

## Global Students/Global Faculty: A Model for Success Factors in the Use of Off-site Faculty for Online Instruction

*Estudiantes Globales/Facultad Global: Un Modelo para Factores de Éxito en el Uso de Facultad a Distancia para Instrucción Online*

**Barbara L. Stewart**

Dept. of Human Development  
and Consumer Sciences  
University of Houston  
Houston, TX 77204 USA  
[bstewart@uh.edu](mailto:bstewart@uh.edu)

**Carole Goodson**

Dept. of Human Development  
and Consumer Sciences  
University of Houston  
Houston, TX 77204 USA  
[cgoodson@uh.edu](mailto:cgoodson@uh.edu)

**Susan L. Miertschin**

Dept. of Information  
and Logistics Technology  
University of Houston  
Houston, TX 77204 USA  
[smiertsch@uh.edu](mailto:smiertsch@uh.edu)

**Abstract**

Based on cross-case analysis, a model is presented to enable more informed decisions regarding the use of off-site faculty for global online instruction. Case evidence is presented that suggests off-site arrangements will work best within a technology rich educational environment. Further, substantial motivators and inhibitors exist and create a context for considering individual attributes that can influence success. Categories of issues emerged from the cases as important for consideration of off-site teaching arrangements. These include: enabling factors, benefits, communications, and challenges. Each category was examined relative to administrative issues, curriculum and instruction, and faculty characteristics. The analysis of these components is reported here in order to enable administrators and faculty considering the use of off-site faculty to be more likely to produce informed decisions and successful results.

**Keywords:** Off-Site Faculty, Off-Site Instructors, Online Teaching, Online Education, Online Instruction, Remote Teaching, Remote Instruction

**Resumen**

Basado en un análisis de un caso-cruzado, se presenta un modelo que permite tomar decisiones con mayor información en relación al uso de facultad a distancia para instrucción global online. Se presenta evidencia del caso que sugiere que preparativos a distancia trabajarán mejor dentro de un ambiente educacional con tecnología de punta. Además, existen importantes impulsores e inhibidores y crean un contexto para considerar los atributos individuales que pueden influir en el éxito. Varias categorías de temas surgieron de los casos que son importantes para considerar arreglos de enseñanza a distancia. Estas incluyen: factores que los posibilitan, beneficios, comunicaciones y desafíos. Cada categoría fue examinada con relación a temas administrativos, currículum e instrucción, y características de la facultad. Se informa el análisis de estos componentes para permitir a los administradores y a la facultad considerar que el uso de facultad a distancia probablemente producirá decisiones informadas y resultados exitosos.

**Palabras Claves:** Facultad a distancia, Instructores a distancia, Enseñanza online, Educación online, Instrucción online, Enseñanza distante, Instrucción Distante

**Introduction**

Online teaching and learning is in a state of dynamic change and evolution (Bonk, 2009). Perhaps even more than evolutionary, the changes in opportunities for global delivery of instruction are revolutionary. Even a cursory Internet search of topics using the search strings “global online education” or “online education international students” yields thousands of listings for higher education courses available from any geographic location around the world. Students engage in formal online learning from their home sites near campus or across the globe.

While the practice of having students distant from a campus is now widely accepted (Sloan Consortium, 2008), the incidence of having faculty teaching from locations distant from campus is less well established. In most cases, as online courses and educational programs are established by traditional colleges and universities, existing resident faculty are tapped for course design and delivery. This paper focuses on these historically existing types of higher education establishments that maintain traditional bricks and mortar campuses rather than on those newer institutions which deliver primarily online courses

and programs and may not operate a physical campus. Issues may be different for primarily online institutions than for traditional campus-based institutions and could well be studied separately.

Assigning existing faculty, who traditionally work from campus, to teach online courses is currently the norm in traditional higher education. In the future, institutions may deem it in their best interest to use faculty members who do not work predominately from on campus, and may, instead, work from locations far from campus. The purpose of this paper is to explore, using the experience of two purposively selected case studies, some of the opportunities, issues, and concerns related to the use off-site faculty to teach online courses.

Review of popular business literature yielded useful practical tips on using, managing, and developing off-site employees in business. While distinct differences are likely to exist for off-site teachers, commonalities may also be in effect. Dwyer (2010) recommended establishing a clear communication routine, taking extra steps to build trust, and frequently reviewing processes. He suggested that gathering the right people was important and indicated that people who are productive without supervision, motivated, disciplined, and flexible were most likely to be successful employees in remote locations. He identified 6 keys to managing off-site employees: build a strong team, gather the right people, put technology to work, master the art of communication, build a sense of “we”, and manage by results. Similarly, Nichols (2010) also specified six steps for managing remote employees: communicating better, establishing respect, building a team culture, creating accountability through self-monitoring, training, and disciplining. Janove (2004) also recommended key ingredients for off-site employees: knowledge, trust, and connectedness. Finally, Javitch stated, “strong relationships and clearly outlined expectations make off-site workers part of a successful whole” (Javitch, 2007).

While much has been written about faculty decisions to teach or create online courses and about what makes quality online education (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000; NEA, 2000; Shea, 2007), little is available that explores issues surrounding the location of the instructor. As online education continues its global climb, more will be needed to guide decision making regarding off-site instructors. Such decisions are distinctly separate, yet related to decisions to teach or offer courses online. Interestingly, however, the primary motivator for teaching online found by Shea (2007) in a study of factors that support or inhibit motivation for teaching online, was more flexible work schedules. Shea’s study of faculty in 36 colleges cited flexibility and convenience in online environments as being related to issues such as childcare and other family needs. The cases selected for this current study were based on off-site teaching needs precipitated primarily by family relocation. The opportunity to teach online from a distance facilitated the retention of experienced faculty members. Green, Alejandro, and Brown’s (2009) work focused on such retention of experienced faculty in online programs and noted that faculty turnover for online applications increased costs, including course adaptation and redevelopment, faculty training, and increased staff support. Green proposed that institutions should be proactive in developing systems focused on retaining highly qualified distance education faculty. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to propose a guide or simple model to assist university faculty members and administrators in deciding whether it is appropriate to retain or use faculty to work at a distance from campus.

## Methodology

The methodological framework selected for this study was Eisenhardt’s (1989) for building theories from case study research. She advocates the application of case analysis as an inductive process and outlined the process of building theory from case research as a prescribed set of steps. These steps included defining a research question, selecting cases, crafting or selecting data collection methods, entering the field, analyzing data, shaping hypotheses or generalizations, enfolding the literature, and reaching closure (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The research question that guides this investigation was “What are the major considerations for successfully using off-site faculty to teach online courses?” Two cases were purposely selected based on Eisenhardt’s guidance in using theoretical rather than statistical sampling for case selection. Pettigrew (1988) recognized that when the number of cases to be studied is limited, it makes sense to choose cases which are likely to extend or develop the emergence of theory. For this study, the two cases were selected because one represented an interstate off-site location and the other represented an

international off-site location. While additional studies, involving a greater number of cases might be beneficial, these two cases were considered as appropriate for this initial investigation.

In the first case, the instructor was a tenured assistant professor who had worked for the university for 30 years. Family decisions, most notably the employment of a spouse, necessitated a move to the opposite end of the country from the home campus. This faculty member taught online from the remote location for 2 years. In the second case, the instructor was a tenured professor who had worked for the university for 23 years. In this case, the move was also precipitated by the career of a spouse. This professor moved around the world. She taught online from the remote location for 5 years. Hence, one case provided interstate experience, and the other provided international experience. While other factors such as sabbaticals, proximity to research sites, commute times and distances, and availability of office space may also influence or impact the need to teach from a distance, such factors were not included in this study.

Case study methodology was also selected based on Yin's (1994) characterization of case studies as useful in investigating contemporary phenomenon in real-life contexts. Further, cross-case analysis was employed to uncover patterns that might exist (Babbie, 2009). Both objective case details and subjective observations were recorded and assessed for variance and commonality, as suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995), to discover patterns.

Eisenhardt's (1989) next steps involve the selection of methods of data collection and entrance to the field. In these cases, the researchers assumed the roles of participant-as-researcher. Two of the authors of this work were the faculty members who taught online courses while residing at a distance from campus. The third author was an administrator in the same college as the professors. Each was charged to record and keep open-ended notes that included not only the details of their experiences but also their subjective impressions. Thus, case participants, in the roles of participants-as-observers, engaged in recording, cataloguing, and reflecting upon both objective and subjective observations and issues that impacted the experience of off-site instruction.

Data collection progressed, over twelve months. During this time, within-case analysis, as prescribed by Eisenhardt (1989), was used to gain familiarity with the data and facilitate preliminary theory generation. In addition, cross-case analysis was used "to look beyond initial impressions and see evidence through multiple lenses (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 533). From tabulation and consideration of the evidence, themes began to emerge. The data were categorized, and grids were used as organizing figures, as suggested by Pratt (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1984) to visually represent the findings. A composite grid was developed and is shown in Figure 1. This enumeration, categorization, and depiction of the data facilitated generalized thinking. The composite grid that organized and illustrated the data prompted the creation of a model that illustrated composite findings and generalizations derived from the data; it also served as a tool for guidance in decision making regarding the use of off-site faculty in teaching online courses. The emergent model was then reflectively reviewed based on the data collected and the existent literature. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were drawn as concluding steps.

### **Findings and Emergence of the Model**

Initially, within-case analysis suggested issues and attributes that are important to the success of off-site faculty instruction. Cross-case analysis then yielded comparative data. The convergent observations and perceptions of the multiple researchers enhanced confidence in the findings as encouraged by Eisenhardt (1989). The categories of issues that emerged included:

- Enabling factors
- Benefits
- Communications
- Challenges.

Each of these categories existed relative to

- Administrative issues
- Curriculum and instruction
- Faculty characteristics.

	Administrative Issues	Curriculum & Instruction	Faculty Characteristics
Enabling Factors			
Benefits			
Communications			
Challenges			
Contexts			
	Technology Rich Educational Environment		
	Motivators versus Inhibitors		

Figure 1 . Grid to Categorize, Depict, and Interpret the Data

Broader case evidence and reflection on the larger picture suggested that these administrative, curriculum, and faculty issues existed within the larger context of motivators and inhibitors. Further, the entire decision making system was judged to be predicated on a technology rich education environment. Participants reported that the availability and use of technology undergirded all off-site teaching initiatives. Hence, within a technology rich environment, motivators and inhibitors were found to exist, and these motivators and inhibitors impacted the consideration of enabling factors, benefits, communications, and challenges for administrative issues, curriculum and instruction, and faculty characteristics.

### Conclusions Drawn from the Data

Since the processing and analysis of the data utilized a grid as a means to categorize, understand, and depict the data, the development of a model was a logical next step. This model is a tool that presents considerations regarding the use of off-site faculty to teach online courses (see Figure 2).

### Description of Components of the Model

#### *Technology Rich Educational Environment*

Online education is predicated upon the availability of robust information technology infrastructure. From virtual private networks and high-speed Internet access to sophisticated course management systems that accommodate both synchronous and asynchronous two-way teacher-student interactions, institutions of higher education have embraced diverse forms of technology and use them in research, curriculum design, and instructional delivery. Students, faculty, administrators, and staff all work within a technology rich environment.

#### *Context: Motivators & Inhibitors*

Motivators, as described in the literature, focus on faculty motivations to teach online rather than motivations to teach from an off-site location. However, since there is no literature regarding off-site teaching, selected motivators of online teaching were reviewed for applicability to these cases. The works of Betts (1998), Bonk (2001), Lee (2001), Maguire (2004), Rockwell, et al. (1999) and Schifter (2000) were judged to be pertinent. These sources identified areas such as: intellectual challenge, desire to use technology, optimal working conditions, and self-gratification as intrinsic motivators. Also included were descriptions by Chizmar & Williams (2001), Parisot (1997), Bonk (2001), Dooley & Murphrey (2000), McKenzie, et al. (2000), Rockwell, et al. (1999), and Schifter (2000). These sources identified tenure and promotion issues and peer support issues. Similarly, opportunity to use technology, ability to meet student needs, administrative recognition, monetary incentives, and technology support (Betts, 1998;

Bonk, 2001; Dooley & Murphrey, 2000; Jones & Moller, 2002; McKenzie, et al., 2000; Rockwell, et al., 1999; Schifter, 2000 & 2002) were applied to these cases.

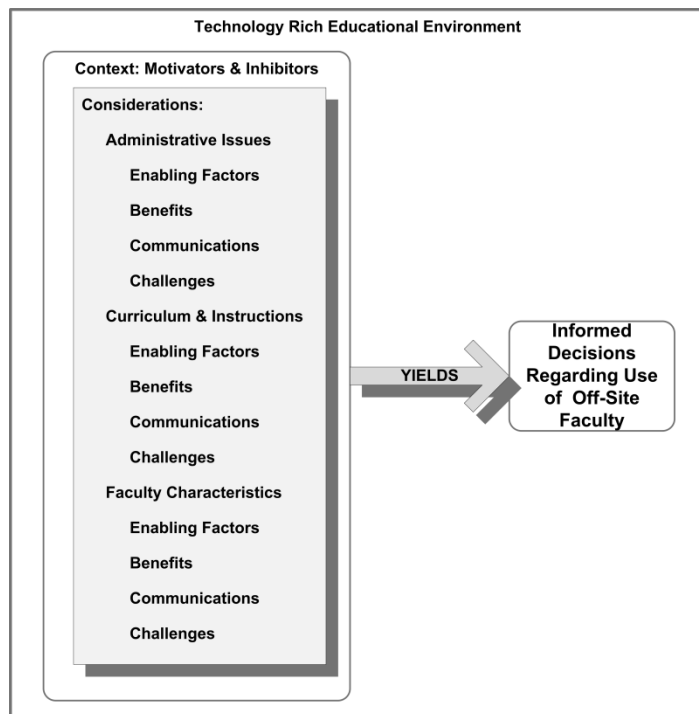


Figure 2. Model for Success Factors in the Use of Off-Site Faculty for Online Instruction

Inhibitors, similarly, were found in the literature relating to teaching online rather than teaching off-site. From that literature the following issues were judged to be germane: lack of time, support, scholarly respect, and training (Baldwin, 1998; Bonk, 2001; Lee, 2001; Northrup, 1997; O'Quinn & Corry, 2002; Parisot, 1997); course quality (Betts, 1998; Dooley & Murphrey, 2000; Jones & Moller, 2002; O'Quinn & Corry, 2002; Schifter, 2000); decreased student interaction (Dooley & Murphrey, 2000; Jones & Moller, 2002); faculty workload (Berge, 1998; Betts, 1998; O'Quinn & Corry, 2002; Schifter, 2000); and lack of technical support (Berge, 1998; Betts, 1998; Bonk, 2001; Chizmar & Williams, 2001; Jones & Moller, 2002; Lee, 2001; Rockwell, et al., 1999; Schifter, 2000; Wilson, 1998).

Issues related to engagement were viewed as important to off-site teaching. Shelton and Saltsman (2005) cited teacher presence as an important feature of online learning. Similarly, McClure (2007) suggested that faculty engagement of students is an important factor in course completion rates.

These motivators and inhibitors, as well as others, form the context within which considerations of off-site faculty use are made.

### ***Considerations for Decision Making***

The following considerations were selected for inclusion in this model.

#### ***Administrative Issues***

***Enabling factors.*** Administrative support at all levels is imperative. It must be clear that all administrators believe that a valid and substantial contribution will be made through off-site employment. Credibility and trust are essential. Administrative support for personnel, technical, training, and record keeping functions must be available. Specifically, case participants valued staff developed systems for completing administrative paperwork; technical training support, including troubleshooting needs; and human resources systems to facilitate payroll, benefits, and regulatory training requirements. Retention of on-campus office space can facilitate periodic returns to campus.

*Benefits.* Administrative benefits include retention of productive faculty members and needed expertise, expansion of the faculty pool, instructional coverage, workload balance, inter-state and international program exposure, and rewards for faculty contributions. Additionally, the academic unit benefits when individual faculty members grow and are rewarded. For off-site faculty, these benefits may include career continuity, continued enjoyment of teaching, faculty collegiality, and faculty development. In general, off-site instruction facilitates retaining and engaging faculty who are: knowledgeable about the program, have training and interest in online delivery, work effectively with the system, and can be actively engaged in program development through strong relationships with other faculty members.

*Communications.* Communication systems are essential. Consistent and speedy responses are required among the off-site faculty member, administrators, and staff. Traditional, as well as electronic methods provide connections. Although meetings present special challenges, technical tools and support are available for online meeting venues. IM, Elluminate, and other webinar tools are available. In general, off-site faculty must make concerted efforts to remain in the “communication loop”. Administrators, faculty and staff in these cases used multiple tools including specialized meeting communication software, document scanning systems, FAX, SKYPE, IM, e-mail, phone, and periodic campus visits.

*Challenges.* Multiple challenges exist. With distance, social and professional contacts change. Informal sharing of information and ideas cannot occur in traditional ways, such as in break rooms or common meeting areas. Another challenge is administrators’ concern regarding the creation of precedent; the concern is that off-site instruction may lead to changes in faculty expectations, causing difficulty in future situations. Additionally, since collegial relationships facilitate productivity in research and program development, alternate means of developing and maintaining relationships must be developed. Lastly, faculty development is a challenge for off-site faculty since many formal and informal training opportunities exist primarily on campus. Participants in these cases cited challenges in these areas including changed contact venues, constraints by central university administration, perceptions of faculty peers, and missed opportunities for training and mentoring.

#### *Curriculum & Instruction.*

*Enabling Factors.* Faculty members must have a positive orientation toward the benefits of online education. Experience in online teaching and in teaching the assigned course(s) is necessary. Support mechanisms such as instructional design, technical, and academic advising staff assistance are important. For the cases in this study, each faculty member had experience in teaching online and a strong grasp of the course content, including previous instruction of the specific courses being taught from the remote location. Support mechanisms included an educational production specialist to assist with course creation and design, an instructional designer to assist with online design issues, an instructional support laboratory for support of students, a university-wide office of educational technology and outreach, college and university technical support staffs to support equipment and technical inquiries, and an academic services center to perform student academic advising.

*Benefits.* A primary benefit of off-site teaching from a traditional campus is the retention of committed faculty members with experience and expertise in a specific needed content area. Faculty members who have historically demonstrated substantial contributions to a program are likely to continue to do so. Consistency and continuity in curriculum development can be delivered by experienced faculty who know the program. Experienced faculty members are in a unique position to effectively re-examine and re-create courses for online delivery. Additionally, when both the instructor and the students are off-site, the faculty member has experiences that more closely relate to those of the students. Having both students and faculty at a distance yields interesting perspectives and tests a more complete model of distance education. Empathy for online students is increased. Finally, having instructors teach from off-site locations also provides the opportunity to bring experiences gleaned from the culture or characteristics of the location into the online classroom.

*Communications.* Online education requires multiple levels of communication with regard to the curriculum. Faculty-student, student-student, faculty-faculty, and faculty-staff communications are all essential. Since online formats create communications challenges, creative use of communication strategies must be employed. Application of both traditional and emerging electronic communication tools is needed.

In these cases, faculty-to-student communication was facilitated via the use of WebCT/Blackboard or an instructor-developed course website. Content modules, e-mail, discussion boards, online synchronous text-based chat and video chat, interactive games and simulations, and content evaluations including exams and assignments were accomplished via these venues. Outside of the course websites faculty-student communication was via e-mail and telephone as needed. Faculty-to-faculty and faculty-to-staff communications were predominately via e-mail, phone, and periodic campus visits.

*Challenges.* Many curricular challenges for on-line delivery are similar to those for traditional courses. In addition, instructors both on campus and off-site must consider converting courses for online delivery, adjusting to online environments, learning course software, building classroom communities, integrating or revising course materials and texts, developing engagement strategies, and maintaining contact with faculty peers to facilitate curriculum review and revision. For off-site faculty, lack of proximity to campus support services such as instructional designers adds to the challenges.

For one of the classes in these cases conversion to the online format, especially when accomplished at a distance, was challenging. That course had historically been taught on campus in a computer lab where the instructor could monitor students' learning as they sat at computers and responded to lecture content interspersed with guided lab exercises. From off campus and especially from across the country, this experience was difficult to replicate. Building a feeling of classroom community was also a challenge. Since these teachers, as well as the students, were at a distance from campus, the issue of class community was of interest. The instructors indicated that community building required a high level of instructor engagement and reported more frequent online interactions than for previous courses. Similarly, engagement was an issue. Tools such as asynchronous discussion boards; synchronous question and answer sessions, discussions, or presentations; and overall course design and layout improved both engagement and a feeling of class community.

*Faculty Considerations.*

*Enabling Factors.* Personal characteristics of faculty members influence the success of off-site instruction. Valuable personal traits include self-discipline, ability to work without social reinforcement, strong grasp of content field, capabilities in instructional design, openness to change, flexibility, technological literacy, independence, time management, strong work ethic, and collegial relationships with on-campus personnel.

Faculty in these cases reported the following as enabling factors for successful off-site instruction: adaptive and open to change, technologically literate, independent work style, time management skills, self-disciplined, able to work without social reinforcement, not a procrastinator, strong work ethic, collegial relationships with other faculty, strong grasp of content area, ability and interest in instructional design, ability to develop and maintain connections with on-campus parties, and a conducive off-site workstation and environment. Additionally, these faculty members had long-term histories with the academic programs and were known for their standards and productivity.

*Benefits.* In addition to the benefits of off-site instruction to administrators and to the institution, individual faculty members can also benefit in substantial ways. Included are intellectual stimulation (including ability to test an evolving form of online education), independence and flexibility in the work environment, increased productivity, and retention of employment in a position that brings personal and professional satisfaction. These were reported by all participants in this study.

*Communications.* As noted previously, communications strategies are important considerations for off-site teaching. Strategies and tools must be developed and used to facilitate ongoing connections with students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Participants reported that regardless of the communication tool employed, attributes such as clarity, respect, politeness, promptness, and consideration for others were important to communications from off-campus.

*Challenges.* Loss of some of the informal collegiality that occurs on campuses simply as a result of being and working in the same space is a challenge for off-site instructors. The ability to easily share a thought or idea in an informal setting is more difficult to accomplish. While existing linkages with others can be utilized, such as collegial relationships forged prior to the off-site experience, it is more difficult to develop new relationships with colleagues while at a distance from campus.

Case faculty acutely felt the loss of collegiality with peers and administrators. Similarly, they missed the live stimulation from students. In general they reported that there was less opportunity to learn from others since not only were consistent informal exchanges less likely to occur, but also opportunities for participation in formal on-campus training was curtailed.

### Implications

From the cases, the authors determined that multiple factors influence the success of off-site instruction. These influences were categorized into administrative, curriculum and instruction, and faculty issues. For each category, enabling factors, benefits, communications, and challenges were identified. As traditional institutions increasingly use online delivery of courses, the potential for shifts to occur in the way courses are assigned to faculty members rises. Administrators will struggle to ensure that capable instructors are assigned to both on and off-campus courses. This model is proposed for use when it is necessary to decide if a faculty member, who for some reason is no longer able to remain near the campus, can or should be retained to teach online.

While this investigation involved cases where the reason for the off-site location was a spouse's job transfer, future investigations may provide added value by examining cases based on alternate reasons for being in a distant location. Similarly, questions regarding whether rank and experience or the discipline of instruction may be useful. Numerous other variables may also be influential and merit study.

The model suggests issues that should be considered in the use of off-site academic personnel. Off-site arrangements will work best within a technology rich educational environment. Substantial motivators and inhibitors exist and create a context for considering individual attributes that can influence success. Issues relating to enabling factors, benefits, communications, and challenges with regard to administration, curriculum, and faculty characteristics must be individually analyzed. The analysis of these components is more likely to produce informed decisions and successful results. As the landscape of higher education becomes more global, the diversity of online program types will challenge traditional hiring practices. Additional models may be useful in establishing guidelines for application in meeting the instructional needs for delivery of educational courses and programs around the world.

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Manuscript received 10 May 2010; revision received 26 Jul 2010.



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