# SUCCESS FACTORS RELATING TO ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

## R. J. Cruise
## Sunraysia College of TAFE, Mildura

## INTRODUCTION

The research began with an examination of a range of alternative delivery methodologies that had been and are currently offered by the Sunraysia College of TAFE to students within the Sunraysia district of Victoria and New South Wales. A survey of literature, interviews with a number of College personnel involved in alternative course delivery coupled with an examination of the evaluations of numerous pilot programs conducted by the College over a period of time led to the isolation of twelve factors that were seen to lead to alternative delivery program success. These factors, listed below, were termed success factors.

- Degree of Interaction
- Appropriateness of the Methodology to the subject material
- Level of Co-ordination
- Presenter/Tutor Orientation and Effectiveness
- Resource and Support Material Availability
- Effectiveness of Technical Services and Equipment
- Limitations of Receival Site or Course Venue
- Level of Costs-Upfront and Recurrent
- User Friendliness of Methodology
- Class Size
- Quality of Lesson Material
- Timing of Presentation of the Course

Following the identification of the twelve success factors, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire asked one hundred and ten students across six alternative delivery methodologies to rate the success factors according to how they perceived them contributing to program success.

## TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY

For the purposes of the study, the six alternative delivery methodologies were defined as follows.

### Outreach Programs/Mobile Teaching Centre

College programs delivered in church halls, community centres, hotels or wherever people living in isolated or remote areas chose to assemble to participate in an education and training program. They were generally co-ordinated by volunteer community members and delivered by College staff who travel to the course venue.

**Off Campus/Correspondence Courses**

Courses prepared in printed form and sometimes supplemented by audio and video tapes. Students generally received course information and return assignments using the postal service.

**Extended Campus Operations**

This type of delivery is very similar to Outreach. Courses are offered by other institutions at Sunraysia College of TAFE. Essentially the course owner "extends" their campus to Sunraysia.

**Teleconferencing**

This methodology is essentially point to point or point to many points communication using existing terrestrial telephone technology. Each point has a loud speaker and microphones (or similar equipment) enabling audioconferencing to occur.

**Satellite Course Delivery**

This technique utilises satellite technology to deliver programs via television. Audio is achieved through teleconferencing. It is essentially one way vision, two way audio.

**Videoconferencing**

Videoconferencing utilises terrestrial communication networks although hybrid networks may be used. It is characterised by two way vision and two way audio.

**THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The rating scale used in the questionnaire was a five point scale with a rating of one being "of absolutely no importance" and a rating of five indicating "of critical importance". Since the success factors had been determined from an examination of previous research and practitioners views, it was expected that student ratings would be in the range of three (important) to five. This was to be the case with a few exceptions. Questionnaire response rate was sixty-four percent.

The following table indicates the responses for each alternative delivery methodology. The success factors are abbreviated for ease of presentation.

## Table 1
## Alternative Delivery Methodology

| SUCCESS FACTOR | AVERAGE RANKINGS | | | | | | OVERALL RANKING |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Outreach Mobile | Off Campus Correspond-ence | Extended Campus | Telecon-ferencing | Satellit Course Delivery | Video Confer-encing | |
| Co-ordination | 4.25 | 4.00 | 4.20 | 4.17 | 4.18 | 4.13 | 4.16 |
| Presenter/Tutor Orientation | 4.31 | 4.0 | 4.40 | 4.0 | 4.18 | 4.0 | 4.15 |
| Quality of Lesson Material | 3.81 | 4.40 | 4.0 | 4.50 | 4.0 | 3.34 | 4.01 |
| Approriateness of Methodology | 4.13 | 3.70 | 4.10 | 4.00 | 3.76 | 4.25 | 3.99 |
| Interaction | 4.00 | 3.50 | 4.60 | 3.67 | 3.53 | 4.38 | 3.95 |
| Effectiveness of Tech. Serv. | 4.25 | 2.75 | 2.80 | 4.83 | 4.06 | 4.75 | 3.91 |
| Resource & Support Availability | 3.50 | 3.90 | 4.30 | 4.50 | 3.29 | 3.50 | 3.83 |
| Class Size | 4.09 | 2.29 | 3.50 | 4.17 | 3.62 | 4.0 | 3.61 |
| Level of Costs | 3.88 | 3.06 | 3.10 | 2.33 | 3.71 | 4.17 | 3.38 |
| Timing of Presentation | 3.69 | 2.80 | 4.20 | 3.25 | 3.29 | 2.75 | 3.33 |
| User Friendliness | 4.06 | 3.11 | 2.80 | 3.33 | 3.29 | 2.63 | 3.20 |
| Receival Site/Course Venue | 2.94 | 3.11 | 2.90 | 2.83 | 2.47 | 3.89 | 3.02 |

## RESPONSES

### (a) Human Centred Methodologies

The rankings presented in table 1 clearly indicates two factors above all others as being seen to be critical to program success. These were co-ordination of the program and the effectiveness of the program presenter. It came as no surprise to the researcher that these two factors emerged from the twelve success factors listed as being "of critical importance".

In the delivery of Outreach/Mobile Teaching Centre programs where many course participants travel long distances to the teaching centre, travelling on unmade and sometimes very difficult roads, have children and baby sitting problems and have been expected to pay substantial course fees, it is not unreasonable to expect well co-ordinated and quality programs.

Whilst these two factors were of "critical importance" for Outreach Mobile Teaching Centre program delivery, the quality of lesson material was considered to be the main factor contributing to the success of those undertaking Off Campus/Correspondence type programs. Once again this outcome was of no surprise to the researcher or, one suspects, the readers of this paper.

With Extended Campus course offerings, a high level of interaction between student and student, and student and teacher, was considered essential to program success. Those students enrolled or previously enrolled in programs by this means also considered the presenter/tutor orientation and co-ordination as essential for program success. As with Outreach programs, a number of the student clients travelled long distances to attend. Clearly, in these circumstances it was not unexpected that the timing of the course presentation was of importance although this was not reflected in Outreach responses. Venue was relatively unimportant indicating a student desire for education and training and a readiness to travel.

### (b) Technologically Centred Methodologies

Given some particularly bad experiences in relation to audio when teleconferencing has been used as a separate methodology or in conjunction with talkback television, the identification of "the effectiveness of technical services" as a significant success factor was a clear message from students. Similarly, such a success factor was also identified with the videoconferencing delivery methodology. Apparently those who have participated in satellite delivered programs have not experienced technical problems to the same extent.

Whilst students in the three technologically centred methodologies considered co-ordination and the effectiveness of the presenter/tutor of critical importance to program success, the quality of lesson material did not enjoy the same widespread favour - the high level of interactivity of the videoconferencing apparently substituting to some extent for lesson material quality.

With both the human centred methodologies and the technologically centred methodologies, success factors such as class size, timing of presentation, cost and venue did not rate highly indicating to the researcher that the student residing in areas that necessitate alternative delivery methodologies were prepared to make sacrifices to be able to participate in education and training.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the outcomes discussed briefly above, a number of recommendations emerging from the research were made. These were:

- that the Sunraysia College of TAFE should continue to provide a range of alternative delivery methods to enhance access and participation;

- the College develop appropriate infrastructures, allocate financial and human resources in order to satisfy client and presenter/tutor needs and maintain course quality at a high level;

- the College should seek corporate sponsors for the delivery of its courses/programs through technology enhanced alternative delivery methods;

- that four or five Outreach centres, suitably equipped, be established;

- that the College further develop courses/programs specifically for use using the low cost Teleconferencing methodology;

- that Satellite Delivery be used only when course participants are high;

- that the number of courses utilising Videoconferencing be increased;

- that the College reaffirm its commitment to Off Campus/ Correspondence and seek to broaden its student client base;

- that the College further develop the Extended Campus delivery mode through the introduction of new courses;

- that delivery methodologies not currently in use by the College be monitored to ascertain their appropriateness to course/program delivery within the Sunraysia district.

## CONCLUSION:

The research may not have highlighted any new-found wisdom in relation to alternative delivery "methodologies" yet it has reinforced existing knowledge or perceived success factors. Significant, however, was the finding that similar success factors exist irrespective of whether delivery method is traditional or alternative as defined.