



JUNE 5, 2006
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Betsy Bedigian
Office: 315.422.3512
Mobile: 315.657.3123
Betsy@Hezel.com

FOLLOW THE DISTANCE LEARNING LEADER

SYRACUSE, N.Y.-June 5, 2006- How can higher education cope with escalating demands for institutional accountability? Ask the distance educators. Continuous growth in distance education forces constant evaluation and improvement.

Enrollment of students taking one or more courses online grew 18.2 percent in 2004 and online courses were available at more than 65 percent of all colleges offering face-to-face courses, according to the Sloan Consortium. Though a majority of U.S. higher education institutions offer some form of distance learning, many administrators and governing bodies question whether distance learning is as good as traditional learning.

This scrutiny no longer falls on distance education alone; Congress and the U.S. Department of Education are holding all colleges and universities accountable to higher standards as the demand for federal financial aid increases and uncertainty surrounds the bottom-line contribution of postsecondary education.

"We have an opportunity to embrace assessment as a tool for improvement," said James Woodell, Dean of Academic Technology at North Shore Community College. "Otherwise, assessment will be about compliance alone and not much of an opportunity."

Yet currently, no standardization for performance measurement exists among higher education institutions and many colleges and universities until recently did not have metrics in place to measure quality. Josh Mitchell, manager of special projects at Hezel Associates, said the challenge is making internal and external performance measurement efficient and more consistent.

A study released last year by the National University Telecommunications Network (NUTN) and Hezel Associates focused on the use of benchmarking in distance education. The study found that 54 percent of respondents use benchmarking to assess the quality of their institutions' distance learning programs against those at similar institutions, but the benchmarking is inconsistent.

"To know where other institutions are is to know what works and what doesn't," said Dr. Richard T. Hezel, president of the education consulting firm Hezel Associates. "We want to help institutions build upon what they know."

Beginning June 12, there will be a new tool for assessing quality in distance learning—the Interactive Quality Assessment Tool (IQAT)—which makes its debut at NUTN 2006. IQAT will help participants track their own data over time and compare against other participating institutions through a comprehensive database of peer-reported information. The program provides subscribers with a baseline through benchmark groups of shared characteristics, such as Carnegie classifications, location and size.

"While we're all eager to increase access to education and maximize fiscal benefits, we have to proceed with some care and ensure high quality in our programs," said Woodell. "IQAT will affect all of higher education by helping educators understand that real assessment, real improvement, comes from much more than simply collecting and looking at numbers."

For more information, visit www.iqat.org or contact Betsy Bedigian at 315-657-3123.

-more-



Hezel Associates
1201 E. Fayette St.
Syracuse, NY 13210
315.422.3512



ABOUT HEZEL ASSOCIATES

Headquartered in Syracuse, N.Y., Hezel Associates provides research, evaluation and strategic services to national and international clients in education, technology, publishing and business. The firm has earned a distinguished national reputation as a leading expert in distance education research and consulting. Clients such as the U.S. Department of Education, Arizona Board of Regents, Habitat for Humanity International, the Public Broadcasting Service, Regis University and the United Way have relied on Hezel Associates' recommendations to make strategic decisions, and create and implement policies. Dr. Richard T. Hezel, a leading research-oriented consultant in the field of education technology, founded the company in 1987. For further information about Hezel Associates, visit www.hezel.com.

ABOUT NUTN

The National University Telecommunications Network (NUTN) is committed to providing dynamic leadership and support of applications of new and emerging technologies in distance education. As a premier distance learning professional organization, NUTN provides vision and experience to higher education institutions and professionals serving numerous constituencies and organizations. For further information about NUTN, visit www.nutn.org.

###