use journals constantly. I used them before they became "in," because I was brought up on them in the 60s. And I think they are critical. Most of our students have never even heard of doing a journal. They've never even reflected on their practice. (And now again, we've now made this entity of "reflective practice" which

> is driving me crazy). But you've always had to do it--good practitioners always had to do it.
>
> So I think that type of thing is critical to distance programs where at least in some of the courses--I think in all the nursing courses ....What is the relevance of this stuff to you in your practice? What are you doing with this stuff? And it also gives them a chance to talk to you as well, because again, its optional. And I do give optional credits, five credits for it. And it's enough to bring most of them up to a pretty good mark. And I think-- its because I want them to do it.

Nicole described her use of journals to focus on process rather than content and as a way to challenge the students to be creative:

> But there's some wonderful stuff. And also I try and get them to do some poetry and creative stuff. Some of it's off the wall, but most of them aren't. So I give them blank credit. You do the assignment and I give you some feedback and if you are off the walls--then well....
>
> But it's the process--it can be done at a distance-right? I will never see this woman and yet I get to know the distance students better in most cases than I do the onsite students. There are certain of them--and you'll just click--now that's an individual faculty member to a student. And some of them are just waiting to have really have that ultimate challenge--stimulation--whatever.
>
> So if every faculty member goes in enthusiastically with their subject matter--whatever. And I set the class up by talking about me and the processes I've experienced to get me to where I am. But they've never really changed--it's always been forward but they've been incredibly diverse.

Similarly, Sherry, a participant from another institution, had also used journals in her course as a strategy for getting to know students better. However, despite the benefits gained from their use, she found them to be too much work to continue with. This is what Sherry had to say about her experience:

> I asked them to do a notebook and it's the first time I used notebooks. I had a lot of learning activities in the course that they were supposed to respond to in the notebook. And I decided to ask then to submit their notebooks and I would give them a mark on the notebook, and they'd

> have an assignment. So, the notebook and the assignment. Well, My God!
>
> Some students wrote ninety pages in their notebooks! I felt I knew these students better than students I ever taught on or off campus. They knew me better because I responded to them. But I couldn't handle it. I mean it was exhausting and it just took days! So I changed that quickly enough.

Participants in this study identified other methods faculty members used to interact with students to establish an environment that facilitates learning. Lou, for instance, emphasized the importance of other kinds of written communication between teachers and students. In her opinion, faculty teaching by distance education needed to learn not only teleconferencing skills, but also how to become skillful at providing written feedback to students when marking their assignments and papers. Marking was an activity that most participants identified as problematic. For example, Sherry said this about marking: "Horrible! I hate marking. Most people do. I mean distance education teachers do."

As much is it was considered to be unpleasant to some participants, marking was deemed an important activity. Subsequently, Lou, concerned about the need for instructors to develop a diligent approach to marking, commented on the importance of this for students:

> The other big thing is about writing comments back to students on written paper, because that being in many ways, the sort of most regularized way of communicating between the faculty and the students. Students are very dependent on that form of communication. And the way they read comments is sometimes quite astounding--not at all what the faculty member intended.
>
> But that's a real skill that I think people need a bit of time to think about, and to really work with to give students the kind of comments that are helpful for them to learn--to do their learning.

Other participants also pointed out the need to provide constructive feedback to students, and more importantly to interact in ways that convey a caring attitude. For some, this meant being available to students and communicating in a timely and sensitive manner. Gail shared her views about how she believed tutors ought to interact with students:

> I think the other thing that we can do is as tutors make sure that we really "quote" it sounds like a funny word--but "care" for our students. And by making sure we get assignments back out to them as fast as we can, that we are available at our tutor hours, you know.

She was particularly concerned about students who might be having difficulties:

> I think one of the things we haven't touched on is what to do with the student who is struggling. Because I think that presents itself as a little bit more of a problem than when you have them there on campus and you can eyeball them and have them into your office.
>
> Part of it is how to maintain a good rapport with that student when they get their paper back from you, you know and its 60% or something. How to get them to talk to you on the phone? If they live close by you can get them to come in. They're usually embarrassed, they could be angry, they could think you are picking on them--you know, there could any one of a zillion responses. And how to assure that student that you are there to facilitate their learning? Although you do have to take on the role of the evaluator as well.

Gail related using the following strategies to communicate with students in a sensitive, constructive manner:

> I always try to start it out with, you know, the old thing--stroke before you poke. I try and say, "Betty your paper was really interesting, I especially enjoyed, you know, your part on da, da, da, da.... The area that you can strengthen is by...." You know, really try to say the things--without saying, "Gosh, you know this is the most disorganized paper I have ever read (laughing)." You just say this poor student, she obviously tried so hard.

> I tend to scribble all over students' papers, so I think I probably do the same if [on-campus] with that. What I really like about doing it by distance is they have these little pink sheets where you can write a whole page of instructor comments and I incorporated that into on-campus because we never had sort of a formal thing. So the courses that I am involved with on campus, we do that, because I really, not only do I like to write comments and reactions to what they've written in the paper, then I like to try to give them a half a page--maybe a whole page sometime, of sort of like a summary. And I'll write, "Check page five and you'll see what I mean, da, da, da, da."

In addition to caring about students, participants indicated a need to demonstrate respect for them. Nicole described how she approached her students to develop a climate of mutual respect:

> Part of the whole thing about working with post-RNs is the respect and mutual respect that has to be built up. I walk in the first day and I refer to them as my colleagues. And they are my colleagues. And I think that that's just a critical kind of thing. Because I mean, just because they are here today--I could be in their classroom if they're teaching me CPR or first aid. And it's just that. And you have to constantly maintain that.

Nicole proceeded to say that she believed post-RN students should be treated like adults and professionals:

> I expect them to get what they want out of it. Honestly, through process I get them to take a look at where they are at, and I get them to evolve. So, that's why I say, "I don't teach you anything. I facilitate your learning." That's my philosophy. And I think we all have that philosophy. Whether we make it explicit or not it doesn't mean it's not true. And [I tell them] "You are responsible. If you don't come to class it's your business. I am giving you a book to read for the course. You read it and you will know what you need to know for the subject area and I am not going to address the book unless you bring it up."
>
> They have everything I put up on the overheads so they can just take notes accordingly. And I think that's really important so they are not copying stuff down--they are listening. And again as I said, I do small group work. I do an individual reflective activity right off when I go

> into class. So they have to start thinking about something and that sort of hooks them for the content.

She described her own negative experiences as a post-RN student, saying she wanted to create a more positive experience for other nurses:

> They've gone through the rite of passage and that's a terrible rite of passage. We have to learn all this stuff. "And if you are registered then I want to jettison you into a creative expand the profession--expand yourself experience. And only come if you want to come, and I will put up incredible challenges."
>
> You know, my courses are tough...They love my courses, they love [two other faculty members]--we make them think. We give them no answers, not even the young ones. I say to them " No, here's what you have to do. You don't ever have to come into this class again. You can stay registered to pass the assignments if you think you can do it." What I want to do is share, and focus on processes in class and that's what we do.

Another participant, Sandy, supported the need for faculty to interact with students in such a way that they create a comfortable environment for learning to occur. She explained that is was important to:

> Foster...a comfortable environment for learning to occur, so students feel comfortable to ask questions. And lets face it. I think when you call someone at home, even though those are tutors hours and that, there's a little bit of uncomfortability about calling people in their homes, you don't want to disturb them and those kinds of things.
>
> So I think it's my job as a tutor to make sure that students understand that that's okay and that I'm comfortable with that, and that really, I don't mind. And therefore, that atmosphere that I create makes them more comfortable hopefully to connect, if you will.

The participants in this study showed considerable commitment to their programs, to distance education, and most importantly to their students. Examples of their commitment were displayed explicitly and implicitly. For instance, during my site visits at least two individuals were obviously quite ill but they continued to go to

work and teach their classes. In these situations, because there was no mechanism to notify students when classes were cancelled, instructors felt compelled to teach even under difficult circumstances.

As Nicole described it, "If we are on our death beds we still go in." Her story below is a fascinating example of teacher commitment to students. Nicole began this story by relating how she had been forced to cancel a class a few weeks before when she was caught in a "whiteout" in a snowstorm while driving to the classroom from her home outside of the city. She disclosed, "And that's the first time that I've ever cancelled class and I just felt terrible. And most of them made use of the time, I had read later--they wrote in their journals. But some of them were really angry." Then, looking out the window, she reflected:

> If this snow continued we would have whiteout pockets and we've had post-RN students killed driving at night [to distance sites]. We had a really devastating hit last year. And it's funny when I was stuck in that whiteout and I knew I was on [a particular road] but I didn't know where I was. And then I saw a sign--there's only one place I could have turned off that had a phone. And I didn't know if I was on the road or off the road and nobody else was around. It was just terrible!
>
> But I could feel that student sitting in the car next to me saying, "Look, don't push it! You don't know where you are. You don't know if you are on the road. And you can even see the edge of the road." And you know it was unbelievable! And so when I saw that and I said, "That's it!" I just pulled in...I am not even sure where in the country I was, until I found one little shop. I couldn't see! And so I called in here and said, "Look I have to cancel."
>
> But we try so hard to accommodate these post-RN students and I think they do appreciate it. They cannot possibly understand what this program is like.

In summary, participants in this study appeared to work diligently to create opportunities for interaction among students and between students and teachers.

There were issues raised with respect to the use of technology, and in particular, audio-teleconferencing, with optimism that the use of computer technology will help resolve some of the communication issues related to cost and accessibility that persisted

However, participants also pointed to the need to use themselves as the primary medium for interacting with students. In particular, they emphasized the importance of interacting in a timely fashion and being accessible to students. Moreover, they illustrated the need to demonstrate caring, respect and commitment to distance students when communicating verbally and in writing, and to incorporate techniques that encourage critical thinking and reflection.

Chapter 9

FINDINGS: BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS

> Schools are entrenched bureaucracies....Those educators who would like to innovate have relatively little authority to change their style....There are heroes in education, as there have always been heroes, trying to transcend the limits of the old structure; but their efforts are too often thwarted by peers and administrators.
> (Fergusen, M., 1980, p. 280)

Distance education faculty and administrators viewed as problematic the need to work within and around policies and practices designed for campus-based educational systems. Besides the need to break the rules to allow for more flexibility for students, several participants spoke of the difficulties inherent in working within the context of bureaucratic structures generally. Specifically, in terms of distance education in conventional universities, issues emerged related to barriers to creating change, structures and processes contributing to ambiguous decision-making, the perceived lack if institutional support, and invisibility of distance education.

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

There were many barriers in the way of making changes in their programs according to participants. For example, Nicole lamented on the need to develop policies and procedures more appropriate for distance education, but was not at all optimistic that such changes were forthcoming:

> One does not change things around here. No way! This is university policy. You are not going to change it here. There are too many other--too many other battles. That is not going to change. It is university policy that applies.... The system is an entrenched system. You are not going to make those kinds of changes. Its bureaucratic and its it's own culture--it doesn't see anything past itself.

Bureaucratic systems posed barriers for other participants in terms of making changes in their distance education offerings and new program development. Kelly discussed changes that needed to occur in their institution, describing at the faculty level:

> There are constraints at many different levels because we work in a bureaucracy. The first constraint is probably the will of the faculty. The way that governance works here is what is called faculty governance, and you know quite honestly sometimes it can be very obstructive in trying to get decisions made.
>
> And so a few people have to do a lot of work to convince the faculty that something's a good idea. And then once you've done that then you've got approval to proceed....And so, there are constraints at the faculty level. If people don't buy in it is hard to make a change.

In addition, constraints were identified at various other levels, including senior administration:

> At the senior university level there's a bureaucracy obviously. So for example, to get a proposal written for [a new initiative] we have to meet with the registrar's office, the fees office, the faculty association, the VPA, the VP finance-a couple of others. There's a bunch of people we have to meet with.

Kelly also identified the paradox presented by the need to make rapid changes but being constrained by traditional environments:

> I think the environment right now of rapid change and rapid decision-making; people are uncomfortable with that. And so rather than make a change you end up with indecision. And I think people are using old ways of decision-making in a new environment and I don't think we can. Personally, I don't think we can survive in that type of environment. We have to be able to move with the times.
>
> So, by virtue of the fact that we are in a big institution, and there are bureaucracies at various levels--to that extent there are constraints placed upon us to try and get things going.

Most participants reported having the freedom and power in their positions to make some minor academic changes in their programs. However, they identified barriers such as lack of funding or lack of faculty or institutional support or commitment to make significant changes such as expanding the number of distance courses or programs they offered.

AMBIGUOUS DECISION-MAKING

In describing the position of the distance education post-RN program within the context of the university, and their relationship to Continuing Studies, Nicole illustrated her concerns about the bureaucratic system she was working in. While pointing to a chart, which summarized the roles and responsibilities of the different individuals involved in distance education course offerings, she noted,

> In order to make a decision regarding anything, I usually have to go to four different pieces of paper because of the way the system is set up....

The relationship of the school to other departments in the university was seen to pose administrative difficulties for others. For instance, Melanie who said cited this as an administrative issue noted:

> There are difficulties with a joint thing. I don't want to complain about Continuing Studies, but some of it is related to that. And I think some of the pressure from within the university to move the delivery side to the academic units comes from that as well.

In a similar vein, Diane outlined the problems she experienced in trying to coordinate her activities with another department in her university:

> Every time I go into DE I am encountering a different person that I need to liaise with. The supports are there, I think. I don't find they are very coordinated. I find there are a lot of duplications in efforts in what we are doing here in the school and what they are doing over there....I know there has to be a liaison for this, but these are some of

> the activities I find I could be doing, and they are probably doing and so you know....It strikes me there is a lot of duplication.

More than one individual raised concerns about the duplication of effort and role ambiguity due to the structure of the organization. This is how Diane described her experience:

> This is a staff position and considered I think, to be fairly autonomous. However, there are limits on what I can and cannot do, because you've got an associate director of undergraduate studies, and this is an undergraduate program, so its important I liaise with her. And I am quickly learning when I am cutting somebody else's grass and when I am not.
>
> Then you have an admission's officer for the school of nursing, who's been heavily into advising students and suddenly this is part and parcel of my job. So at what point do I cut off and she take up? That sort of thing. You have to walk a very fine line so people don't feel threatened that you are going to take away their work.

Nicole encountered role conflict as well. In discussing the structure for decision-making in terms of granting students letters of permission to take courses, or exemptions from courses she noted,

> The decision has to go through the student advisor, anything of a course [nature], getting advanced standing in a course or whatever...it has to go through her. But she'll consult with me most of the time, and that's one of the roles I play. She doesn't make those decisions on her own. We make them together. Which to me is duplicating effort. It's is not so much in the best interest of the student or the program. It's the way it is. Let me make it [the decision] and leave it!
>
> Why do we need to meet like to do this? So many hours, so many hours we have just been sitting! Thank God we like each other!

Alice identified a related issue, which she believed posed constraints on her ability to perform her job, and also contributed to role stress. She maintained, "Probably, the biggest barrier is being the source of information but not the person who sets the rules. That can be a little stressful." The notion of role conflict was

similar to concerns echoed by Diane, who also identified the lack of coordination of activities and duplication of efforts to be problematic in her job.

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Many participants identified a common issue in the lack of coordinated information systems to enable them to track students in programs offered in dual-mode universities. The problem of tracking students was attributed mainly to the practice of students frequently transferring back and forth between on-campus courses and distance courses. This was compounded by the fact, as Jane indicated, that students could take certain courses without being enrolled in a program, and they could be enrolled in a program but not taking courses.

Therefore, it was difficult to identify those who were "officially registered" and those who were non-credential or visiting students. When asked, it was impossible for any of the participants to provide an accurate number of students in their programs. Melanie noted,

> We've had this problem of saying well, we have [a certain number] of students in the post-RN program. But a large percentage of them were not taking courses in any semester and we didn't even know where they were to some extent.

Similarly, when I asked Rita about the number of students in their post-RN program she admitted, "This is one of the hardest figures to come by." She went on to explain that the difficulty was due to the flexibility within the system which enabled students to "take a break for a year out." However, she was clearly frustrated with the failure of the university to develop a system for tracking students, regardless of their standing. This is how she described the issue:

> I have to say, we do not have a good record keeping system in this

> university as far as counting students. And I thought it was just peculiar to this school. But it's just incredible! And they can't seem to track for us always, whether they are distance or whether they are post-RNs on campus. And it's been driving me crazy! And one day, I walked out to one of the admission officers and I said, "There must be some way we can know exactly how many post-RN's we have. And her comment was, "Short of going out and counting the files, we wouldn't know."
>
> And it just astounded me! But then she explained that some of them maybe have passed their deadline, but the arrangements haven't been made about whether they are in or out. You know extensions--some of them take a year off or something if a personal matter has arisen, that they can't continue. So who's actually showing up in the Registrar's Office will look a little different than what's in our file cabinet. And that has to be sorted out.

Nicole appeared equally frustrated when she discussed their problems accounting for students. Like in Rita's situation, part of the problem was attributed to difficulties tracking part-time students, and the other was due to the lack of a computerized system to manage information about courses and students. Nicole explained how students may either not show up for classes, drop out, or take more than one at a time. "They can do what ever they want, which is why we have such headaches! We cannot track anybody." Showing me her many sheets of paper containing class schedules, she said, "We have to do this all by hand.... How do you do it when you've got all these students around and we have no way we can't track them?"

With regard to the general system within which their distance education program was being offered, Nicole had this to say:

> The system is such a clunky system. I mean it obviously works. But it only works because we make it work. Nothing is easy here...It is not a good distance one. I am drawing on my own experience.... We are starved for resources....

Furthermore, Nicole's more serious concern was that they had no systematic mechanism in place to notify students if classes were cancelled. "Students get very upset about that." Joanne too shared this concern, and although she indicated that classes were rarely cancelled, two were cancelled due to illness during my site visit. Canceling classes had serious implications for students, as many of them drove substantial distances to teleconference sites to attend class, and they often had to drive in poor weather conditions.

Obtaining the resources necessary to develop and maintain the infrastructure to support distance education was Maggie's concern as well, because "our resources to develop the courses in the first place have not really grown. They certainly have not grown as quickly as the courses we are developing and administering." Explaining that the number of courses they managed had doubled, Maggie noted with dismay, "And at the same time, budget cutbacks have strained the resources we have."

Other infrastructure problems in this institution made it difficult for them to provide the level of service they strove for. For instance, Glenda pointed out that not only did they lack resources, they had not been successful when requesting more funding: "We always ask. And up to now, we haven't had much control over it. There are a lot of issues here. One of them is space." With that remark, I was taken on a tour of the facilities, and saw first hand what was meant by: "We are really space constrained. And we have people working in spaces that are far too small.... So, even if we got the funding to get another position or two, where would we put the people?"

Despite the concern over resources, these participants had what they described as a very well organized system in place to track their course materials. Glenda explained: "We have a system in place that we track our course materials [with]. We can know exactly what goes in to a student, when it goes out--down to 100th of a second--on our data base." Then, showing me their system, Glenda noted:

> We log in and out our assignments and exams once they are written and submitted.... And we have a log of what actually happened--When we received it from the student or the invigilator, when it goes to the instructor, when the instructor sent it back to us and when it is sent to the student.

On the other hand, there was no method to track what transpired once students received their course materials. Glenda commented on this aspect,

> We don't have a 1-800 number. Our instructors are available to the students, each one identifies times during the week when they will be available for the students. And we hope students will avail themselves of those services. But we don't know from the minute the student registers to the time things go out to students in information packages, to an examination notification, and the exam comes back, whether some students are actually out there. We don't have a telephone tutor system. The instructors are their own tutors, unlike many places. And there is no logging of any of these calls or who phones when.

These individuals clearly identified the structures and supports they required:

> From our end, I would like to see some standardization of how things are going to be done. So that everybody is aware of how things should proceed. Information is timely to staff, instructors and to students. Because students are the most important. They are the ones who are keeping us in business.
>
> Obviously, we want the support of the university in our delivery, and a recognition from the departments that distance education is a viable method of delivery and we should put some emphasis on it.

Similarly, in Lou's estimation "having the infrastructure in place," was an important factor in their distance education offerings. Remarking on the number of

students they managed in their program, she said, "I think it is absolutely amazing that it works as smoothly as it does." However, she did describe structures and processes that she believed posed barriers. For example, she referred to the telephone registration system as,

> A very bizarre system....It's touch-tone, and it's the most bizarre system I have heard of in my entire life! It just seems so very complex. And all kinds of barriers go up for students to get through that. So, I think that's a very big problem. We don't have a 1-800 number, and they can't use Visa, so they get billed somehow. And it's a very complex calculation that happens. I think that's got to change!

Nevertheless, despite this concern, she accredited the university with being somewhat supportive of distance education in order for the program to operate as smoothly as it did. She surmised, "I think there are structural supports in this university because it does have some, albeit limited, commitment to distance education."

On the other hand, some administrators did not believe they had adequate support compared to the supports provided to other similar programs in the university. For example, comparing her workload to her counterparts in other faculties, Melissa clearly illustrated blatant inequities within the university. First pointing out that most of the individuals in her capacity were women, Melissa summarized the situation like this:

> There is a man [in another department], but he also has an assistant who does a lot of the work that I do. Which is a bone of contention for me! In the glory days he managed to get that. And so, they are a smaller program than we are, but more heavily staffed. So, that's one of the tensions within the Faculty right now, is inequitable staffing.
>
> So he is able to say, "As program director, I don't need to deal with delivery." He has a program coordinator to deal with delivery! So he

> can attend to "global issues," as he says. Whereas, I am running 150 miles an hour doing delivery and global issues! Something just has to give! He is able to devote a lot of time just looking into videoconferencing and so forth and so on.

She noted as well that the inequities in staffing were directly related to inequities in funding:

> All the budgets are being scrutinized. Well, why is that they have more funding than we do when we have more registrations? I don't know what the outcome will be!

Similarly, Ava believed their program was treated inequitably compared to other programs and Faculties. She maintained that if budgets were reduced, their distance program would be singled out more quickly than the campus-based programs. She reasoned,

> Well, I think that it probably would happen, not because it is the right decision, but because it [distance education] has such a stepchild relationship within the university structure....[This university] is I think, regrettably far behind other universities across Canada in sorting out where distance delivery fits....There has been a lot of old guard thinking loping around this campus.

Furthermore, she noted that with previous budget reductions, "Nursing has taken astonishing hard treatment, I guess based on the assumption that the women will shut up and do their jobs. There is no way they would have gotten away with that with a man in the driver's seat!"

On the other hand, one of the administrators from a service department, which was predominantly male, perceived the infrastructure support for distance education from senior administration to be very strong. Dawn suggested that there was:

> ...complete, fantastic support! It's amazing how this place has supported our Centre. They have never, ever refused me a request for

> funding. Never! I mean, they never say no! The whole administration has really given full backing to us from the beginning.

Similarly, Kelly reported that although the bureaucracy was tedious to work through, overall support for distance education in the university was "very positive" from people such as the Registrar and library staff who had been "extremely supportive." However, in this case, despite the felt support, there were concerns about the lack of funding for distance education programs. As Kelly said,

> We are not a large faculty, so we don't have a lot of money and we don't have a lot of sponsorship either. So I am always saying at admin. meetings that we have to spend money to make money. And by that I mean we have to spend money on marketing and advertising to make money, in the sense of student recruitment. It's difficult when you are on such a tight budget.

Likewise, Melanie presented as her major challenge the need to deal with the question of, "How do you provide the maximum service in education, research, community service, with shrinking dollars?" And that, she observed, "is a constant preoccupation." In a similar vein, Diane noted that the main issue she faced was,

> Funding. It's a big issue. We are probably prepared and willing to offer a variety of programs--it's funding. We have had such serious cutbacks here at the university that [we] have had to try to expand programming without the additional staffing.

In summary, it appeared that administering distance education nursing programs in these dual mode institutions was problematic in that there was perceived to be limited support for distance education programs, their faculty members and administrators. As Bev described it, "From administration of the university, I think it [distance education] is better tolerated. I don't think it's blessed--but I think it is better tolerated." Dillon and Walsh (1992) and Olcott and Wright (1995) have

discussed research that suggests there is a lack of institutional support and leadership in conventional universities for distance education. This is compounded by the pervasive view that distance education is peripheral to the central mission of the university.

In this study all participants expressed a need for more institutional supports for distance education. Inadequate systems for registering and tracking students, lack of recognition of the value of distance education, and inadequate and inequitable funding for programs were all identified as issues. Yet, as Hyatt (1998) suggested,

> The most important factor, however, in whether a distance learning program grows or the direction it takes is most likely the administration and faculty of the college. Lacking sufficient support from either group will make the road rocky, if not impassible (p.1)

INVISIBILITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Micheal Jeffries (1997) pointed out that one advantage of mixed mode institutions where both distance education and conventional education are offered, is the ability to draw upon the resources of the resident faculty and services. However, he went on to say that it is just as likely that the opposite could occur, as some faculty and administrators may consider distance education to be inferior to on-campus education. The notion that distance education was perceived as less effective and less important than on-campus education was expressed in this study by faculty and administrators alike.

In each of these mixed-mode institutions participants shared experiences that suggested that others viewed the distance education programs for post-RN students as inferior. While some individuals seemed to be only mildly concerned about it, others

considered this to be a serious issue. Most participants reported experiencing the effects of invisibility within their own nursing faculties, by faculty members from other disciplines, and by senior administration.

Bev shared the perception that faculty members in their school who were not involved in distance education tended to hold a less than positive view of it. She noted, "Our faculty has not always been the most supportive of distance education." Although she was quick to add that perhaps there was "nothing really wrong with that," she appeared to be disturbed by it, as manifested by her tone and facial expression. Nevertheless, she explained the reaction of other nursing faculty members this way: "They're not involved, and when people aren't involved they just don't get on the bandwagon."

Bev also rationalized that the lack of visibility of distance education in their institution was a factor contributing to the situation, "I think if we were more visible, and if people saw an option for more people to be involved they'd be more supportive." However, when asked whether she believed the distance education program was treated equal or similar to other programs in the faculty or in the university she replied, "No. I think it's not. It would be unfair to say it is. It doesn't have the same profile that other programs do." Accepting some of the responsibility for this she noted:

> Some of that could be our responsibility a little bit. The need to downgrade this outreach program as a program might have put it into a--well people just see it as a delivery mechanism and therefore treat it accordingly--maybe that's okay.

However, Lou raised the issue of the lack of valuing of distance education and like her, Bev shared this concern:

> But my concern though is, I don't think everybody in the school sees the need for it as much as those folks that are directly involved in distance. There are still those questions about quality assurance. Are you doing as good a job? Are you tracking them down? Faculty still struggle with students being in the system and we not knowing exactly where they are.... And there's a lot of them who really question the whole socialization process and how can you learn without having a discussion.

Moreover, other participants expressed the view that distance education programs are undervalued within the Nursing Faculties. For instance, Nicole was clearly annoyed by:

> The whole issue of how tenured faculty view distance education within the school of nursing. And I am not saying that they don't hold it--yes, I am saying that--basically what you hear without it really being said, is that DE courses are not as rigorous as on campus. It's that whole notion that you have to be in a group to learn. It's very much the traditional way that we've taught on campus. From the faculty perspective it's the letting go--not having the same degree of control over what the student does or does not do. So I think faculty thinking about distance education is an issue, and getting that same valuing of distance courses that we have on campus.

In yet another university with a well-established distance education program in nursing, one individual noted that while the nursing faculty overall were very supportive of distance education, the larger university community was not. In Rita's estimation the faculty were very supportive of distance education, "Because it's the umbrella Faculty that has other programs, there's terrific support from within the Faculty to help each other and develop mechanisms to look at common issues." However, she went on to point out: "A lot of the university doesn't know what

distance is about. First of all, a lot of them don't know we are doing it, and those that do, don't know what it's about."

She illustrated this by describing the experience at their university when her Faculty attempted to gain support for new graduate programs:

> .....The questions that arise are basically questions about distance. The tone underneath is it is too Mickey Mouse. How do you maintain your quality? How could you possibly keep in touch with students who are distant? You know, how could you supervise anybody at a distance? You know, all those questions that frustrate all of us--to say, "How can we teach them?" How can they ever know that there are different ways than the traditional "bums in seats in classrooms" approach to teaching? But it is amazing to me that [this university] has been known for its distance programs across the country, but within the university there are so few faculties who understand what it is.

Maggie and Glenda both commented on the lack of awareness of and support for distance education within their university. Maggie speculated,

> I am sure there are faculty members who teach on this campus, who have been here for many, many years, and who are probably barely aware that there is a distance education program. That students can do courses without being sitting in neat little rows on campus here. And it's not just faculty members; it's department heads.
>
> And I guess for the general administration of the university, that distance education is often looked on as a sort of "add-on," something extra. That a department head can allocate resources to on-campus teaching, and if they have something left over--or should I say maybe an instructor who doesn't really fit in--they can be allocated to the distance courses. And so that's what we've been fighting.

Others, such as Rita and Bev, who were struggling with the lack of respect for distance education in their institution, believed there was a need to make distance education more visible. Rita maintained that in order for change to occur, people who are knowledgeable about distance education need to concentrate on: "Making it better

known to others, so that it has both a respect and an ability to have other people join in the idea that this is a good way people can learn."

Black (1992) and Clark (1993) in their respective studies on faculty support for and attitudes toward distance education, found that familiarity with distance education is associated with a more positive view. Furthermore, as Black (1992) indicated, how faculty view distance education is important because, as participants on faculty, departmental and senate levels of university governance they are involved in the decision-making processes regarding program approvals, resource allocation and regulations governing the programs.

Indeed, one participant, Kelly experienced first hand the influence of faculty members on decision-making, and observed, "It can be incredibly frustrating at times to get policies pushed through, because it seems everyone must get a kick at the cat. And if some have not had their kick, they don't want the policy to go through."

With regard to the attitude of nursing faculty members who taught courses on-campus in their university, Gail stated,

> I don't perceive that there is a lot of support--sort of active support. I think some people think of it as something other people do. They don't necessarily see that education can be beyond university walls. I think sometimes they think students will get a substandard education.
>
> And I don't think that it is--that if it's distance education it's substandard. I don't think the two equate. You can also have a substandard education on campus. I think in many ways I would almost call it benign ignoring sometimes. You know, they just kind of let those who are interested just go ahead and do it, and the other people just sort of ignore it.

Mary, commenting on the view toward distance education from faculty involved in graduate programs in her university, said, "There wasn't a lot of interest. I

think faculty felt (and this sounds a bit crass) but, "They learn best at the foot of the Master," and they want them there." Interestingly, Sherry, used the same term, when she referred to the lack of prestige in distance education within the academic community in her university. She did not believe this same view was necessarily shared at the senior executive or 'power level' as she put it,

> The straight Arts and Sciences couldn't see that learning could even take place by distance, because of that rather elitist view that people have to come and be at the "foot of the Master" in order to learn. But, more and more that's disappearing.

However, In Lou's estimation, the elitist view is not disappearing as fast as she would like. She noted ruefully,

> Within the Faculty there's a good feel for distance, because we are all reliant on it, and in fact, it probably pays our way in many other ways. But in the context of the wider university community there is very little understanding, and quite a snobbish attitude towards distance--that its second rate and not worthy and all the rest of it.

Melissa observed as well, "There is growing interest but there is still that vanguard that's saying, "No, its not real education." Indeed, she firmly believed that distance education is not seen as equitable to on-campus education, and furthermore, that this is reflected in the way the programs are funded:

> The rhetoric is there but will they really give the dollars?....The other tension is, well if they don't give us the funding we'll have to get it from the students. But then you'll have the Board of Governors--there is one who is advocating, saying, "Well why should distance students pay more? They should be as heavily subsidized as on-campus students."

Since its inception, funding had been an issue in this program as Sherry, its originator pointed out:

> I was going through battles with Extension and with other schools about our right to use funds generated by our distance program to feed back into our distance program to make it a better program. Those battles took a lot of my energy and time. So I suppose you could say budgeting issues were critical issues.

Another participant believed that if university senior administrators were genuinely supportive of distance education, they would do more than "pay lip service to it." Commenting on budgetary issues and "the university strategic plan which was just launched," Glenda reflected, "I think in some ways, since the introduction of that plan, or the release of that plan, we've seen more words than action."

Turoff (1998) maintained that at the heart of the funding problem is the fact that universities have not clarified the goals of distance education in their organizations, resulting in inconsistencies between their objectives and their budget practices. He commented on the practice of funding distance programs differently from on-campus programs, saying,

> Institutions are approaching distance learning by walking into the future backwards....[because of]... budgeting idiosyncracies...the distance student is paying for the costs of classrooms they never use and the opportunity to use the income from distance students to improve the distance program is non-existent. (p. 10)

Besides being disadvantaged by the funding mechanism, Nicole believed that the distance education program for the post-RN's and the faculty who were closely connected to it, were disadvantaged by the fact, that unlike the other programs in their department, there was no dedicated faculty for the distance education post-RN program. She contended that the reliance on sessional instructors rather than having permanent staff, affected the quality of the program as well as her ability to plan:

> There is no group of people that works just with the post-RNs. We are scattered all over the place. There is no post-RN faculty! There are people who teach in the post-RN program. And I find that to be a real bugger! Because, who is my faculty? We have too many part-timers. We are not a team. We have no identity per se.
>
> We have all of these part-timers, but a part-timer is a sessional lecturer. That is, they are only paid to do the teaching--start with the first class--end with exams. That's it! No committees. No extra association with the university. Which is terrible! I have been arguing--but we are not going to get it--for permanent part-time positions, where people are committed not just to the basics of running the course, but to the school and the program.

Another participant who was a seasoned administrator and distance educator raised as an issue the need for faculty members who are dedicated to distance education. When asked what she saw as the main administrative issues, Mary stated without hesitation:

> Getting a faculty that is dedicated. I use that word dedicated loosely because in this faculty you could not just be dedicated to the DE program. But at least if you are really convinced that you are going to do the best job possible.... And faculty development. Development takes a lot of time....to get them to realize the difference between distance and on-campus; that you just couldn't fly by the seat of your pants and hope you had your notes from the last term and walk into the classroom. Because it [your course] was there for God and the world to take a look at.

Gail believed that the view of distance education was changing, albeit slowly:

I think the rest of the university is beginning to wake up to distance education. But I think, you know, the main focus here has been on-campus. And you know the term marginalized? It very clearly describes what distance education has been at [this university] for a long time.

Evidently, participants held the view that distance education had a position of relatively low status in dual-mode universities and consequently, it was not supported

to the same extent as on-campus programs. Many also shared the view that concomitantly, students often felt they were not treated equitably. For instance, in Ann's experience:

> Distance students sometimes fancy themselves more or less as second-class citizens. And we strive--we turn ourselves over and upside down to eliminate the possibility of giving that impression. But nonetheless, some of the students do feel--particularly if something goes wrong with the electronic equipment--they feel that they are more or less at the mercy of the technology.

Nicole was convinced that perhaps distance education itself was not the entire issue, but rather that the issue was compounded by other factors, such as the type of student being served. In her view a larger issue centered on the fact that post-RN programs were perceived as less important or less significant than generic [or basic] nursing programs. She explained it thus:

> The attitude here is so obvious--they are only post-RNs, they're only post-RNs. Why are we so fussed about them? Why are we so worried about quality education? They are not at the same standard as the generic students. I mean that's been around forever.

It seemed apparent that while most participants believed their students' status as post-RNs affected the type of services they required Nicole believed it also negatively affected the quality of service they were provided. Other participants believed that they were marginalized because of the relative invisibility and subsequent negative attitude towards and lack of support for distance education. This was further compounded by the lack of a cohesive faculty group who could act as advocates for distance education. From the perspective of the participants in this study, it seemed that in most of the institutions distance education was considered an

add-on and not part of the mainstream. Therefore, the structures and resources necessary for student and faculty support were often lacking or uncoordinated.

Researchers such as Olcott and Wright (1995) contended that the problem of lack of faculty support for distance education in dual mode universities could be attributed to the fact that "faculty participation" in distance education has often been viewed simply as teaching via a particular educational technology. They maintained however, that technology has little to do with it. Rather, "It is the perception among faculty that the team approach to designing distance instruction may undermine the faculty member's autonomy and control of the curriculum" (p. 6).

Moreover, these authors professed that faculty members who are involved in distance education can play a key role as ambassadors to potential distance educators, and they can play an advocacy role for distance teaching to departmental chairpersons, deans, and the executive administration, and to students. Some study participants expressed the belief that by increasing the awareness of the potential for distance education in their institutions they could advocate for it and perhaps heighten its profile. However, they provided evidence that at least for now, distance education is at best tolerated and is far from being part of the mainstream.

Chapter 10

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> There is nothing but a vague fever before the art of artistic expression, and only the work itself, completed and understood, is proof that there was something, rather than nothing to be said.
>
> (Merlou-Ponty, 1982, p. 623)

In this chapter I present a summary of my findings, discuss my interpretations, and offer recommendations for further research. First though, I present a review of the research process I used, including the purpose of the study, the methods I used to conduct my research, and the components of my analysis.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine administrative issues associated with post-RN baccalaureate degree programs offered by distance education in Canada. As a basis for the study, Moore and Kearsley's (1996) definition was used, where distance education is:

> Planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements. (p. 2)

The study centered on the broad two-part question: What are the issues faced by administrators of nursing degree programs offered through distance education and what processes have they put into place to address these issues?

METHODS USED

To undertake the study, interviews were conducted according to accepted qualitative methods with individuals involved with distance education nursing degree

programs in dual-mode universities in Canada. Administrators from five well-established nursing programs were contacted. This group formed the original participants of the study. Early in the study it became apparent that other individuals, most of them recommended by the original participants, would also make valuable contributions. Therefore, through a snowball selection process a total of 28 were ultimately interviewed. In addition, a variety of institutional documents were examined.

COMPONENTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Using a naturalistic, interpretive approach to inquiry, I sought to better understand the issues associated with nursing degree programs offered by distance education. I interviewed those who were intimately involved with administration in distance education to gain an understanding of how they would identify the issues and make sense of their experiences. Concordant with this approach I organized what I observed, heard and read according to my respondents' observations and my own insights, and these issues and themes were verified by my participants.

I analyzed the data from a perspective that assumes people, situations and events do not possess meaning, but that meaning is conferred on them. People actively engage in creating and interpreting their worlds in a purposeful way, and these interpretations are shared with others in an effort to achieve some sort of consensus or shared meaning. Furthermore, the analysis was undertaken not in an attempt to develop theory or to determine the "truth," but to gain understanding and find meaning from the perspective of the participants.

Consistent with a naturalistic, interpretive approach I contend that the participants provided the first stage of analysis as they shared their experiences with me through interviews and conversations. Their narratives and comments are intertwined with my field notes and excerpts from related literature, which provided additional perspectives in my analyses.

In the next stage, I categorized, synthesized, and searched for patterns in the data and interpreted them according to my perspective, presenting them in the form of emerging issues. According to Dewey (1958), recognition serves the purpose of identification, and when attaching a name or label to something according to some previously formed scheme of classification or stereotype one has successfully recognized it. However, Carper (1978) maintained:

> Perception goes beyond recognition in that it includes an active gathering of details and scattered particulars into an experienced whole for the purpose of seeing what is there. It is the perception rather than mere recognition that results in a unity of ends and means which gives the action the esthetic quality. (p.17)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

I grouped the administrative issues that emerged from the study under six major categories. The categories of student participation, student support services, faculty participation, program development and delivery, interaction, and bureaucratic systems are summarized here, along with their associated issues; methods used to resolve the issues and related literature.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION: ISSUES

Issues related to student participation in these post-RN degree programs offered by distance education were related to recruiting and admitting students,

dealing with distance students as adult learners, and creating flexibility versus sticking to the rules.

Recruiting and Admitting Students

The ability to recruit and admit students to certain programs or to particular sites was a concern expressed in terms of both too few and too many students. Having too few students presented funding and pedagogical implications and raised the question of whether to continue the class or even the program. On the other hand, having too many students also had pedagogical as well as space implications.

Clinical courses were identified as "bottlenecks" and impediments to accepting large numbers of students. These courses presented challenges related to finding appropriate clinical experiences and preceptors, the need to adjust class size and faculty workloads to accommodate the extra work involved, and the availability of faculty and the funding to hire them to teach these courses.

Distance Education Students as Adult Learners

Participants noted that a factor that attracted them to these programs was the assumption that post-RN students are mature adult learners. They also indicated that there were unique challenges associated with these students. Some individuals believed this level of learner presented a paradox. Many participants believed that because these students were mature and experienced they were easier to work with than younger students were. Conversely, others noted that because of their complex lives, post-RN students also had more personal problems, were more demanding, and required more attention and time than other students do.

A shift in student demographics emerged as a concern that could escalate in the future. Whereas, for the most part the assumption existed that post-RNs students are adult learners, many participants recognized that this trend is changing, with students entering programs at a much younger age than in the past, and with little or no experience. The lack of clinical experience and relatively low level of maturity manifested by this younger population had particular implications for the clinical courses where instructors and preceptors had come to expect mature, experienced nurses. In addition, this younger student population suggested a need to question the appropriateness of programs that were established on the assumption that students in these post-RN distance education programs would be mature adult learners.

Creating Flexibility versus Sticking to the Rules

Participants identified as problematic the expectation that they conform to traditional rules and regulations when they believed more flexibility was required. It was common practice to bend the rules and extend deadlines or give extensions in order to accommodate the students and their busy, complex lives. The constant pressure to conform was identified as an issue for instructors, advisors and administrators. However, budgetary, space and accounting implications could arise from increasing the flexibility so that students could transfer back and forth between on and off campus programs, drop in and out of courses and programs, and have unlimited extensions to complete the courses.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION: RESOLUTION

Participants used various means to deal with issues related to recruiting and admitting students to post-RN programs offered by distance education. When low

enrolment was a concern, actions to attract students included making the programs more flexible, promoting the programs at conferences, travelling to various sites to meet with potential students, and sending program and course information to hospitals. When high enrolments existed, extra sessions were offered, instructors accepted larger numbers of students, or students were required to wait until the course was offered again.

Concerns associated with clinical courses and the ability to admit students persisted despite attempts to minimize the problems. For example, most programs had one individual responsible for coordinating clinical placements in order to acquire appropriate placements and clinical preceptors for students. In addition, in one program clinical preceptors were reimbursed for working with students. However, even with financial compensation as an incentive it was difficult to convince working nurses to preceptor students. Participants indicated that this could become a greater concern in the future with a growing population of younger, inexperienced nurses entering post-RN programs, as they require more supervision and assistance from preceptors who are already experiencing heavy demands from their work.

The recognition that clinical courses were more work than straight theory courses led administrators to adjust faculty workloads and add financial incentives to entice faculty members to teach these courses. Nevertheless, the need to place limits on the number of students admitted to clinical courses remained a concern because of difficulties in hiring faculty or in acquiring funding to offer more courses.

Most administrators recognized the unique challenges mature students presented and they attempted to structure courses and programs to deal with these

challenges. This included the need to recognize prior experience, giving credit for courses taken elsewhere, offering teleconference and videoconference sessions at times which would accommodate working nurses, and respecting their added demands of work and family obligations.

On the other hand, participants recognized that there are unresolved curriculum issues related to the shift in student demographics and the relatively inexperienced students now entering the programs. In addition to the implications for clinical courses mentioned above, administrators raised concerns about the appropriateness of courses and programs that were designed for more experienced nurses. None of the participants indicated that anything was being done to address this issue beyond recognizing the potential problems that could evolve.

The need for flexibility was being addressed on an individual level by bending the rules when particular situations arose. However, on a program level, although administrators recognized and supported the need to allow students to have extensions, to be able to transfer back and forth between on-campus and distance education courses and between full-time and part-time status, there were no formal policies and procedures in place to address the needs of distance education students. For the most part, at least on an official level, students who were enrolled in distance education courses and programs were required to adhere to conventional rules and regulations.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Berge (1998) observed that "many barriers to learning and teaching at a distance are caused by lack of access to resources and people (p. 11). The findings from this study indicate that the lack of both human and financial resources posed

barriers to students participating fully in distance education. Participants indicated that students were not able to access courses to the extent that they expected because there was inadequate funding and/ or faculty to enable all of the courses to be offered all of the time. Clinical courses were of particular concern because of the difficulties associated with acquiring appropriate preceptored clinical practice experiences--a concern that was expected to escalate with the trend toward to a younger student population.

Paul (1998) in two surveys of university students who were taking distance education courses, also found that there was a changing student profile. Similar to Wallace (1995), he described a shift from the number of older learners, for whom distance programs and services have traditionally been designed, to a growing number of younger learners who were combining distance study with classroom study to enable them to have increased flexibility in scheduling.

Sherry (1996) observed also that although we traditionally think of distance learners as mature adults, more and more younger students are involved in distance education. This may have implications for the ways in which courses are designed and presented to students, and for the types of support services that they may require.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: ISSUES

Participants noted that there were a variety of student services required to support distance education in traditional universities, and that there were issues associated with the provision of these student services. In particular, they identified common issues related to library services and student counseling and advising.

Library Services

While they expressed appreciation for the services that the libraries provided for distance education students, participants indicated that library services for these students remain marginalized. In addition, issues were raised with regard to inequities between distance education and campus-based students, between urban and rural students, and in relation to students who may not learn the required library and research skills.

Counseling and Advising

Counseling and advising issues revolved around the intricacies of dealing with the post-RN students and their unique circumstances and demands. As well, concerns were identified in terms of the institutional arrangements for providing these services. Frustrations were expressed related to the inability to provide the desired quality of service with limited resources, role confusion when more than one or two individuals were involved in these activities, and the need to find ways of informing distance education students about the existence of the support services.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: RESOLUTION

Student support services were identified as an area requiring attention in these distance education programs, particularly in terms of library services. Attempts were being made to develop a means to improve students' abilities to access and learn how to uses library resources, mainly through the use of technology. However, no satisfactory solution existed to deal with the concerns related to the knowledge that many students do not learn critical library skills. Similarly, participants expressed

frustration with the inability to address issues related to inequities in library services provided to distance education students and on-campus students, and between distance education students who lived in close proximity to universities and those who were in more remote locations.

Furthermore, participants generally had not developed ways to provide what they considered to be adequate counselling and advising services to distance education students. Although they seemed to be coping with this issue, they identified a need for more resources in this area due to the growing number of students they were serving. No one mentioned an alternative way of providing support services.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Issues arising in this study from the need for student support services such as library services, and counseling and advising are consistent with the views of Paul (1998), Phillips (1998), Rodrigues (1998) and Stenerson (1998). These authors all emphasized the need for student support services, including counseling, tutoring, peer support, academic advisement and library services. Rodrigues (1996) and Stenerson (1998) noted that needs of distance students and students on campus are no different as far as these services are concerned. They ask the same questions, require, and expect the same resources and the same quality of service.

Similar to the participants in this study, these authors maintained that many issues related to library access and support still need to be addressed, especially with the growing use of web-based resources and multimedia in distance education. While the use of technology may improve the services available, successful programs,

regardless of the methods used, must focus on the needs of students and not the technology itself (Sherry, 1996).

FACULTY PARTICIPATION: ISSUES

Concerns related to faculty participation in distance education coalesced around the availability of faculty who are willing and able to teach in the distance courses and the integration of traditional faculty into distance education programs. Issues included faculty attitude, workload, orientation and training, and the reward system in distance education.

Faculty Attitude

While participants indicated that generally the attitude toward distance education appeared to be improving, one of the most difficult issues some of them faced was attracting faculty who were interested in teaching in the programs. More than one participant indicated that there seemed to be no middle ground--faculty tended to "either love it or hate it." When faculty viewed distance education negatively, it was often largely due to the time and effort involved in preparing for class, frustration with the equipment, and difficulties trying to interact with students.

Clinical courses taught by distance education presented specific concerns because of the additional responsibilities for faculty members, requiring smaller class sizes and relatively low compensation for the time and effort involved. In general, the anonymity of distance students, the need to be more flexible, and the belief that students taking courses by distance education perceived that they were treated like second-class citizens despite faculty members efforts to prevent this, were all identified as factors that affected faculty attitude toward distance education.

Faculty Workload

This study revealed that most faculty members who were involved in these distance education programs were recruited from the regular faculty pool or were hired on external contracts. Regardless of how it was done, trying to establish equitable teaching workloads was identified as an issue. Course development was a particularly contentious workload issue due to the "labor intensive" work involved and because it was usually done in addition to their "regular" work. Participants, including faculty members, administrators, support staff and the student all frequently referred to the extensive and exhausting work associated with distance education.

The course revision process was problematic for three reasons. In one instance the course developers held copyright to the courses, and revisions could not be made without their permission. Secondly, even when the first course revision was part of the original course development contract, faculty members were often too busy or lacked the motivation to undertake revisions. This was compounded by the fact that there was little or no financial incentive to do so. Thirdly, as with course development and teaching, course revisions for distance education were not perceived to be "real" work or part of the professorial workload normally accepted for promotion and tenure.

Orientation and Training

Despite a common belief that distance education required different skills and responsibilities than face-to-face teaching, participants noted that there was little or no orientation, training or ongoing staff development provided for faculty members. When orientation was provided, it was usually limited to a "buddy system" where new

faculty worked for short periods "along side a course coordinator or course professor." More commonly, they "learned as they were doing it" or by "flying by the seat of their pants." With few exceptions, participants expressed concerns about the lack of orientation and training for distance education in their institutions and identified this as an area that ought to receive attention in the near future. In particular, they identified a need for distance education teachers to learn how to use technology more effectively.

Rewards

With one exception, distance education teaching and course development work were not considered professorial activities that are traditionally evaluated for promotion and tenure. Furthermore, participating in distance education endeavors meant little in the way of any other rewards for faculty. At most, they were paid extra for the distance education work they performed, but they were expected to conduct these activities outside of their regular work time.

For the most part, distance education work was not evaluated in terms of faculty performance, nor was it considered to be scholarly work. Consequently, it seemed invisible within the traditional university context. Indeed, being involved in distance education might prevent them from undertaking research and other activities normally viewed as important professorial work. This, combined with the extensive work involved, the lack of orientation and training, and inadequate reward systems could all affect faculty attitudes toward and their willingness to participate in distance education.

FACULTY PARTICIPATION: RESOLUTION

Attempts were being made to improve faculty attitude towards distance education by generally increasing their awareness about and encouraging them to become more involved in distance education. Some administrators simply had as terms of employment an expectation that faculty members teach by distance education, giving faulty members no choice. Others used strategies to encourage this, such as reducing class size, and if possible, by providing extra compensation to teach by distance education, particularly in clinical courses.

The increased workload associated with distance education course and program development was a widely recognized issue that was not easily resolved according to most participants. Recognizing distance education work as part of the "normal" professorial workload accepted for promotion and tenure was seen by one administrator as a way to reward faculty for the intensive work involved in distance education. However, this approach was not adopted as a means to address the issue of faculty participation elsewhere.

In addition, although for most participants, implementing orientation and staff development programs was identified as a means to improve the willingness and quality of faculty participation, there was very little actually being done in this area. Most participants recognized this as a priority that needed to be addressed in the near future, especially in the use of technology for teaching.

FACULTY PARTICIPATION: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Others have identified issues related to faculty participation, which are similar to those found in this study. For example, Schlosser and Anderson (1994) identified

new skills that teachers must learn when they assume the role of distance educators. These include understanding the nature and philosophy of distance education, designing and developing courseware, adapting teaching strategies, organizing instructional resources into an appropriate format, and training and practice in the use of telecommunications systems. In addition, they must become involved in dealing with copyright issues; collaborative planning, organization, and decision-making; and evaluating student achievement, attitudes, and perceptions at distance sites.

However, consistent with the findings in this study, Sherry (1996) observed that "few teachers have had sufficient training or field experience to enable them to be effective distant teachers or to use technology successfully in their classrooms" (p. 9). Furthermore, she maintained that student misbehavior and attitudes, the physical environment, technical problems and classroom dynamics are concerns in distance education that require a great deal of time, support, peer networking and guidance to overcome. However she went on to note that teachers tend to focus on the increased workload and drawbacks associated with innovations rather than the benefits. The issue of workload was a definite focus in this study.

Participants reported that newcomers to distance education learned about their distance education work "as they went along" or by "flying by the seat of their pants." At all of the sites the need for faculty orientation, training and support to teach by distance and/or to use technology was an issue raised frequently. This is also a persistent issue in the distance education literature. Clark (1993) and Dillon and Walsh (1992) cited fears of reduced student interaction, lack of spontaneity, technical and administrative problems such as problems with distribution of materials to

students and poor audio problems as faculty concerns related to student interaction. Bates (1995) indicated that faculty need training to raise their awareness of their potential and to make sure that the media are used effectively and completely.

Kearlsey (1996) also observed that "very few of today's educators (teachers and administrators) have any first hand experience with distance learning or technology" (p. 56). And almost none have a deep enough understanding of either to accomplish the kinds of changes that are required to really meet the needs of students. And yet, Stout and Mills (1998) found from their experience that the instructor is the key to the success of distance education courses: "The most important factor in determining the success of a distance learning course is the instructor's understanding of the capabilities and ability to use the media to best advantage" (p. 177).

Participants in this study raised issues related to the lack of training and the need to become more knowledgeable about distance education generally and specifically about using technology effectively. However, heavy workloads, the relatively low status of distance education, and the lack of structures and processes to support it made it difficult for faculty to develop their abilities.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY: ISSUES

According to participants, the nursing programs offered by distance education in this study tended to be developed in a sporadic, piece-meal fashion with no overall program plan. Rather, they were developed on a course-by-course approach. The unsystematic process of course and program development and delivery seemed to have had long-term consequences. In some programs, the lack of adequate policies, procedures and processes to effectively administer the programs emerged as a

concern. Participants reported program development and delivery issues related to course production, curriculum delivery and quality assurance.

Course Production

In all programs students received some type of print-based course materials, and had access to an instructor during established "tutor hours" or office hours each week. To complement this, most programs incorporated the use of audio-teleconferences, although these were not mandatory and reportedly were poorly attended. Participants noted that production problems (including copyright issues), availability of materials to students, and turn-around time for materials were issues requiring attention.

Curriculum Delivery

Because originally there was no overall long-term program plan in most of these programs, courses were developed and delivered on a one-by-one basis. This meant also that instructors were hired on a part-time basis with no faculty designated specifically for distance education. The lack of faculty "buy in" was identified as a problem resulting from this, partly because the course developer was not necessarily the teacher. Situations had occurred where subsequently the teacher did not agree with the content and wished to change the course or did not want to teach it.

Quality Assurance

In most cases course materials consisted of a standard course package prepared for distance education. In one situation, students were mailed course outlines and courses were taught by audio teleconferencing. In this instance, issues emerged

related to the quality of materials and the diversity among the instructors who made independent decisions about what was sent to students.

Curriculum reviews and revisions were carried out differently among institutions, but for the most part were based on student and instructor feedback. These were perceived to be strenuous but necessary aspects of quality assurance. However, these undertakings also had workload implications. In addition, quality issues related to course design, in terms of creating student-centered courses that encourage critical thinking and the use of analytic skills, and effective use of technology for teaching were raised as challenges.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY: RESOLUTION

Administrators were searching for ways to improve course production and delivery. However the extent to which they controlled these processes varied, and therefore affected their efficacy. In some cases nursing administrators had control only over who was hired to write the courses, while the actual course production and delivery processes came under the purveyance of another department. Some administrators hired external course writers and used sessional instructors to teach distance education courses, whereas others hired regular faculty members to undertake these activities in addition to their regular work. Neither approach seemed completely satisfactory.

Some participants were implementing a team approach to improve the course development process, with the course instructor comprising part of the course team. This also improved the potential for faculty "buy in" which was an issue in some cases. However, issues of copyright and ownership of course materials were

unresolved in one institution and this continued to affect the course development and revision process.

The issue of availability of materials to students was being dealt with in two cases by devolving responsibility for course production to the nursing faculty itself, rather than leaving this to an external department such as Continuing Education. This proved to be a successful change in these two institutions and was being considered in one other institution as a means to improve the availability of courses to students.

Problems with program quality were attributed to the lack of long term planning and lack of cohesive program structures when the programs were originally developed. Some administrators were attempting to remedy these problems by undertaking extensive program and course reviews and revisions. Other quality assurance issues were being managed by using student and instructor feedback to direct changes. However, in two programs student evaluations of courses taught by distance education were not used to evaluate faculty performance; indeed in most institutions distance education activities were not included as part of faculty members' overall performance evaluation.

Administrators noted that the quality of teleconferenced and videoconference sessions, the ability to design courses in ways that teach critical thinking skills, the quality of teaching materials, and the perception that distance education is of questionable quality were ongoing unresolved issues in program development and delivery.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Haché (1998), Moore and Kearsley (1996), Murgatroyd and Woudstra (1990), Olcott (1996) and Stenerson (1998) all supported the need for systematic and strategic planning in distance education. Anderson, Kysela and Williamson (1997) also noted that distance education processes always involve considerable organization - often more complicated and extensive than that needed in face-to-face delivery. The lack of such planning was evidenced by participants in this study who indicated that they were experiencing the effects of programs that were developed in a piece-meal fashion with no overall program plan.

The implications were manifested by the lack of structural systems to track students, inadequate student services, and the reliance on sessional faculty to develop and teach distance education courses, or the need to hire full-time regular faculty to do this in addition to their regular work. Participants identified the lack of a dedicated faculty group, lack of cohesive programs, workload concerns, and poor tracking systems as related issues arising from the way programs were planned. Furthermore, they did not foresee significant changes forthcoming in the near future to offset these.

INTERACTION: ISSUES

Issues related to interaction tended to be linked to two main concerns. The first was whether or not students required face-to-face interaction as part of their distance education experience, and the second was related to finding ways to create a means for more interaction among students and between students and instructors.

Need for Interaction

One reason participants believed that students needed some face-to-face contact and peer group interaction was to help create a university identity for students. Study groups, tele-resource centres and workshops were incorporated into some programs to accomplish this. Others used teleconferencing to link students with peers and instructors. These strategies met with dubious success in certain cases as groups did not always work well together or attendance was low.

There was a prevalent belief among participants that nursing students in distance education programs need some face-to-face contact with peers and with faculty members or mentors. Spending time on campus with their peers and with their instructors was seen as the ideal way to develop a sense of belonging and identity to the nursing program and the university, as well as helping to transform perspectives and enhance professional socialization. However, these opportunities were not available to any great extent in most programs, and where they were available, they were not mandatory.

Creating Opportunities for Interaction

Despite the general consensus that students need to connect with each other and with instructors, participants noted that students participated in interactive activities to a limited extent when afforded the opportunity to do so by telephone. Instructors reported being contacted rarely and having low attendance at teleconference sessions, perhaps because in most cases students were required to pay for long distance calls. In addition, there was an underlying assumption that if students needed assistance they would contact their instructors, and furthermore there

was no standard requirement that instructors initiate telephone contact with students at any time.

Participants identified other methods for instructors to create meaningful interactions with students, such as using their communication skills effectively when marking assignments, and incorporating the use of journals in their courses. Journals were seen as a way to get to know students better, develop an intimate relationship with them, and encourage creativity and reflective practice. In particular, participants emphasized the importance of providing constructive, timely feedback and demonstrating a respectful, caring attitude when interacting with students both verbally and in writing.

INTERACTION: RESOLUTION

Participants identified a variety of means they were using to deal with the need for interaction among students and between students and instructors. Nevertheless, the long-standing issue in distance education related to the need for ongoing interaction with faculty members and preceptors remained. Although most believed that having students spend time on campus was ideal, it was also recognized that it was difficult to incorporate mandatory on-site activities into distance education programs. Most programs did include clinical courses where students worked with preceptors at clinical sites, although there were many unresolved problems associated with this.

Besides holding group meetings on campus, the use of technology was considered to be a way to help resolve issues related to the need of interaction. Unfortunately, teleconferencing had proven to be relatively ineffective in this regard,

this was attributed to students having to pay for telephone calls, because the sessions were often held at times that were not convenient for students, and because the teleconferences were not mandatory. Therefore most institutions were exploring the possibility of expanding the use of computer technology. However, participants recognized that the diversity among students in terms of access to computer technology would continue to present challenges to implementing widespread or mandatory use of computers in these programs.

Despite the importance placed on interaction, there were no requirements in these programs for instructors to initiate contact with students or to maintain it on a regular basis. In addition, as mentioned earlier, students were required to pay for long-distance telephone calls and the costs may have been prohibitive. The use of toll-free telephone numbers was identified as one mechanism that could improve opportunities for interaction. However, with the exception of their use for library access, toll-free numbers were not available in any of these programs. Similarly, although timely and considerate written feedback was considered essential, there were no formal expectations by administrators that instructors return assignments within a specified period of time.

INTERACTION: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Verduin and Clark (1991) have discussed the importance of providing opportunities for interaction and socialization, saying "insufficient socialization is a common criticism of distance education" (p. 100). Eastmond (1995) wrote also of the isolation and loneliness that distance learners might experience from being separated from students and instructors. Participants in this study identified the need for

interaction in order to promote professional socialization and to identify with their universities. A variety of attempts was being made to address this issue through technological means and through onsite group meetings, in keeping with Swartz (1997) who suggested that social interactions are facilitated when learners are in personal contact.

However, as Moller and Draper (1996) observed, the central issues and concerns related to the need for networking and socialization persist. Likewise, Hatcher and Craig (1998) maintained, "The inability of participants (learners and instructors) to be in physical contact with each other is a continuing issue with distance education systems" (p. 62) and was an issue in this study.

In addition to concerns about peer and learner-teacher interaction, the nursing administrators in this study were required to provide students with opportunities to interact with preceptors in clinical facilities. While this type of interaction was deemed essential, coordinating student placements and garnering appropriate preceptors was a seen as a daunting chore by most participants. Similarly, Yonge and Profetto-McGrath (1990) outlined the many administrative duties, difficulties and unanticipated problems related to coordinating preceptor programs, noting that "negotiating placements is a major task" (p. 30). This task is further compounded in distance education by the introduction of greater distances between the instructor, the student, and the preceptors.

Furthermore, participants discussed the need to use technology more effectively in addition to, but not as a replacement to using appropriate personal verbal and written communication strategies. This is in keeping with Davies (1997) who

stressed that creating a "high tech/high touch" environment is critical to effective distance learning (p.68). Similarly, Dede (1996) maintained, "The most significant influence on the evolution of distance education will be not the technical development of more powerful devices, but rather the professional development of wise designers, educators and learners" (p. 34).

Sherry (1995) also suggested that the "most important factor for successful distance education learning is a caring, concerned teacher who is confident, experienced, at ease with the equipment, uses the media creatively, and maintains a high level of interactivity with students" (p. 5). Negroponte (1997) cited by Cassidy (1998) presented the notion that emotional sensitivity is central to forming a learning partnership between distance education teachers and students. Consistent with the views of participants in this study, Cassidy (1998) maintained that tutors must be skilled at facilitating reflective discussions over the telephone and in written form. She used the term "emotional sensitivity" as one type of support that is vital in distance education, requiring that tutors put time and thought into replies to questions and be skillful at recognizing meaning behind discussions.

BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS: ISSUES

The need to work within and around policies and practices designed for traditional campus-based institutions was problematic from the perspectives of those involved with administering programs offered by distance education within these universities. Factors such as the presence of barriers to introducing and implementing changes, structures contributing to ambiguous decision making, lack of institutional

support, and invisibility of distance education were viewed as issues related to administering distance education programs in nursing.

Barriers to Change

Participants identified many barriers and constraints inherent in entrenched, bureaucratic systems that made it difficult for change to occur. There were constraints identified at the faculty level due to resistance to change, at the senior administration level because of inadequate support, and with rigid working environments where people were accustomed to old ways of decision-making in a time of rapid change.

Ambiguous Decision-Making

The position of the nursing programs within the university and their relationship with the departments of Continuing Studies or Distance Education contributed to ambiguity in terms of decision making and coordinating activities. Participants identified problems with duplication of efforts, role confusion and cumbersome bureaucratic systems that inhibited their ability to effectively make decisions and manage their programs.

Lack of Institutional Support

Participants noted that there were inadequate infrastructures to support distance education. Specifically, systems to track students, methods to notify students of cancelled courses and the lack of financial and human resources were cited as barriers to providing effective service. In addition, there was a belief that the nursing programs offered by distance education were treated inequitably compared to other programs, and that this was related to three factors. The first was the belief that

distance education was not valued in traditional universities, secondly that they were administered and staffed predominantly by women, and thirdly that post-RN programs were not seen to be as important as "basic" four year degree programs.

Invisibility of Distance Education

Participants reported experiencing a sense of being treated as if they were invisible within their own nursing faculties, by faculty members from other disciplines and by senior administration. The belief was also expressed that distance education was viewed as "too Mickey Mouse", substandard, second rate, and an "add-on." Furthermore, the attitude towards distance education was perceived to be reflected in the fact that most of the programs were funded differently from on-campus programs (by cost recovery instead of base funding in most cases), by the reluctance to treat distance education work as significant, and by the lack of dedicated faculty to develop and maintain distance education programs.

BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS: RESOLUTION

Participants identified coping mechanisms they adopted to work in bureaucratic systems where they faced barriers to administering distance education programs in conventional universities. While they were able to make course and instructor changes, they noted that it was difficult to make substantive changes in their program formats due to the rigid structures and rules and regulations inherent in these institutions. Some participants were dealing with the perceived lack of support for distance education by trying to increase its visibility and profile within the institution by making others more aware of the nature of distance education and its related benefits.

Others ignored or bent certain rules in order to provide students with the flexibility they required. Some participants simply expressed frustration with the perceived low status of distance education and believed that they were unable to change the situation due to the ingrained systems they worked in. Still others seemed unaware of the implication arising from the fact that the nursing distance education programs were under-valued relative to campus-based nursing programs or to other distance education programs within their institutions, although they identified undervaluing as an issue.

Certain individuals believed that having a group of nursing faculty members dedicated to distance education would strengthen the position and improve the quality of distance education offerings. In addition, this would provide a more supportive environment for administering the programs. Most participants provided much evidence that distance education is at best tolerated -- not blessed -- and is far from being part of the mainstream in conventional universities, but few offered solutions to the problem.

BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS: LITERATURE RELATED TO FINDINGS

Haché (1998) maintained, "By definition the world of traditional education, particularly at the post-secondary level, is slow to evolve and tends to preserve the status quo while distance education experiences the reverse" (p. 7). This situation was supported by the findings in this study. Participants noted that the traditional contexts within which their distance education programs were situated and the concomitant barriers inherent in bureaucratic structures affected their ability to plan, create changes, and make decisions. Furthermore, their ability to offer flexible

options to their distance students was compromised by the rigidity of the systems within which they operated.

Stenerson (1998) described the stigma that continues to haunt distance education despite its growing popularity. Olcott (1997) also believed that distance education must still make an immense leap to bring it into the mainstream of higher education. From the findings in this study it seems that distance education is seen as a necessity in order to attract and retain students, but it does not hold the same status as campus-based programs; it continues to be invisible, and does not garner the same level of support from senior administration.

THEMES

I have described the findings in relation to the administrative issues that emerged from this study and in terms of what is discussed in the relevant literature. Here I illuminate some underlying themes that emanated across the issues. It is worth mentioning here that identifying, synthesizing and interpreting key administrative issues in distance education was more complex than I anticipated, and more difficult to communicate sensibly than I imagined it would be. Looking back I should not have been surprised given the multiple layers and complexities of interactions that take place in the social and political context of educational institutions. Nevertheless, I did gain a better understanding of the issues and how they are, or in some cases are not being dealt with by administrators of distance education programs in particular universities.

It is necessary to begin by clarifying that when administrative issues are being discussed here it ought not to be interpreted that any one administrator in any

institution experienced these concerns. It was evident during this study that while one individual might assume formal responsibility for the general administration of a program, the actual "administration" of these distance programs was a joint effort. Many different personnel and personalities were involved in different aspects of administrative work; at times certain aspects were being handled by more than one person simultaneously.

It was often difficult to disentangle some issues from others, as they were all interrelated. However, they seemed to fall into six broad categories of student participation, student services, faculty participation, program development and delivery, interaction, and bureaucratic systems. Furthermore, embedded in and across these issues other underlying themes emanated. The discussion that follows is centered on three main themes: marginalization, intensity and commitment.

MARGINALIZATION

Two synonyms for the word marginal are nonessential and peripheral. The perception that distance education was perceived to be nonessential and peripheral in these dual-mode universities permeated this study. The perception of marginalization was expressed overtly by students, faculty members, administrators and support personnel. There were also covert manifestations of marginalization of distance education at the student, faculty, and program level. The impression that students who participated in distance education were marginalized arose from issues related to their recruitment and admission to programs. An example is their limited access to programs and courses either because of lack of funding, or because faculty were unwilling or unable to teach the distance education courses, or from lack of clinical

placements. In addition, they were further marginalized by inequities identified in services provided to students on campus, distance education students with relatively easy access to campus, and distance education students in remote locations in terms of access to library and counseling services.

The fact that none of the institutions had adequate systems in place to count the number of distance education students is perplexing and indicates additional marginalization. It is perplexing because on one hand, the universities relied on student numbers for funding, and on the other, they had no accurate method to determine how many students were in the distance education programs at any one time. The inability to keep track of their students was a frustration for many participants. The underlying message seemed to be that distance students are invisible and simply do not count in the same way as students who are on campus. This is further reinforced by the lack of policies and processes specific to distance education. Requiring that students who are studying at a distance adhere to the same rules and regulations as conventional students denies the differences and challenges inherent in studying at a distance. In essence, it is a denial of the distance education students and their needs, indicating quite clearly that these students are perceived to be "add-ons" in conventional university systems, and therefore do not belong in the mainstream.

Nursing faculty members who participated in distance education in conventional universities were marginalized by the negative attitudes of their own faculty as well as by other faculty members and administration. Furthermore, the fact that in most cases, their distance education work was an "add-on" to their "real" work,

and was not worthy of being "counted" as scholarly work, pushed them further out of the mainstream. Moreover, if they chose to participate in distance education, the extensive work involved in course development might have prevented them from pursuing research and other work that traditionally "counts" as professorial activities upon which promotion and tenure are based. The implications of this are that faculty members tended to be over-worked if they became involved in distance education activities, but they did not feel adequately rewarded for their work.

Furthermore, because their distance education work was not counted as real professorial work in most cases, in many ways faculty members involved in distance education were invisible. Not only was their work invisible, they were invisible to the students they taught as exemplified by participants who described student behaviour at teleconference sites. Anderson (1995) also found this in his research. Similarly, as Taylor (1997) noted, "The teacher is embedded--embodied--but invisible in the broadcast and print-based information package" (p. 128). Additionally, in this study participants noted that distance education teaching was often not evaluated by students or administrators.

The lack of any identifiable group of "distance education faculty" contributes to the perception that faculty are invisible and thus further marginalizes the individuals who are involved in distance education. By neglecting to develop a cohesive faculty group to teach and develop distance education courses and programs, there is no strong voice for distance education. Nor is there any formal faculty group who become involved in distance education teaching, course development and program planning. One associated concern is that faculty and administrators may work in

isolation when undertaking distance education work. They are faced with fighting a lonely battle for their programs and for the rights of distance education students. Another implication is that there are inadequate orientation and staff development programs to support faculty, and although it was seen to be important to have these in place, within the context of the larger faculty it was not given priority status.

Nursing administrators of distance education programs appeared marginalized in many ways. In some instances they assumed almost sole responsibility for course and program development, delivery, maintenance and improvement, all with little assistance. Their only cohorts were sessional faculty members or full-time faculty members participating in distance teaching as add-ons to their regular workload, an unsatisfactory situation according to some participants.

Indeed, administrators freely expressed the view that the distance education programs for post-RN students were marginalized within their universities. They conceded that their programs were treated differently from other programs in terms of the expectation that the distance education programs function on a cost-recovery basis, and the perceived lack of support from senior administration. Marginalization was manifested in other ways as well. Perhaps by coincidence more than by design, the administrators of distance programs tended to be located in offices that were distanced from the more "mainstream" programs, making them appear marginalized geographically. This, together with the fact that distance education programs were not usually base-funded, as well as the evidence of apparent inequitable funding between nursing and other programs in some cases, raises the question about the

extent to which the post-RN nursing programs offered by distance education count in conventional universities.

Participants attributed marginalization of distance education to a number of factors. There was a perception that distance education was seen to be generally inferior to classroom instruction, that post-RN students were less important than other university students, and programs were predominantly managed by women. As Clark (1956), cited in Thompson and Schied (1996) pointed out in his study of organizational adaptation, "a common indicator of...marginal status is the strong need...to 'sell the program'...to other school men" (p. 331). Participants suggested that they needed to raise the profile of distance education and sell it to others a viable option to the traditional "bums-in-seats" approach to teaching and learning. Clearly, there is a need to create a more positive view of distance education in conventional university settings, to take it from being simply tolerated to being fully embraced as an equal partner in teaching and learning in higher education.

INTENSITY

The view that distance education is more work and more intense work than conventional education has been suggested in the literature by Moore (1995) and Kearsley (1996). This conception was shared by students, faculty, support staff and administrators in this study and was a thread that wove through many of the issues they raised. For example, faculty members indicated that they were considering reducing the amount of work in their courses based on student feedback that they were "way too much work." A student relayed the perception that in her view and those of

others she had spoken to, distance education was considered to be more work than courses taken on campus.

Support staff also indicated that there was more work associated with advising and counseling students at a distance, particularly post-RN students. From their accounts, dealing with post-RN distance education students was demanding and stressful work. This stemmed not only from the difficulties related to dealing with students with whom they had little or no personal contact, but also from the nature and needs of the students, who were described as having complex personal situations. In addition, they believed that due to their maturity and their professional accomplishments, post-RN students have different needs than "basic" students, and they are more assertive about having those needs met.

Faculty members and administrators emphasized the intense and exhaustive work involved in course development and revisions, and the extra work associated with planning, preparing and teaching courses at a distance, including using technology, and the extra marking and work associated with clinical courses. The issue of who owns the course materials once they are developed or revised arose as problematic. Traditionally, universities have acknowledged that faculty, as the authors of courses, own their course materials and hence copyright to them. This is not often the case in distance education. For faculty in these dual-mode universities there was, at least in one case, a struggle over proprietary control of course materials. It was surprising that this was not a greater issue in other organizations, given the work involved in course development and the relatively poor reward system in place for faculty who participated in these activities. Perhaps because they believed that others

treated their work in distance as inferior, they were not inclined to view it as important enough to seek compensation or recognition for it.

Administrators of distance programs commented on the excessive work associated with planning and coordinating the courses, maintaining the programs and managing human resources. Their ability to perform their administrative functions to their satisfaction was compromised by the lack of cohesiveness in the way programs were planned, and lack of a dedicated distance education group who could be directly and consistently involved in distance education initiatives. These concerns contributed to increased work for program coordinators and seemed to arise directly from the sporadic nature in which the distance programs have been developed over time. There were calls for a dedicated faculty group to support distance education programs, but little optimism that such changes would occur.

COMMITMENT

Despite the perceived lack of support, participants demonstrated a profound commitment to distance education students in this study. They recognized that students might require more flexibility in terms of deadlines for assignments, the option to transfer back and forth between onsite classes and classes offered by distance education, and the need to take time out from studying if necessary. Working within the bureaucratic constraints of conventional university systems, these participants were willing to bend the rules to accommodate distance students. They were willing also, to accept the consequences of their decisions and to continue to fight for more flexibility.

Furthermore, commitment was evidenced not only by faculty members' expressed concerns for students and their complex lives, but more importantly, they demonstrated it by their actions. For example, being present at work despite outwardly manifesting signs of poor health, and driving through storms to arrive at teaching sites were genuine, meaningful expressions of commitment to students. The commitment manifested by participants was not necessarily specifically to distance education, however. It was apparent that these participants were also committed to post-RN education and to maintaining a clinical component in their programs despite the concomitant challenges associated with finding preceptors and teaching clinical courses.

There were many indications that post-RN students are different from other students, and in some cases, this perceived difference was what attracted participants to work in these programs. Some individuals were convinced that a genuine desire to work with post-RNs was required to enable them to function effectively in their relatively stressful roles and demanding working conditions. The difference in post-RNs was attributed to their relative maturity and their complex lives and professional situations which were perceived to make them more demanding on one hand but more appreciative on the other.

Participants suggested it is important to take a relatively tough-minded approach in order to challenge students to stretch themselves and to encourage them to learn how to think critically. On the other hand, they emphasized the need to have an empathic approach and caring attitude toward students, particularly because they were teaching at a distance and recognized that students needed more support when they did

not have frequent and on-going contact with each other or with instructors. This is much like Negroponte's (1997) suggestion to use emotional sensitivity and Cassidy's (1998) framework of challenge and support. It was apparent that for the individuals in this study, being distance educators was more of a philosophy and a way of being than a way of doing things.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was designed to better understand issues faced by administrators in conventional universities who are involved in distance education programs for post-RN students. The study was conducted in five dual-mode universities, by interviewing 28 participants involved with post-RN nursing programs, and studying certain organizational documents. Caution must be utilized in drawing generalizations to other distance education programs in these dual-mode universities or to other distance education programs in other universities. It is possible, however, to make some recommendations for senior and program administrators and to draw some implications for research in educational administration. Hopefully, these insights will provide some guidance or assist in program development or improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Participants in this study described administrative issues that indicate how problematic it can be to be innovative in providing distance opportunities for students within the confines of traditional bureaucracies. In particular, there was a need identified for more flexible administrative structures that would facilitate a more supportive teaching and learning environment. The introduction of more flexible

schedules and policies and processes specific to distance education would serve to formalize what is already being implemented in many cases, by faculty members and program administrators who bend the rules to accommodate the needs of distance students.

McQuire (1988) described the difficulty faculty members have when trying to learn the ropes when they first enter a distance education environment. She suggested the need to increase the efforts to establish larger communities in distance education and for organizations to provide a more supportive environment for faculty involved in distance education. Negligence in providing faculty orientation and ongoing staff development was prevalent in this study. In particular, faculty members need training in order to use technology appropriately. By ensuring the availability of adequate funds and support to program administrators, senior administrators could assist newcomers and even seasoned educators to more easily and systematically learn how to undertake their distance education responsibilities and use technology effectively. This would be more satisfying and effective than by learning through trial and error or "flying by the seat of their pants".

Educational administrators need to evaluate what message they are sending and their assumptions underlying the differences in services, funding and reward systems in place for distance education programs. The impression from this study is that those who participate in distance education in these conventional universities keenly feel that there is a lack of administrative support. Senior administrators could serve those who participate in distance education better by incorporating the following recommendations: 1). Becoming more aware of the unique nuances inherent in

offering distance programs and implementing policies and processes specific to distance education; 2). Evaluating organizational policies and procedures to ensure that distance teaching and course development are rewarded in the same way as traditional professorial duties; 3). Being aware of possible gender biases in their institutions and reducing any inequities that exist; 4). Changing the perception that little more than lip service is paid to distance education by providing adequate human and fiscal resources to support these programs, 5). Paying attention to the disparity in services provided to different groups of students and the question of whether students taking courses by distance education ought to be paying higher fees than students taking the same courses on campus; and, 6). Supporting the use of toll-free telephone numbers in distance education programs.

Program administrators, although working within the constraints of conventional systems, have the power to affect positive changes in programs that incorporate distance education. There is evidence from this study that by implementing the following recommendation they could yield improvements in programs offered by distance education to nursing students: 1). Providing ongoing orientation and staff development programs for faculty members; including training in the use of technology; 2). Developing standards for course development and delivery which include expectations regarding frequency of contact between instructors and students; and turn around time for assignments and exams; 3) Reconciling the disparities in services provided to students such as library services and lobbying for systems that accommodate distance education students equitably, without jeopardizing their ability to learn library and research skills, 4) Ensuring that faculty are evaluated

and rewarded for distance education work in a way that acknowledges the considerable effort involved and, 5) Exploring the implications of having a group of dedicated faculty members for distance education course development, teaching and research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This study began by discussing distance education as an alternative paradigm. Throughout these pages it has been suggested that as an accepted alternative there are indications that there is a considerable way to go towards recognizing it as a legitimate choice. The relatively low status, negative attitude toward, invisibility and marginalization of distance education that persists in dual-mode universities is perplexing given its widespread use. This area deserves further study to better understand the reasons for and the possible effects of marginalization on students, faculty and program administrators.

The assumption that students require face-to-face interaction or connections to other peers and faculty was prevalent in this study. There are conflicting views on this in the literature and is an area deserving of more research. A study with students who participate in group experiences, either face-to-face, by teleconference, or by computer might serve to illuminate the advantages of these opportunities. The addition of computers was assumed to be a technology that in the future will increase and improve interaction and facilitate critical thinking in students. Further study might serve to assess if this is, in fact, the case.

The challenges of arranging clinical experiences and acquiring clinical preceptors were pervasive across the programs. The practice of paying for preceptors,

the age and experience of students, and the lack of on-site faculty may affect the willingness of practicing nurses to mentor students. More research is required to better understand what motivates nurses to agree to precept students who are studying at a distance without the usual supports provided by conventional universities.

The reward systems, lack of an obvious peer group, and orientation and training for faculty were identified as issues. These could be studied further to understand their effect on faculty attitude toward distance education. In addition, despite the extensive work involved and the relative lack of rewards and support for doing so, faculty and administrators demonstrate a strong commitment to distance education and to post-RN education. Further research into what contributes to this commitment might benefit administrators and faculty who wish to be involved in or are hiring new faculty for distance education.

Finally, the perception that post-RN students are different from other students ought to be examined to better understand these differences so that educational programs can be planned to meet their needs more effectively. The changing demographics ought to be investigated in order to understand the nature of the change and whether the curriculum is appropriate and support structures are in place for younger populations of nursing students.

CONCLUSIONS

I started out by quoting Rumble (1992) who wrote that distance education is an emerging alternative educational paradigm. It might be the case however, that distance education is more of what Kuhn (cited in Lambert and Brittan, 1987) referred to as an anomaly. These authors noted further: "Anomalies are sets of data that

reigning paradigms have difficulty in accommodating. Of course there are always expedient ways of accommodating them, either by explaining them away or by adopting one or another *adhoc* hypothesis" (p. 138).

From the issues raised by the participants involved in administrative aspects of the post-RN nursing programs in this study, it seems that there is considerable room for improvement in the way distance education is accommodated in these conventional institutions. Conventional universities appear to support offering distance education as an option but are not always prepared to put the necessary resources or processes in place to support faculty, students or programs.

Holmberg (1996) suggested that distance education can be incorporated into conventional university systems as an independent system where "students can start, stop, interrupt and finish their studies at any time, study individually and join learning groups"(p. 9). Conversely, he noted that antagonists of this view impose the same restrictions on distance study as is inherent in traditional study: "limited geographical coverage, classes of limited size, regular meetings, pacing, division of the year into terms of study, prescribed examination dates, etc." (p. 9). He referred to the latter as an innovation within the accepted paradigm, meaning it is not really an alternative to the status quo. The issues and themes identified in this study support this view. However, if distance education is going to be a success in conventional universities, the administrators of these institutions will have to seriously consider changing traditional policies and processes, and providing additional resources, support and recognition to those charged with managing the programs.

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Appendix A

Guiding Interview Questions

1. Organizational:

   How do you describe your major roles and responsibilities with regard to the post R.N. program offered by distance education?

   What methods do you use to deliver your distance education program?

   How are decisions made as to what methods are used?

   How does your program relate to the department of extension?

   What procedures and practices specific to distance education do you use to administer the program?

   What are the major issues you face in your work?

   What processes have you put into place in attempting to resolve issues?

   What constraints and barriers do you face?

   How would you describe the nature of support received from other units of your organization, for example, central office, student support services, student advisement, and library services?

2. Personnel:

   How are faculty hired for the program—are they hired specifically to do distance education or are they integrated with the regular on-site program?

   What training is provided for faculty hired to do distance education?

   What is performance evaluation based on in relation to distance education?

3. Curriculum

   How are decisions made as to what courses are offered in your program?

   How are courses developed for distance delivery—do you develop them specifically for distance education, are they developed by others and purchased by your university, or do you use the regular courses and revise them for distance delivery?

   Are courses developed and revised by in - house faculty or are outside personnel hired for this?

   How is course development funded? Is it done on a contract basis? If faculty do it, is it considered part of the faculty workload?

   Where does the funding come from for course development and revision?

   What mechanisms are in place to ensure courses are current and accurate?

4. Financial

How is the program funded?
Who has control over the budget?
Is funding based on student enrolment or some other formula?
How stable is the funding for your program?
What is your responsibility in relation to student recruitment?

5. Autonomy

To what extent do you believe you influence internal policy decisions affecting your program?
What role do you play in ensuring that your program liaises with other units in the organization, with off campus sites, and with other programs?
What processes are in place to ensure your faculty have access to equipment and technical support?
To what extent do you influence external policy decisions affecting your program, for example the number of students the government will fund you or, the geographical area you serve, or the location of your off-campus sites?
Have you any reason to believe that your program is treated differently from other academic units in the university as far as support or funding is concerned?

Appendix B

Letter to Participants

Dear ---------:

I am a nurse completing my doctoral degree in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I am conducting research on the experiences of administrators of distance education programs for nurses. You have been identified as the person responsible for the administration of the distance education program for nurses at your university. I hope you will agree to have me spend time at your university and that you will engage in some interviews with me about your experiences, and particularly about issues and challenges you face in your work related to distance education.

I will be conducting personal interviews with administrators for approximately one hour each. Follow-up interviews may be conducted as well. If you agree to participate, the interviews will be conducted at a time convenient for you. I will be asking questions about the structure of your program, the distance education strategies used, the locations and number of students served. In addition, we may explore personnel, financial, curriculum, policy, and organizational support issues.

Little research has been done on nursing administrators in Canada, especially in distance education. I believe that as someone who has experience in this area, you could provide valuable and meaningful information that could be useful to others. Participation in the study is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. With your permission, the interviews will be taped. The transcripts will

be identified by code numbers only. Beyond myself, only my thesis committee members will have access to the transcripts and they will not know the names of participants. You will have the opportunity to review the analysis and description of the study pertaining to your program for verification purposes. If quotations are used in the final reporting of the data, anonymity will be preserved by leaving out distinctive references. Tapes and transcripts will be destroyed when the thesis is completed.

I hope you will be willing to participate in this study. I will be contacting you by telephone or electronic mail to see if you are willing to be interviewed. If you are, we will arrange a convenient time to conduct the interview.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Joy Fraser

IMAGE EVALUATION
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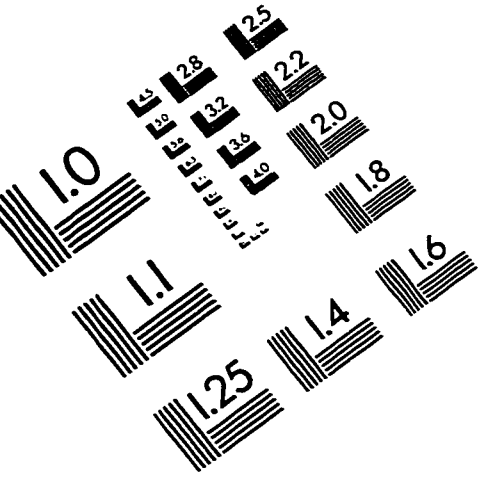

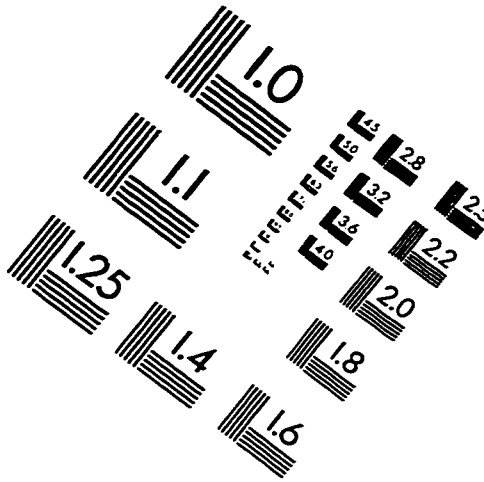

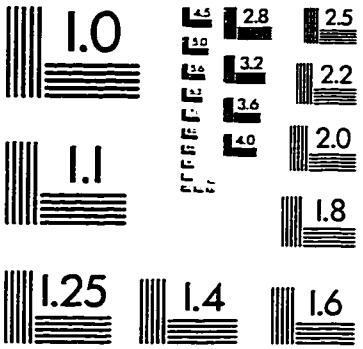

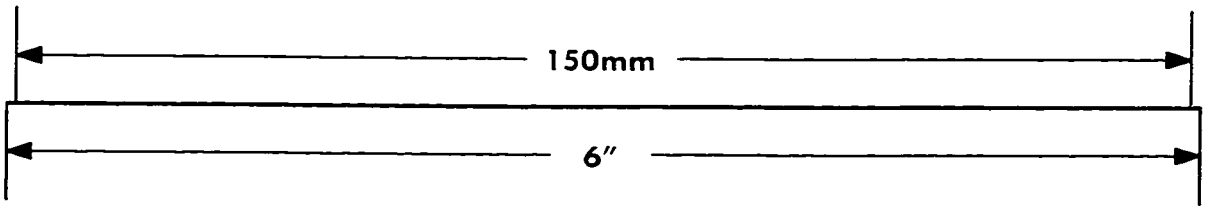

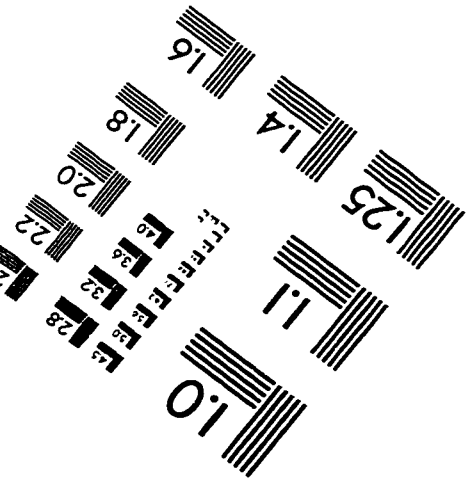

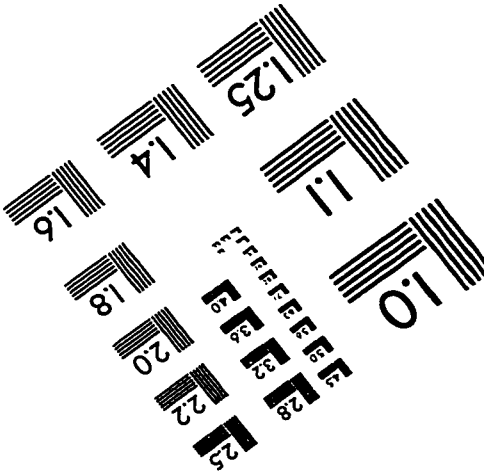

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