

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

AND DISTANCE LEARNING



OVERVIEW

Distance learning allows adults to gain vital skills training to secure employment and move beyond entry-level jobs, whether it be through getting a college degree online or completing an online worker training program. Busy people pressed for time and money learn online at their own pace and for less money than they would typically spend on an in-person course. Distance learning allows industry specialists in remote areas to impart their knowledge to wider audiences through two-way video conferencing. Over 80 percent of students in U.S. colleges and universities live off campus, as do the vast majority of students in secondary and continuing education programs. Connecting these millions of Americans to powerful new online educational and training applications requires a commitment to universally accessible broadband.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Traditional post-secondary degree courses and job training programs with inflexible schedules do not always accommodate the time constraints of people with full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Slower Internet connections limit online educational or training content to a text-based format. Educational content with audio, graphics and video can only be effectively delivered by high speed Internet, to which many adults still do not have access. For example, although simulations and gaming applications are increasingly popular teaching strategies, their use is restrained by a lack of access to sufficient bandwidth. Students and adult learners stuck with slow connections at home or at the public library experience frustration when attempting to access advanced online learning programs.

BENEFITS OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET

- Self-paced, online learning frees people with irregular or inflexible work schedules from rigid classroom-based course schedules.
- Advanced two-way communications enable students and workers not only to watch lectures and training programs from home but to ask instructors questions and engage their classmates and colleagues via video conferencing.
- Training specialists from faraway areas can reach workers more easily, saving everyone time and money by eliminating costly travel.
- Broadband-enabled social networks enhance online learning by creating a community of learners that can share educational and training resources or work together on group projects.
- Many different types of communities have shown great success already with online learning: Low-income workers seeking advanced job skills, rural students unable to reach city libraries and incarcerated individuals training for future employment all benefit from distance learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universities should strengthen their tradition of developing and deploying advanced Internet applications that have the potential to transform online learning and job training.
- Policymakers should extend affordable broadband to all Americans so that everyone can have the educational and employment benefits of high speed Internet.

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