Faculty Issues in Distance Education

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Abstract
Distance education is becoming common in the delivery of software engineering education and training. This panel will examine this phenomenon from the perspective of faculty delivering distance programs. Panelists have experience with a variety of delivery technologies and will discuss considerations and impact of using those methods of delivery.

Overview

Distance education, and especially education delivered via the Internet, has been an area of great activity in recent years in both institutions of higher education and in training organizations. For software engineering, distance education is particularly relevant since many of the people seeking education and training are practicing professionals. As individuals, the convenience of distance education can be quite attractive. For organizations employing these professionals, distance education has the potential to substantially reduce travel costs.

Other than the students themselves, faculty members are probably the stakeholders most affected by the growth in distance delivery of education. This panel will look at distance education from a faculty perspective. The focus will not be on techniques of teaching at a distance. Rather, the focus will be how distance education changes what it is like to be a faculty member.

The panel will include brief presentations by each panelist describing the distance education program at her or his institution and impacts this program has had on the faculty. Open discussion by the panelists and conference attendees will follow.
Some of the issues this panel will explore are:

- Teaching workload impact and implications
- Technical and administrative support
- Course materials preparation, maintenance, and ownership
- Peer acceptance including tenure and promotion considerations
- Expectations of administrators
- Job satisfaction

**Distance education programs**

The panelists represent the following distance education programs:

- **Air Force Institute of Technology** offers a distance learning program in software engineering through its Professional Continuing Education School. The program consists of five classes, four of which are taught via satellite broadcast. The last class is taught face-to-face in a three week session. In addition to the synchronous satellite broadcasts, the distance courses make extensive use of voice mail and email.

- **Drexel University** offers a Masters degree completely online. There are no face-to-face or synchronous activities in the program, but the approach emphasizes creation of online learning communities with a lot of interaction among participants. Teaching in the online program has become part of the regular workload for the faculty and new faculty members are hired with the understanding that they are likely to teach both online and face-to-face.

- **Monash University** is Australia’s largest university with 7 campuses and about 42,000 students. Most Gippsland campus IT courses are taught both by distance and face-to-face although the majority of students are off-campus. Distance students are usually older than the average on-campus student. Many come from other countries, many are working professionals and/or in the armed forces. Students receive printed study guides supplemented by on-line and multimedia CD-ROM materials. They are supported by WebFace, an in-house web-based communication and assignment processing system which allows them to use any browser to communicate with teachers and fellow class members through dedicated subject/course newsgroups.

- **Texas Tech University** has been teaching software engineering courses via distance education since 1993. Currently the faculty deliver the courses entirely over the Internet; that is, all materials are available for download through the course web page. The biggest problem concerning distance education courses is the need for more individualized interaction with the off-campus students. The biggest potential benefit would be if courses could be "shared" among various universities, which would allow for a greater variety of offerings while helping to deal with the shortage of faculty. In this regard, Texas Tech has been working with some other institutions to pilot common distance education offerings.