

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR COMMENTS PROMOTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Please accept this response to your call for comments on December 23, 1998 as found in the Federal Register, Volume 63, No. 246, Docket No. 98-12A

1. *Nature of Distance Education*

Distance Education is may be defined as the delivery of instruction to students beyond the geographical boundaries of the traditional classroom. There are various methods or modes of distance learning and these have transformed over the years. Our institution, Brevard Community College, Cocoa, Florida employs three types of distance learning technologies: Telecourses, Online Courses and courses delivered via microwave on our Televised Interactive Educational System.

The basic difference between distance education and the traditional face-to face instruction is the physical location of the student and the instructor. There is no longer the requirement for the student to “come to” the teacher nor the teacher to “come to” the student. The technology delivers the instruction and feedback between the instructor and student. Digital technology has allowed those of us involved in distance education to expand our methods of delivery and make them asynchronous and interactive. Whereas in the traditional telecourse (one of the most widely used method of distance education) the student had little or no opportunity for collaborative learning or interactive instruction. Digital technology has provided various tools to allow “conversations” between students and students and student and instructors. The Internet is used both as a resource for course materials and a tool of communication between classmates and instructors. Students use email for private questions or conversations with the instructor and they “chat” with other students in the classroom bulletin boards or discussion rooms. These are interactive conversations with students and instructors replying to various postings. They generally are asynchronous wherein students and teachers may post at anytime of the day or night, however, the instructor may require or request all students log on at a specified time to have real time conversation. It has been my experience that this is rarely required. Instructors have the option of retaining these discussion postings and emails by either printing hard copies or storing them in archives to retrieve off the computer at any later date.

Instructors do not necessarily “create” new content for their online course; they utilize existing content and transfer it to a different mode of delivery. In particular, in the legal assisting courses that I teach, I have all my lesson outlines, quizzes and study questions stored on a floppy disk. This material is then converted into HTML format and posted in the virtual classroom. In addition, some of these courses online are also delivered as telecourses and these video tapes are made available to the students either directly as a link from the virtual classroom. Or alternatively, they can rent the

tapes from our libraries. Therefore, the student who takes my course on line is getting the exact content the student sitting in the traditional classroom.

All course materials are made available to registered students in electronic form. The students may have to purchase a textbook separately, however, often they are available online as well. Here at Brevard Community College, the instructor has the option of restriction access to any or all course materials to registered students only,

2. *The Role of Licensing*

I cannot provide a great deal of insight into this area. Most of my course content is original materials drafted by me, the instructor. In one instance I did attempt to post something found in our textbook. I received permission from the publisher, however I was told that I would have to again request permission each semester, and therefore it was my decision not to use the material.

Our virtual classrooms are password protected, therefore, it would be my position that we fall under the general “fair use” doctrine as any other traditional classroom would.