

Distance Learning Forum
Sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
June 1st and 2nd, 1998

Breakout Session Reports

Executive Summary

The participants in the Forum were divided into four groups designated by different colors. By design, each group represented a cross-spectrum of those attending the Forum. The members of each group discussed what they had heard during the course of the Forum, their discussions guided by facilitators. Each group was assigned a reporter to take notes on the group's discussions. After approximately one hour, the participants reassembled to hear a summation of each group's meeting from the reporters.

Yellow Group

The Yellow Group said it had come to understand that many questions exist about distance learning that they had not theretofore realized. However participants said by accentuating certain approaches, answers would develop. These approaches include:

- Virginia's colleges and universities, both public and private, should work collaboratively;
- Technology should be employed to augment and enhance learning in every way possible;
- Market research towards understanding the needs for and costs of distance learning must increase;
- Distance learning should be subordinated to the missions of the individual institutions rather than the other way around.

The group agreed that SCHEV's role should that of a broker and information clearinghouse, and offering services related to the management and technical support of distance learning endeavors. The group—with the exception of one individual—did not support the formation of a separate virtual university within the Commonwealth.

Green Group

The Green Group spent most of its discussion focused on SCHEV's role in distance learning. Its participants thought SCHEV could be most effective as an information clearinghouse, promoting dialogue among all the institutions, public and private, about the issues surrounding distance learning. Specifically the Green Group felt that SCHEV should come to the forefront in the following areas:

- Organizing more events such as the Forum to facilitate the discussion among all parties interested in distance learning issues;
- Particularly facilitating discussion about intellectual property rights;

- Helping get the financial incentives in place for institutions and faculty to pursue distance learning project development;
- Providing assistance in instructional design and the use of technology for distance learning opportunities;
- Ensuring that adequate funding exists for the full public system to engage in appropriate distance learning endeavors;

The Green Group raised the issue of funding for distance learning. Participants suggested that one source would be to reallocate existing resources from lower to higher priority items, and that the institutions should begin now to consider their priorities for distance learning.

Blue Group

Keying on Dr. James Koch's presentation in Panel One (Dr. Koch is the President of Old Dominion University), the group discussed the prospect of the state's distance learning "haves" racing away from the "have nots." The Blue Group said that the state should not relegate many public institutions to second-class status by favoring investment in those institutions already heavily involved with distance learning.

The group said that there should be few constraints applied by the state on distance learning efforts, and particularly not in the area of Internet-based efforts. At the same time, the group wanted more state funding, especially in the form of specific initiatives, for distance learning.

The group said that SCHEV is behind in dealing with distance learning and needs to "step up to bat." It should serve as an information agency for consumers on what's available in the distance learning field in the state. Second, it should serve as a broker between distance education needs and the institutions as suppliers. Finally, SCHEV should be the agency that promotes and oversees the standards that govern distance learning in the Commonwealth.

Red Group

On the question of regulation versus coordination, the Red Group came down heavily on the side of coordination. They favored the state offering an information dissemination function, and opposed anything that would serve as a barrier to experimentation in distance learning by any of the institutions.

Concerning the problem of program duplication, the group said the state should do nothing directly to prevent duplication. However, participants did say that in the world of limited resources, the state should only provide the institutions funds for budgets that made sense within each institution's mission. The group said that duplicative programs

that make it through a budgeting process and to the open market will then be subject to natural market pressures, which will inexorably weed out unneeded efforts.

On the subject of a separate virtual university, the participants opposed such an endeavor. Participants said SCHEV should develop centers to provide support services in the application of technology, career advising, and testing (assessment). The Red Group closed its presentation by mentioning that as a foundation for an effective distance learning effort in the Commonwealth, SCHEV should continue to develop the articulation and transfer policies among the public and private institutions.