STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

This introduction to the case studies presented at the 1992 New Delhi Symposium on student support services in distance education proceeds from two assumptions. First, student support services reflect the operating principles and practices of the distance education institutions of which they are a part. Second, those operating principles are experiencing a fundamental change. They are moving away from the traditional "industrial" model that is characterised by the course design team and the production of instructional packages towards a more "distributed" model based on study centres or communication networks. These allow greater interaction among students and a more obvious role for the individual teacher (Kaye and Rumble, 1991). These changes in operating principles are seen in the mandates, organisational arrangements, and curricular formats of distance education institutions.

But it is in the curriculum area that change is most obvious and has the most direct implications for student support services. Coincident with the movement from industrial to distributed model is a curricular shift from what Boot and Hodgson (1987) term the "dissemination" approach, concerned with the effective distribution of information, to a "development" approach, which takes as its primary purpose the intellectual and personal growth of the individual. The bases for the development approach include a reconsideration of the position of students in the instructional transaction — one which views them less as recipients of information and more as active participants in the learning process. A further change in perspective involves adoption of an essentially constructivist approach to curriculum development. This involves the use of *relevant* instructional designs that are linked to the personal situations of students, especially to their work and career expectations; and more *social* or interactive arrangements for learning. Interactive learning can occur in mediated settings available through audio and computer conferencing technology or in face-to-face situations as provided in study centres.

The implications for providing student support services according to the development approach to distance education are as follows:

- Support services need to maintain their involvement in the remediation of student problems but, at the same time, they must become more active in promoting the intellectual development and well-being of students. The latter approach suggests that the traditionally distinct advising and tutoring tasks be brought into closer alignment and, in some situations, be combined in the single role of an "academic counsellor".

- The focus for this altered role is the promotion of interaction among and between students and instructors through either mediated or face-to-face means.

The arguments underlying the recommendation for a changed support service role are set out in this introduction to the case studies presented at the New Delhi Symposium. This is done in three ways, including:

- summary of the student support literature reviews;
- overview of the institutional context for change; and
- description of the elements of a responsive support service.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: FOCUSING THE DIRECTION OF CHANGE

The starting point for this overview is the Commonwealth of Learning Roundtable Report on student support concluded the previous year in Vancouver (Croft, 1991). The report of this meeting, which included a comprehensive literature review, is a representation of the student support field as it currently exists. The following section therefore is limited to a summary of literature reviews comprising conference proceedings, symposia, and special collections relating directly to the support service topic. The reviews themselves provide a set of indicators or milestones which mark the evolution of student support service theory and practice. Further, as summaries of the important research and position papers in the field, they reveal the elements that together form the various support service structures. Organising the field on the basis of the existing literature allows an examination of those aspects of support whose greater development promises to maximise the effect of change. Finally, the literature reviews serve to document the progression towards a higher priority for student services in the policies and activities of distance education institutions.

Sources

A limited number of reviews of the student support service literature exist. These were identified through a search of the ERIC system, the ICDL database, and a systematic review of collections from ICDE conferences and symposia on support services or counselling. They are outlined below, followed by a brief summary of the more obvious themes in a schematic of the essential elements that comprise the field.

Guidelines and Handbooks

For the most part, guidelines and handbooks are practical "how-to" manuals, but some include reviews of the field and their recommendations are based on a conceptual framework or frameworks. Three of the more representative and comprehensive references are Lewis (1984), Williams (1980), and Bailey (1987).

Lewis (1984) begins with an assessment of the kinds of support distance learners need, and the stages in their educational programme when the various forms of support are most required. While tutoring is the central concern of this "open learning guide", other aspects of student support are included. However, the division between advising and tutoring is maintained. Lewis writes a section on "how to choose, train, and monitor tutors" from the institutional perspective. As well, the author extensively lists further material and background reading in specific applications such as telephone and audio-cassette use.

From the extensive REDEAL research programme undertaken at Athabasca University, Williams (1980) produced a tutoring manual to improve the interpersonal skill of the

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telephone tutors that the university employed. An interesting feature of the publication is its conceptual base: the tutoring practices that Williams recommends are based on the work of Carkhuff's human relations training approach (1969). Also, the recommendations contained in the manual were field-tested in the REDEAL research programme with the effects of training sessions measured in actual exchanges between students and telephone tutors. A variety of data were gathered and analysed, including tape analyses of transcripts. Of particular interest is the inclusion of interpersonal communications skills as an essential requirement of the tutoring function. In doing so, the REDEAL definition of tutoring broke with established descriptions in which personal and supportive relationships were emphasised only in the counselling function. In the REDEAL model, tutoring did include content expertise and pedagogical skill, but interpersonal communication skills were seen to be essential to effective academic advising.

Bailey's (1987) guidance manual is perhaps one of the most comprehensive and detailed of its type. It is interesting to consider Bailey's (1987, 33) definition of "guidance" as the term used to describe the support service function. As defined, it involves a range of processes aimed at helping individuals become more self-reliant and more able to manage their own personal, educational, and vocational development. In this support scheme, guidance involves the following seven distinct sub-processes:

- *Informing:*   Giving clear, accurate, unbiased, and relevant information to the individual in a form and at a pace that is most useful to him or her.

- *Advising:*   Making suggestions to the individual based on the helper's own knowledge or expertise.

- *Counselling:*   Offering the individual a relationship based on trust and acceptance within which he or she can explore issues relevant to development and can carry through decisions.

- *Coaching:*   Creating or structuring a learning experience so that the individual can practise and gain new knowledge, skills, or perceptions.

- *Assessment:*   Gathering and giving information about the individual or about specific aspects of the individual (abilities, performance, aptitudes, values, interests, and so on).

- *Advocacy:*   Taking action on behalf of and with the agreement of the individual.

- *Feedback to Systems:* Providing information to organisations on the experiences or problems of individuals that require changes in the system.

Bailey (1987, 34) also states what guidance is and is not, thereby providing an overall sense of purpose to the various activities of the service. In her view, guidance is neither problem-centred, based on a medical model, nor authoritarian in nature. Rather than being solely concerned with problems and learning blocks, it concentrates on personal growth. As well, guidance is not based on a "pathological" view of individuals with conditions to be cured; rather it is based on normal human development. Finally, guidance is not something to be dispensed by experts but is based on an equal relationship and the belief that individuals have the capacity to help themselves.

Virtually all aspects of the support service system are included within Bailey's concept of guidance, and special overlapping relationships with other distance education functions such as marketing, administration, and tutoring are elaborated. Tutoring and guidance are distinguished, in Bailey's view, by their respective concerns: where tutoring is often narrowly focussed, short-term, and tied to a specific learning task, guidance is directed more towards long-term personal, vocational, and educational matters. But the distinction is essentially conceptual; in practice, it is a distinction of emphasis. In open learning systems tutors may need subject expertise plus some level of guidance skills (Bailey 1987, 148).

Conferences

The most obvious general review of distance education activity is the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) World Congress that occurs every three years. The value of the congresses is that they set support issues within the broader context of general distance education issues. Sixteen such congresses have been held, with the most recent in Bangkok in 1992. In many ways, however, the proceedings of workshops and other topic-specific conferences are more informative sources when assessing the state of student support practices over the past decade. For example, the United Kingdom Open University's series of conferences on student counselling has dealt with some of the major themes in the student support field. As the editor, Alan Tait, recounts, the first two conferences were forums for organising thinking on a dimension of distance education which, to that time, had been neglected relative to the design and development of course material (Tait 1983, 1987). Subsequent conferences were theme-based (Tait 1989, Tait and Messer 1991). The "Interaction and Independence" theme of the 1989 conference resulted in a critical appraisal of policy and action since the initial presentation of the Daniel and Marquis (1979) article on the topic. This marked a significant reorientation towards the learner and the need for conversation and dialogue. In effect, the conference participants questioned the dominant "industrialised" delivery model that was centred on the home-study course materials package. Moreover, through its contribution to personalising access and completion policies, the support system contributed to the process of democratising higher education system.

The 1991 United Kingdom Open University's conference extended thinking about the role of the student support service beyond supplemental support for the learner. Using the Empire State College, Downing College programme as a model and as the starting point for discussion, the conference explored the question: If autonomous learners were so important in the educational process, where in distance education did they appear in discussions of what was to be learned? This question reemphasised the centrality of the learner but it did so in relation to what was to be studied. In the Empire State programme, students could invent their own courses, defining — with relevant academic support and supervision — topics, problems, and projects for course credit. As an alternative to existing home study, this model offered a dramatic challenge to established views of the relationships between the institution, the student, and the curriculum, however defined. In Tait's (Tait and Messer 1991, 2) words ". . . the learner has intruded into the curriculum", and the implication that followed was that student support services need to act as facilitators of new knowledge that the student creates.

Of course other conferences publish proceedings or have their activities reviewed in the journals. These conferences offer insight into current support service issues. For example, the regional conference held in Colombo in 1991 which dealt with "Face-to-Face Components in Distance Education" was reviewed by Ismail (1992). Her conference summary reported that greater interaction between and among instructors or tutors and students was assumed necessary to improve programme quality. Quality was ' presented as a feature of education and training that would improve career mobility. The

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long-term benefits of education to the recipient's career work were also presented in the context of the student as consumer, a view with implications for change not only in providing student support but in the general operation of distance education institutions.

ERIC and ICDL Reviews

The ERIC and ICDL databases are accessed regularly by researchers and are available in various formats: fiche, hard copy, disc, and online. The online format includes distributed arrangements: the ICDL and ERIC databases, as well as thousands of other scholarly collections, are available online via the global Internet system. Both ERIC and ICDL sources have been employed to generate recent student support reviews. Most are straightforward summaries organised under broad and traditional headings (see, for example, Wright 1991). However, two recent reviews are arranged with unique structures. Dillon and Blanchard (1991) developed their review around a framework suggested by Moore (1987). It involves three intersecting areas: instructional support, direct student support, and communication support. Croft (1991) reviewed the relevant literature to assess the range of support functions in distance education and organised it according to a standard scheme involving the three phases through which students pass (entry, independent study, exit), together with a further division between administration and direct support for learning.

The Dillon and Blanchard review emphasises technology and its relation to systems that promote greater interaction. The components of this model include the institution (teacher), the student, and the media format, which may vary in terms of their potential to offer interactive communication among the participants. Various combinations of participation levels and interaction are related to curricular goals, which are positioned along a continuum of complexity.

Croft's review is more wide-ranging and reflects the variety of literature available. Croft posed a number of questions concerning the development of policy issues in the support field. Those most directly related to the administration of the support enterprise include the following:

- To what extent should administrative convenience control the organisation of the support service?

- To what extent is it possible to provide economic and flexible support for practical and project work?

- Is it possible to assess the effectiveness of such services?

Other questions are related more to the learner's experience, including:

- Can the support system tailor services to the particular needs of students?

- Should these services be made compulsory?

Overall, these are support service concerns that might have been reported many years ago. But they have an obvious immediacy in view of the increasing expectations that distance education can offer both improved access and quality of instruction to those who wish education and training at the postsecondary level. Some of the questions, however, result from developments in areas such as communications technology and the recognition of equity groups.

As indicated, both reviews draw on the various literature sources, the most recent of these being the ICDL database. For the purposes of this overview, it is useful to examine its applicability to the student support area, at least as determined from Dewal's (1991)

recent assessment. The array of student support topics contained in the database was tabulated and assessed by topic. In adapted form, the topics and proportions are reproduced in Table 1.

Many of the topics represent the established concerns of student support services although they do not address all of the administrative issues raised by Croft (1991). The greater number are concerned with direct student support matters. The largest category of these — the learner characteristics category — includes references that deal with the special needs of adult learners and with gender issues.

Table 1. **Support Service References in ICDL Database**

Topic	Proportion
Guidance and Counselling	15
Computer and Telephone Conferencing	15
Tutors and Counsellors	13
Learner Characteristics	26
Study Skills	7
Dropouts	9
Evaluation	2
Miscellaneous	13

Adapted from Dewal (1991).

Structure

The Croft (1991) analysis of the field distinguishes between the administrative and learner support functions of a student support service system. Table 2 illustrates this division together with the three-stage sequence of student support services. Within this matrix, various support tasks are positioned and, while they do not exhaust the list of possibilities, they do include the more salient support functions.

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Table 2.   **Structure of the Student Support Field**

Structure	Educational Sequence		
	Entry	**Integration**	**Exit**
Administrative Support	Registration	Assessment	Certification
	Orientation Resources	Library	Job Entry
Learning Support	Study Skills	Tutoring Counselling	Dropout Re-entry

Table 2 is a standard representation of the structure and functions of the support services available in most distance education institutions. The columns of the table represent the phases or stages through which students are generally presumed to pass (see, for example, Lewis 1984). The rows partition the institutional functions and features of the support service into those of an essentially administrative nature and those related directly to support of the learning process.

As they move from stage to stage in their educational experience, students come into contact with the rules, regulations, and rituals that comprise the "system". As well, they meet individuals employed by the institution who perform various tasks, each more or less related to the student's successful entry, adaption to, and eventual conclusion of a course of study. Nicholson (1977) discusses the counselling functions associated with the student's progression through a course of study as occurring at three points, termed: "induction crisis", "differential transit", and "settled connection". These, or similar terms, are employed by other writers to describe the relationship between students and the support service system. While each of the three phases has its own counselling tasks, the actual activities contained within the sequence varies by programme and even by the definition of "counselling" employed. Bailey (1987), for example, further differentiates the entry phase into "pre-entry" and "enrolment" in order to concentrate support concerns on, initially, informing the student of the options and implications of various programme choices. At the same time, an exploration of individual needs and priorities provides an assessment of the student's motivations in enrolling.

Nicholson, like other writers, distinguishes between the tutoring and the advising or counselling roles. These roles have typically been considered separate (Daniel and Marquis 1979; McInnis-Rankin and Brindley 1986) or even more finely partitioned (Bailey 1987). The further distinction between administrative functions and direct support for learning is useful in that it focuses the concerns of support services and steers policies in directions that will have the greatest benefit for students (Nunan 1992). Croft (1991) also dimensioned her review of support service functions in this way, and Bailey (1987) developed an overlapping set of activities for guidance and administrative responsibilities in distance teaching institutions. The importance of strictly administrative tasks is seen neither in the weighted scheme of ICDL references nor in the other review sources. Obviously such activities are essential to the effective operation of any institution, but matters of direct student support appear to be of greater concern to the field.

A rationale for emphasising particular elements of the system, along either the administrative or learning support dimension, is not immediately obvious in the student support literature. For example, some underlying support themes do not appear in the schematic at all. Nor are these given particular significance in the topical summary of the ICDL holdings. Important issues such as gender and technology, among others, are not included in our representation of the support system; and their potential to influence the suggested direction of change is not recognised by the weighting assigned them in the distribution of ICDL articles. Nevertheless, some important trends are emerging in the literature.

Arguments over the relative emphasis given system interaction and independence set out by Daniel and Marquis (1979) still continue in, for example, the exchange between Brindley and Jean-Louis (1990) and Thompson (1991), who debate the merits of mandatory support services for students. In both cases, the assumption is that at least some students lack the skills of independent study and need counselling. But "study" as defined assumes that the burden of instruction is borne by the traditional course package and that counselling would augment this vehicle where needed. More recently, however, Nuy (1991) studied problem-centred approaches to instructional design in distance education settings and suggested that students need varying amounts and kinds of direct academic support in the less structured and more highly interactive environment required of a problem-based curriculum. This view reflects more accurately the emerging concerns in the literature, underscoring as it does the need for highly developed interpersonal and communication skills in this setting, and hence the importance of a more direct role for academic advisers in the cooperative social structures generally associated with problem-based learning.

Future developments in support service operations then involve the possibility and perhaps necessity of shifting the concerns of support services away from the amelioration of individual student problems towards a more obvious involvement in the interactive instruction process. This argument derives from changes in the curricular forms and instructional designs employed by the distance education institutions themselves. These changes require an increased emphasis on and allocation of resources to the direct support of the learning process. Within the developmental approach outlined by Boot and Hodgson (1987), Tait (1988, 97) considers the role of tuition and counselling to be essential in encouraging students to make sense of knowledge and information on their own terms. The implication is a merged tutor-counsellor role and a greater degree of interaction between student and institution. This alters the established task of most support services, which concentrate their efforts on preventing dropouts, assisting weaker learners, or counselling individuals with personal problems. Such an approach limits support to a minority of students, and emphasises pathological characteristics. To the extent that support services become less involved with the remediation of student problems and more active in promoting the intellectual development and well-being of students, they redefine their traditional role as a supplementary service to the course package (see also Graham and Harrower 1986).

Paul (1988) has represented that support services must reposition themselves in the institution. While the academic faculty of universities take precedence in making most decisions, their greater political power relative to support services need not mean that the support sections of the institution are permanently relegated to a position of secondary importance. With one exception, however, Paul's strategies involve little change to the separate institutional roles of advising and academic sections. For example, enhancing the scholarly credentials of support personnel and developing the political acumen of the support service administrators preserves the existing institutional structure. Paul does describe as an alternative the distribution of support service personnel across the various academic departments but acknowledges the probable subordination of these individuals

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and their support role to academic and administrative priorities. Underlying the difficulties associated with each of the proposals is a tendency in the universities to separate the cognitive from the affective. This is seen in the tradition of scholarship and research at universities, a history which ensures that status accrues to the academic staff and not to those engaged in an essentially supportive role.

Nunan (1992, 2) sees as one alternative to the disaggregated and specialised functions of most existing support services a more integrated and comprehensive system. Assuming that student support is an "all pervasive and central educational component of distance education", then:

> ... the institution would design and make available a supportive network of preparatory courses, study skill development opportunities, personal and course counselling, learning support through flexible access to resources including individualised support from the teacher/facilitator, all constructed in ways which avoid deficit views of learners and which students can draw upon to meet their needs. [emphasis added]

This alternative advances the notion of an integration of advising or counselling and tutoring by suggesting a merged role of the advisor/guidance counsellor with that of the tutor. The South Australian College of Advanced Education's approach to support services is of particular interest. The assumptions of this institution's curriculum policies include:

- the holistic nature of programmes; and

- a view of students that is responsive to their individual concerns and particular learning contexts.

These views recognise the variability among students' personal learning goals and the necessity to integrate the support functions. In relation to integrated support functions, King and Forster (1985, 102) state: ". . . instruction and support activities would seem to overlap to the point where distinctions become superfluous". This seems to be a theme emerging from the support services literature, driven mostly by the actual or prospective changes in the general institutional policies and practices of distance education universities and colleges. To the extent that this change occurs, support services then will move from the margin to the centre of educational provision, at least in those institutions concerned with the personal and intellectual development of their students. That this is not always the case is pointed out by Brindley and Fage (1992) in their analysis of student support systems at Athabasca University and at the United Kingdom Open University. At the United Kingdom Open University, two models of support were debated: the first considered that every tutor should also act as a counsellor; the second would have assigned a counsellor to every student, with the responsibility of supporting them through their academic career at the university. The support system actually established was a compromise that attempted to balance the following features (Tait 1992):

- local and accessible contact;
- linking to the tutorial role;
- programme specific knowledge; and
- continuity over years of study.

Of particular interest is the linking of counselling and tutoring roles in this system. Brindley and Fage (1992,15) describe this as ". . . local counselling support should be backed by stronger links between students and tutors and between counsellors and tutors".

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

As do all postsecondary institutions, distance education universities must react to changes in the needs of their students and other interest groups in the society. Some of these pressures are expressed in the changing patterns of enrolment: factors such as the necessity for lifelong learning, geographic mobility, and the recognition of equity groups have combined to significantly increase the number and variety of part-time students. Responding to these changes has meant that distance education universities have had to reshape their mandates, organisational structures, and curricula. These shifts in demand and institutional response imply corresponding changes in the nature of student support. The institutional context for this changed support role is outlined in this section, where it will be seen that the movement to a student-centred instructional model represents the anticipated form in which student support will be provided.

Especially salient developments in the general distance education literature describe the shift to a student-centred model of provision. As well, changes in the mandate, structure, and operating principles and practices of distance education institutions are described. Both have implications for the curriculum design of recent concepts of knowledge acquisition and use. These "transmission-to-transformation" interpretations are gathered together and given more detailed expression in the institutional profile suggested by Boot and Hodgson's (1987) distinction between dissemination and development. The following analysis is conducted within the bounds of theory and practice found in the published literature, where this is appropriate to the concerns and levels of discourse found in the student support literature. The general distance education literature does infer, imply, and on occasion refer directly to more fundamental, even ideological, themes. But as Guy (1990) points out, distance education for the most part has escaped much of the critical analysis of the "new sociology" represented by writers such as Bourdieu (1973), Foucault (1977), and others whose writings are employed in critiques of current educational practice. The emergence of articles debating the applicability of such notions as post-Fordism likely marks a change in this condition.

The Mandate

The principles of open learning and the practice of distance education were initially established to improve accessibility to postsecondary education. The essential elements of most institutional access policies included rolling enrolment dates, the removal of prerequisites, and the convenience of home study — the latter designed to accommodate the personal situations of students with job and family responsibilities. More recently, the concept of accessibility has been expanded from access-of-entry to include access-of-results. Morrison (1989) and Paul (1986) describe this as an obligation: where nontraditional students are granted admission to an open learning programme, the institution is obligated to provide the necessary support to ensure achievement and completion. However, issues of programme completion raise other matters concerning the utility of knowledge and the transfer of skill. These are discussed in greater detail later but require brief comment at this point.

The student support literature suggests a more direct role in support of the learning process. The potential for contradiction exists in the various roles that student support service personnel play. Under open entry, support for inadequately prepared students is obviously necessary. At the same time, however, curricular changes require greater interaction among instructors and students; and these demand that tutors possess many of the skills previously employed only (or largely) in the advising role. A recognition of the extent to which curriculum changes influence instructional support and counselling tasks is seen in the call for greater attention to the problem of achievement and completion. It is also seen in the relationship between the academic outcomes of the distance education programme and their relevance to employment opportunities for the student (Sweet 1991). The access concept, then, has been considerably elaborated to include entry, completion, and transition to the workforce — with an expanded role implied for student support services. This role turns on the notion of customer demand or what Sewart (1992a) has termed the "service sector approach". Essentially, it assumes a view of the student and the other clients in the society as consumers who are able to demand a range of educational options. These are in a form more closely related to personal, economic, or group needs than to the structures of the educational institution and the academic disciplines.

Access and Equity

Distance education has historically implemented the principle of openness or, at least, removed barriers to access. But the identification of groups who deserve special status has occurred outside distance education. Government policies aimed at establishing equality of opportunity have in some countries been quite specific in designating ethnic, gender, or employment groups who are perceived as disadvantaged by educational policies. Such policies mark a shift from attempts to increase postsecondary participation rates to enhancing access for specified target groups. A further development in those policies is the monitoring of group participation in particular programmes: for example, the number of women enrolling in math and science courses.

An emerging literature deals exclusively with "disabilities" in the general higher education literature. These appear to attend to issues of general awareness of need and to institutional access barriers. For example, Bursuck et al. (1989) and Sergent et al. (1987) present the results of national surveys of available services. Interpretations of trends in these services suggest their greater availability and appropriateness (Statistics Canada 1990; Wilchesky 1986). Discussions of institutional barriers to participation by the disabled and the means to overcome them have been reviewed by Hill (1992). Some specific references to the needs of the disabled learner have appeared in the distance education literature (see, for example, Cutress 1988).

The literature on exceptionalities in higher education is not limited to those with physically or intellectually limiting conditions. Access for the elderly is dealt with in the general higher education literature (see, for example, Lawson 1992) as well as in the distance education literature (Dessaint and Boisvert, 1991). The case for a distance education role in meeting the special learning needs of aboriginal people has been made by Roberts, White, and Burge (1990) and in an annotated bibliography, *The Native Learner and Distance Education* (1988), prepared by the Confederation College of Ontario.

Women's groups have been the most articulate in advancing the cause of access to equal education. Their arguments have occurred within the context of a larger women's movement involving social, political, and economic programmes. Education is but one vehicle for social change, although it is generally recognised as an important one. The value attached to education as a means of personal liberation, social mobility, and

constructive social change is apparent in the writing of women from developed and developing countries. One of the more extensively reported topics in this literature is that of "women's studies", which is seen as a particularly powerful vehicle for learning and as a focus for group communication and networking (Burge 1988; Coulter 1989; Neale 1992). While numerous publications deal with women's educational issues, relatively few explore the potential for distance learning to further access to basic and higher education. A comprehensive publication on women and distance education is Faith's (1988) compilation that includes accounts of students engaged in distance learning as well as the interpretations and perspectives of professional women working in the field as faculty and administrators. More recently, the *Journal of Distance Education* (1990) published a special issue on women in distance education that presented a range of topics, among them an analysis of regional (and national) barriers to access. Although modest in the volume of publication, women's learning at a distance is a field in which assumptions are being rethought and elaborated. For example, Faith (1988, ii) described the anomalous impact of distance education on women's lives: while encouraging individual growth and development, it also can work to further confine women to the house and their traditional domestic role. More recently, Kirkup and von Prummer (1990) have discussed the topic of women's isolation but arrive at a different conclusion than Faith, albeit from a somewhat altered perspective. To these authors, the requests for personal contact and support networks from women learning at a distance do indicate a "felt sense of isolation", but this is not necessarily associated with negative personal circumstances:

> . . . [as] for example, being housebound with young children. It can, rather, emerge from a positive desire to be connected with others. It comes out of a life in which one's relationships with others and the well-being of others are a crucial part of personal development. It is a positive way of being rather than an immature state on the road to "separation" or "independence". (1990, 29)

The need for affiliation, as well as achievement, is characteristic of all learners, but as Burge, Howard, and Ironside (1991) point out, most distance education strategies are being directed towards achievement as an end. Successfully completing course requirements becomes more important than meeting the affiliation drives that promote effective and comfortable learning. The attention women's groups have drawn to issues of affiliation are important in constructing a learner-centred view of distance learning and support services. As well as developing arguments for a role for distance learning in the lives of women, these writers have elaborated some basic educational concepts. For example, the need for differentiated educational programming was argued by Thompson (1983, 93), who did not see that access to the existing educational system would advance the cause for women:

> It is not merely a question of improving the chances of women to compete in a man's world . . . but to demand a radical change in the nature of what is being offered. This implies at least an equal share in its control, at least an equal share in the determination of what counts as valuable knowledge within it, and at least an equal recognition that what is important about women's experience of the world is as valid as men's. Without such real equalities, notions of "equality of opportunity" are essentially rhetorical.

Burge (1988) then developed Thompson's position in a reanalysis of the concept of "andragogy", a concept that assumes a learner-centred approach to instructional design and organisation. Burge and Lenskyi (1990, 24) concluded that, while andragogical and

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feminist teaching share many features, including the validation of the learner's personal experiences as a resource for learning, they nevertheless differ:

> What feminists have termed "feminist pedagogy" goes beyond andragogy because it takes the specificity of women's experience into account. Female learners come to class with specific personal histories, learning styles, and expectations that are shaped, to varying degrees, by their experiences as girls and women in a society characterized by male power and privilege.

Whether gender is a necessary or even supportable distinction in the conditions of learning required by adult students (Manicom 1993) or distance learners (Garrison 1988) is subject to some debate. In any event, the feminist position can be considered a voice for institutional change which, when joined with the voices of other groups in society who have not been well served, can work to alter those policies and practices of the distance education universities that create barriers to access and opportunity.

Access and Achievement

A concern with access-as-results (Morrison 1989) requires a commitment to ensure that students receive the guidance and support they need for academic achievement. This concern is often accompanied by calls for more adequate support services. Underlying the notion of an institutional obligation to support students as they attain course and programme objectives is a reorientation of attitude towards what Levin (1992, 268) terms a "standard of success instead of the bizarre notion, so common in education, that many failures are an indication of quality". Changes in institutional views about their responsibility to support students as they meet reasonable academic standards are prerequisite to support service policies that effectively encourage students to complete their courses.

Another aspect of the access concept concerns the relationship between curricular choice and the more general reason for enrolment. Typically, students enrol in order to get a better job or to advance in the workplace. Career counselling in the traditional support service model has long recognised this reason for enrolment. However, students may best realise the instrumental value of an education when guidance is embedded within the curriculum itself. For example, the value of cooperative learning arrangements between educational institutions and business and industry is increasingly apparent. These developments are consistent with the need for lifelong learning in promoting career maintenance or mobility. They also accept the personal situations of the student as legitimate sources of knowledge (Boot and Hodgson 1987). These extensions to the meaning of "accessibility" are discussed below in terms of programme completion and relevance or transition to the workforce.

Completion

Two questions are most often raised in relation to programme completion:

(1) How persistent are students in pursuing their education?
(2) Is the material necessary for university-level academic work available?

The term "persistence" is used because there is evidence that many people do not "drop out" of school but rather return at a later date or enrol in some other programme to further their careers or satisfy their interests. Tinto's (1975; 1982) formulation is perhaps the most widely used framework for interpreting retention. The Tinto model assumes that institutional and social integration are essential to student satisfaction. In this sense, it is

a model of persistence rather than dropout (see, for example, Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler 1992). The Tinto model has received considerable research attention and conceptual elaboration in the distance education literature (Bernard and Amundsen 1989; Kember 1989). One overview of the relationship between institutional practices and student persistence was conducted by Taylor et al. (1986, 86), who gathered information on students from five institutions in various countries. As the authors report, no consistent trend in the data was found and the study failed to generate "consistent empirical evidence that would suggest a generalisable principle upon which distance education systems could be based". It may be that the conceptual basis of the model, which sees university education as part of a "rite of passage", is more appropriate to the younger student population (Tierney 1992). It requires a substantial reworking if it is to explain the behaviour of adult students in a distance education setting (see, for example, Kember, Murphy, Siaw, and Yuen 1991).

Tinto (1975) suggests that an institution's response should not be limited to the problem of retention but should consider also the broader goal of student development. Tinto (1982; 1990) offers a number of guidelines, including the following recommendations:

- Universities are social and intellectual communities in which it is especially important to have frequent and rewarding contact between students and faculty and staff.

- Effective retention involves a commitment to students and care for them. It is student-centred.

- Retention efforts should reflect the unique character of the educational mission of the university.

A second area of concern in promoting student attainment is the availability of resource materials needed for university-level study and scholarship. Recent reviews of the literature on off-campus library services by Burge, Snow, and Howard (1988), Shklanka (1990), and Latham, Slade, and Budrick (1991) indicate the very limited extent of research in this area. Working with case studies and other, largely descriptive accounts, Latham et al. summarised the various models of off-campus delivery and noted that all involved to some degree the elements of effective delivery that Slade (1987) summarised:

- core collections placed on-site with special funding to purchase duplicates of items on the main campus;
- mail delivery of special requests;
- telephone or mail reference service;
- special telephone lines for off-campus students;
- advertisement of library services;
- a librarian designated for off-campus services;
- adequate support staff;
- bibliographic instruction to off-campus students;
- online bibliographic search services;
- interlibrary loans;
- free services;
- assessment of user needs; and
- evaluation of services.

Burge et al. (1988) were interested in developing an adult, learner-centred model of library services. This model is directed towards the "autonomous learner" end of Howard's (1985) continuum. As autonomous learners, students are released from the pre-selected package of reading materials or the assigned reading list to undertake

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research on a topic that may be of their choice but certainly allows the freedom to find and select resources from the library. Despite this model, facts from the few surveys available indicate that few students possess these independent learning skills (Shklanka 1990, 8). Burge et al. (1988), nevertheless, were able to state the organisational requirements of a learner-centred delivery model. This was their "developing partnerships" scheme, in which library staff work with distance educators to integrate the seven elements of the system, including: programme and course planning, services marketing, resource development, data access, technical communications, services and, and materials delivery, and professional development.

Garrison and Baynton (1987) make an interesting distinction between support for the learning process and support for the mediation (communication) process in their discussion of resources that both distance learners and their on-campus colleagues require. Resources that are unique to distance learning include:

> . . . the resources of the learning process [that] include the availability of access to courses, teachers or facilitators, learning materials, library facilities, media equipment and community experts. The need for resources associated with the mediation process results from the geographic distance between the teacher and the learner, and requires some type of mechanical or electronic transfer of information through telecommunications or mail to carry out the two-way communication in the learning process.

While this discussion omits the concept of the study centre as a communicative vehicle in the educational transaction, it nevertheless is useful to highlight the communication vehicle (whether electronic or mail) as the means by which off-campus students obtain access to resources.

Transition

The issue most closely associated with transition to the workforce is the utility of the training students receive as they attempt to enter the job market. The question of relevance is central to the ongoing debate in the postsecondary education literature over the relationship between education and training and the appropriate role of universities. To the extent that the university acknowledges some vocational interest and responsibility, discussion then centres on the utility of task-specific training as opposed to the development of more generic skill sets. A closely related matter concerns the value of including a general educational dimension (for example, the humanities) to professional education or training.

Sweet (1991) discusses support policies in the context of an access continuum that spanned the entire student's experience from entering the institution entry through completing the programme and entering the workforce. The model for this expanded view of accessibility and opportunity was private correspondence schools. But their curricula are very task specific and frequently criticised as preparing students for job entry rather than career mobility. Increasingly, employers are calling for graduates of postsecondary programmes to possess the ability to learn, to welcome and adjust to change, and to be flexible in their approach to the demands of employment. While the requirements of employers, as well as the human resource development policies of governments, may not be the first priority of an educational institution, they are of some concern and consequence. Distance education institutions cannot ignore the fact that most postsecondary policy issues are debated and determined within the access-quality-funding "triangle" (Skolnik and Rowen 1984). And the balance between access and

quality is shifting as governments demand greater accountability in the general operation of institutions and in the relevance of their curricula to labour market requirements.

Hendrikx (1992) defines "quality" as comprising three components:

(1) intrinsic validity, based on established evaluative criteria;

(2) the ability of the production process (of, for example, course materials) to meet technical standards of excellence; and

(3) customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction includes the perceived legitimacy of the distance education degree. The courses offered and the degrees awarded by distance and traditional universities may be equal; and there may even be formal recognition of the distance degree. But popular recognition may still be lacking. Students often do not view the distance education credential as equivalent. Nor do some accrediting bodies. As Kirby and Garrison (1990) point out after surveying the Deans of Graduate Studies at Canadian universities: distance education is not accepted as a legitimate educational delivery method because of the perception that it fails to support critical discourse or a community of learners, both of which are considered essential features of a university-level education. These evaluative criteria are largely internal to the education community. As previously indicated, the marketplace also operates to determine the utility of a degree or certificate.

Extending the Mandate

A broader, social implication results when distance education institutions move away from the dissemination model which Tait (1988, 98) describes as constructed to reflect "a hierarchical image of society in which authority and power reside with those who are the holders and regulators of expert knowledge". Democratising the system goes beyond policies of access to address the need to redefine conditions of learning in ways that recognise the active role students play in their own learning. This may be seen in Apple's (1992) description of the reactions of students to textbooks (so central to the conduct of distance education). Apple's (1992, 10) analysis suggests that even under the most rigid industrial model of home study, recipients are not the "empty vessels" so often portrayed:

> We can talk about three ways in which people can potentially respond to a text: dominated, negotiated, and oppositional. In the dominated reading of a text, one accepts the messages at face value. In a negotiated response, the reader may dispute a particular claim, but accept the overall tendencies or interpretations of a text. Finally, an oppositional response rejects these dominant tendencies and interpretations of a text. The reader "repositions" herself or himself in relation to the text and takes on the position of the oppressed. . . . These are, of course, no more than ideal types and many responses will be a contradictory combination of all three. But the point is that not only do texts have contradictory elements; audiences construct their own responses to texts. They do not passively receive texts, but actually read them based on their own class, race, gender, and religious experiences.

While acknowledging an active role for the learner in knowledge acquisition, Apple's analysis suggests that the range of intellectual interest a student displays is constrained by limits placed on the content of texts by those who decide what material is or is not admissible for study. Apple (1992, 10) concludes that a democratic process must be

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established that involves ". . . the creation of the conditions necessary for all people to participate in the creation and re-creation of meaning and values".

Boot and Hodgson (1987, 14–15) describe the essence of the dissemination model as "open access" while that of the development model is "open curriculum". This concern with subject matter relates not only to the problems of information manipulation and control that Apple outlined, but also to the instructional issues raised by participants in the Empire State College, Downing College conferences. As discussed earlier, they explored connections between the context for learning and the meaning students give content. Under this interpretation of the development scheme, the notion of context is not limited to the interaction between learner and text but also involves the joint participation of students and instructor in dialogue (see, for example, Garrison and Baynton 1987). In Tait's (1988, 97) words:

> . . . the mediation and interpretation of course material by the tutor (or facilitator, or counsellor) represents a central function in promoting the independence of the learner, and in supporting educational practice which can be termed democratic.

The theme of democratisation and an interpretation of interaction as involving both people and texts will be taken up in the next section, which outlines institutional and curricular changes in distance education universities.

Organisational Structure and Operation

Various operating principles and practices exist at universities involved in distance education. These have been described in a number of articles, most recently by Rumble (1992), based on differences in the organisational structures and government systems among distance education universities. These Rumble termed "distance teaching universities", "campus-based universities", and "dual-mode universities". Rumble's institutional arrangement includes the assertion that distance teaching universities possess fewer resources than dual-mode universities, or a campus-based university that decides to become a dual-mode university. Nevertheless, distance teaching universities do have special qualities, including the potential to be more flexible in their provision. Rumble quotes Perry (1976, 55), who argued that distance teaching universities would be able to ". . . experiment with new patterns of teaching with a freedom that would be impossible to achieve in established universities". Some of these features include unique strengths in the technology and processes of materials development and in the delivery of support services to distant students. For the most part, however, these attributes have been employed in developing an "industrialised" method of provision in which the design, development, and delivery of course materials are governed by criteria of product quality and logistical efficiency. The more obvious structural and operational changes to this approach involve processes of decentralisation and innovation.

Decentralisation

While distance teaching universities and dual-mode universities are useful distinctions in that educational policies and practices are influenced by institutional structures, the view of distance education as an industrialised form remains the predominant notion. This view cuts across all other conceptions of organisational form and pattern (Keegan 1986; Peters 1989). However, references to alternative models — those that are more responsive to student needs — appear with increasing regularity in the literature, and some are finding concrete expression in the institution (see, for example, Mason and

Kaye 1990). Kaye and Rumble (1991) refer to "distributed classroom models" as the apparent direction of change providing in distance education. These models place greater emphasis on learning in groups, on networking, and on a more obvious role for the individual teacher. This move away from the conventional model — which submerges the teacher within the course development team and which assigns the local tutor a remedial and evaluative role — the authors attribute to a number of factors:

- wider access to new technology;

- growing demand from the business community for continuing education for employees;

- increasing competition for part-time students; and

- a move towards a "post-Fordist" society with its emphasis (in the case of education) on addressing the needs of the individual before those of the institution.

The direction of change towards greater institutional responsiveness is, in the first instance, based on a reanalysis of the needs of students that reflects their changing role in the distance learning process. Once considered consumers of packaged information, students are today seen as more active participants in their learning. A view of the student as agent is consistent with recent developments in cognitive psychology where development of skill and understanding requires exercise of some measure of control over the acquisition and use of information. From this perspective, the learner is accorded greater responsibility in determining curricular means as well as ends (Burge 1988). Arguments for repositioning the learner in the knowledge acquisition process may be seen in critical assessments of the operating principles and practices of many distance education institutions. For example, changed conceptions of knowledge and its proper pursuit underlie the work of Boot and Hodgson (1987, 8) who question the legitimacy (and efficacy) of the traditional formula of independent study when they distinguish between dissemination and development orientations in the operation of distance education. Institutions concerned with the effective dissemination of knowledge consider it to be "a valuable commodity existing independently of people which can be stored and transmitted". This interpretation characterises the traditional "industrial" model of distance education as articulated by Peters (1989). In contrast, a developmental orientation views "knowing as a process of engaging with and attributing meaning to the world, including self in it". From this perspective, the institution's primary concern is the personal and intellectual growth of the individual.

Consistent with the dissemination-development distinction is the "post-Fordist" metaphor used to describe the changes underway in distance education institutions. Post-Fordism has been variously described but possesses the following features: flexible systems of manufacture, customised design for specific market segments, and an emphasis on quality control. An essential element in the emerging post-Fordist economy is the need for businesses to become learning organisations. In addition to workplace learning, schools, colleges, and universities need to modify their curriculum and instruction to better equip graduates for lifelong learning and retraining (Resnick 1987). The institutional implications of the post-Fordist view are a greater differentiation of tasks and a more decentralised authority and decision-making. However, there is some evidence that post-Fordist arrangements do not always produce the expected levels of labour force involvement and commitment; and they may be even more exploitive of the worker than the old "production line" concepts of manufacture (Satoshi 1982; Parker and Slaughter 1990). Certainly, evidence exists that continuing education opportunities are available only to a limited number of workers, usually those at management level. In the distance education field, Campion and Renner (1992) warn of open learning policies that

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serve such "neo-Fordist" training requirements which effectively exclude most employees. Bailey (1987) similarly describes constraints on access in her overview of various open learning schemes in Britain.

In their final comment on the application of the post-Fordist concept to distance education, Campion and Renner (1992) suggest that as a descriptor of the changes underway in education, post-Fordism may best describe only those institutions that currently are especially "Fordist" in their operation. Those that resisted the industrial-ising influence of the Peters model of distance education will undergo less change. And since the established universities were least likely to embrace this approach, the dual-mode universities are less affected (but see Evans and Nation 1992). The distance teaching universities on the other hand — and these are the type of institution included in the Delhi Symposium   presumably require and are undergoing significant adjustment.

Innovation

Morrison (1989) states that distance education institutions are in the business of innovation. And Rumble's (1992) distinction between distance teaching universities and dual-mode universities, and Shale's (1987) description of the distance teaching universities as strikingly innovative ventures, suggest their generally entrepreneurial nature. However, Morrison claims that a contradiction exists between the conservative academic culture and the entrepreneurial tendencies of the organisational culture that characterises distance education. Sewart (1992a) similarly has described the need for a more flexible and responsive institutional structure based on the theory and practice of the service sector industries; and, further, Sewart asserts these developments will require attaching greater importance to the support service functions of the organisation.

In any event, some innovative policies are of greater import than others in the operation of distance education programmes. Collaboration has been described as a particularly innovative policy practice characteristic of distance education universities (Sweet 1986) and this notion has been more completely developed by Konrad and Small (1989) and by Moran and Mugridge (1993). However, given the depressed economic situation in which most countries find themselves — large debts, high levels of unemployment, and a rapidly changing world economy — continued pressure from governments and other agencies sponsoring educational programmes require consistent and incremental improvements in performance. At the same time less and less funding is available. In the decentralised, post-Fordist period this requires that postsecondary institutions be especially venturesome in their planning.

Michael and Holdaway (1992, 17) distinguish three aspects of "entrepreneurial higher education": partnerships with business and industry; fundraising; and, of more immediate interest, "the structuring and administering of a postsecondary institution to reflect a market orientation and less dependence upon government funding". The market or demand model is a policy direction that governments can pursue in various ways. These include: privatisation through transferring assets and services to the private sector; or simply encouraging publicly funded institutions to operate on a cost recovery basis, at least in part.

Privatisation, a world-wide trend in higher education, is seen by many as a threat to existing publicly funded distance universities. These institutions can, however, learn by observing the private sector's operating principles and practices and, in some cases, can benefit from a direct association. Murgatroyd and Woudstra (1990, 15) regret that many reject the application of business analogies to educational organisations: "There is much to be learned about the management and administration of complex service activities from business organisations engaged in related fields". Underlying innovative

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institutional behaviour is an attitude and spirit of entrepreneurship. Although profit and cost-recovery programmes do not operate under exactly the same conditions, there are more similarities than differences (Sweet 1991); and, increasingly, the public sector is adopting the demand model in their institutional planning and implementation. Tait (1992) reports that the United Kingdom Open University requires increasing numbers of its programmes to operate on a self-financing basis. The costs of student support activities are recouped from fee income. Foks (1988, 36) believes distance education institutions are positioned to do this "provided their approach is well placed and adventurous". Foks offers the following suggestions:

- Compete more strenuously for government funds, against each other and against private organisations.

- Consider various entrepreneurial ventures that might have seemed distasteful in the past.

- Seek funds from sources other than ministries of education and, for that matter, government.

- Enter into more cooperative ventures with each other, with other educational bodies, and with the private sector.

A view of the student as consumer and client has obvious implications for the general organisation of a responsive distance education system. It also extends to the curriculum development process and, most directly, to the concept of student-centred designs.