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Managing Transitions for Distance Education Students and  
Distance Education Faculty

by

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## Abstract

This paper will examine the similarities between new distance education students and new distance education faculty and the transitions that affect them both as they take on new learning and career challenges in a distance education environment. Strategies will be reviewed and suggested as ways to help both groups persist. The ADEPT Model of training will be introduced as a way to understand what may be important for distance learners and distance faculty to know as they begin degree programs and positions in the field of distance education.

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Introduction

Higher education is changing. No longer is the word university synonymous with eighteen-year-old students and brick and mortar buildings. There are growing legions of adults desiring education that can flex to lives filled with work, children, and other adult responsibilities (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). With major advancements in technology, distance education is stepping up to the plate to fill the gap for this expanding population of learners. New distance education institutions are being developed and traditional institutions are expanding offerings to include distance education (Howell et al.). The need for distance education faculty is growing as well to meet the need. However, both distance learners and distance faculty may find themselves facing a variety of challenges not encountered in brick and mortar institutions including the need to have knowledge of technology to survive in the distance learning environment (Williams, Paprock, & Covington, 1999).

This paper will examine the issues that new faculty and new students face when beginning a degree program or faculty position online. The needs of both groups will be discussed and a case will be made concerning similarity of those needs. Online orientations will be reviewed as a strategy to help ease new faculty and student transition. Finally, the ADEPT Model of training will be introduced as a way to understand and organize

content about what is important to know for new faculty and new students entering a distance education environment.

#### Two Distance Education Students

Thirteen years ago Dimitri left his home country during a war that put an end to his career and tore his family apart. While he had a college degree from his home country, it meant little in the United States. However, his high level skills in computer science allowed him to find employment. Since Dimitri is in the technology industry, and work has become less plentiful in the last couple of years, he felt he needed a college degree in computer science to help him remain competitive. With workweeks that can often add up to sixty hours or more as a systems analyst, and a young family, Dimitri chose to go back to school through distance education to reach his goal of achieving a degree in the United States. He cited the flexibility of distance education as the main attraction. Since beginning his program, he has had two faculty mentors (attrition loss) and now beginning with his third. He feels due to changes in faculty mentors that he fell behind in his program and is concerned about finances since he is paying out of pocket for his own education (Saad, D. 2003).

Joel is a twenty-six-year-old student who, until the last few months, worked in the technology industry. He decided to return to school to get his degree through the distance citing flexibility as the main attraction. Joel has struggled with school all his life. He states it has been difficult for him to see anything through to the end in a traditional setting. He

doesn't like sitting in a class. Joel felt the flexibility of distance education may work better for his personality plus he needs to work full-time to pay the bills. He states he has a number of siblings that have all pursued degrees and gone on to graduate school. Joel says that he is, "the black sheep of the family". Although he has been successful thus far in his distance education program, Joel states he feels a sense of isolation from the university - like he is "all alone out here" (Hardman, J. 2003).

#### Two Distance Education Faculty Members

A year ago Jack retired from his first career at a major corporation. With outstanding credentials in his field and an advanced degree, he applied for and was offered a job at a distance education university as full-time faculty within a few months of retirement. Jack accepted the position and stated he felt excited about the chance to make a difference in the lives of students. Jack is also excited that he can live remotely from the university. He admits that flexibility and the chance to make a difference were the most positive factors in accepting this job. Before Jack started his employment, he felt his experience in technology would be enough for working in a distance education environment. Four months after accepting his position, Jack states the job isn't what he expected. He has struggled with technology glitches, demands of students, "administrivia", and feelings of isolation. He states that training and support for faculty is inadequate and that he has

been unprepared to do the work. He feels embarrassed if he cannot answer a student's question (Woodward, J. 2003).

Shannon accepted a position as a full-time distance education faculty a few months ago after a career in K-12 education. She was excited about the chance to make a difference in the lives of adult students and also stated the flexibility of working any time, anywhere as the two most positive factors in her decision to accept her position. While she likes working with students, she states that she has not had enough training for the distance education environment. She is frustrated with technology problems. She states she struggles with feelings of isolation and putting boundaries around her job answering email any time of the day or night. She says, "I hear the bell and I have to answer" referring to the notification alarm on her email software. She says the position is not what she thought it was going to be though she had no idea what to really expect. She states she feels like a high level, "CSR" or customer service rep (Miller, S. 2003).

#### New Faculty and Students in Transition

Both groups, new students and new faculty members, have some things in common. First, and perhaps most importantly, they are entering a period of transition defined by Schlossberg in Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" p. 111. However, even if an individual volunteers for a change by taking on a new job or enrolling in a college program, it does not mean that this individual has the

skills to make the change. For the two new students, enrolling in distance education college programs is the beginning of a change. This change may mean increased opportunities for more meaningful work, increased salaries and/or increased feelings of confidence and self-worth. However, beginning a change is somewhat like beginning an adventure. Not all adventures are positive. As stated by Evans et al. (1998), college students of all ages face changes that ultimately can have long-term effects. It makes sense that distance education institutions would want a student's long-term effects to be positive. As stated by First Rate Customer Service (2003), "the average happy customer tells five other people while an unhappy customer, by comparison, tells between nine and twenty other people." For many distance institutions attempting to establish themselves in the field of higher education, the need to be learner-centered and learner-concerned is a high priority. Therefore, how well students do, what they say, feel or think about the institution is of utmost importance (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003).

Faculty members Jack and Shannon are also facing transition. Both face a new environment that they must master to feel competent and successful or the risk is that they will leave (Leibowitz, Schlossberg, & Shore, 1991). From an institutional viewpoint, recruitment of talented and qualified employees can be expensive. While there is no national standardized record-keeping method of employee recruitment costs, a survey dated from 2002 done by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) suggests that most organizations

agree that the cost can be steep to recruit, hire and train employees. Figures vary from a 1991 survey stating that the costs of hiring in the U.S. averaged six thousand per employee hire to a recent SHRM survey of organizations in the United States in which six hundred and thirty-six respondents reported that the cost of recruitment for exempt positions ranged from twenty six to seventy thousand while non exempt from zero to twenty four thousand (Will Help To Create Universal Method to Determine Cost-Per-Hire, 2003).

In the long run, it would seem that distance education institutions benefit from understanding that both new students and new faculty are going through transition and that programs and strategies to help both groups gain a solid foothold in their new environment should be implemented. But before an institution even gets to the point of implementing a program to help new hires or new students already in place, perhaps the institution needs to examine what is a "good fit" to the institution. For both groups, perhaps "retention begins with recruitment" (Seidman, 1989). Recruiting good fit students will improve chances for smoother transition to a distance education university and to a distance education program. Not providing accurate comprehensive information to students

...can result in an unwise choice of institution or programs of study and consequently, low student morale, high attrition rates, and future recruiting problems. Conversely, adequate information can enhance morale and recruiting retention...(Seidman, 1989)

Seidman suggests that it is best practice for institutions to tell students exactly who they are, what they have to offer and then stand back - let students make the decision. In an article entitled, "Why Students Drop Out of Further Education" (1999), the number one reason cited for dropping out of college was that students did not feel as if they were in the right course or the right place. The conclusion from this could be that students who know what to expect and choose on an informed basis are more likely to be satisfied with the adventure that awaits them.

Besides providing students with accurate information and then allowing students to make their own decisions, another way to identify good fit students for the online learning environment is to measure prospective students attributes. According to a site entitled, "Is Online Learning For You?" the following characteristics are identified as positive signs for future online learners:

- Are highly motivated
- Are independent
- Are active learners
- Have good organizational and time management skills
- Have the discipline to study without external reminders
- Can adapt to new learning environments
- Take advantage of extra credit opportunities
- Are driven to complete all work
- Have a positive attitude about learning experiences
- Anticipate the demands on their time
- Think critically
- Become a co-learner

Lynch (2001), in a review of retention issues for online learners also suggests that one way to identify good fit students is to help them self-select by eliciting, "self-awareness of personal suitability for the Web-based learning environment" p. 5.

To sum, recruiting good fit students at the outset by providing them with realistic expectations of the distance education environment is one way to help ensure that students will have an easier transition period. Identifying students who are a good fit by providing surveys of what constitutes a good candidate for online learning is a way to help students self-select as well.

Recruiting good fit faculty for distance education positions may not be much different than recruiting good fit students. Reasons why an employee may leave a job can include unrealistic expectations created during the recruitment process (Leibowitz et al., 1991). Also, according to Rahman in Lorenzetti (2002), when looking for distance education faculty, "We need the best professor, not the one that knows technology the best". He states that interest and enthusiasm are the most important factors in recruiting online faculty and that while technology is an important concern, that support of the online faculty by technology staff should be implemented. In an online article entitled, "What Online Faculty Need to Know but Were Afraid to Ask", a list of desired characteristics are itemized for those looking to work in an online environment. These include:

- Willingness to learn new things
- Technology willingness
- Understand that technology is not foolproof
- Interpersonal skills
- Be accessible
- Ability to engage students
- Flexible and open-minded
- High energy
- Ability to relate to traditional and non-traditional students
- Be a cheerleader
- Patience
- Smile electronically
- Course expectation
- Computer Skills

To conclude, new distance education faculty and new students may have a lot in common. To start, they may both be attracted to distance education because it offers flexibility (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). In addition, the profile of a successful distance learner and distance faculty are similar including willingness to learn new things and work with technology. Finally, new online faculty and new online students may be going through a period of transition in their lives. A student or faculty member's ability to come through a transition in a positive manner would be to everyone's benefit - student, faculty, and institution. However, before a student or faculty member even enters the institution, an attempt to fit faculty and students to the institution would be helpful and may ensure that the new adventure for both groups, is more positive. Once

a student has enrolled or faculty have been hired, the transition begins.

### Transition

Transition can be thought of as a series of stages or phases. Schlossberg in Evans et al. (1998) states that to understand the meaning of a transition, it is necessary to consider the type, context and impact. She outlines three types of transition; 1) those that are anticipated such as graduation from a degree program, 2) those that are unanticipated such as a job loss; 3) and those she calls non-events or transitions that are expected but do not occur. She went on to identify the four "S's" which are factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with these types of transitions. These include: situation, self, support, and strategies. The individual's resources in these four areas may mean the difference between effectively coping with a transition or not. The individual's view of the transition as positive, negative or irrelevant is what influences behavior (Evans et al., 1998).

According to Leibowitz et al. (1991), newcomers to a position can experience transition difficulties to the institution due to a number of factors. These individuals are at risk of leaving if transitions are not bridged successfully. The following stages are outlined below and are identified as time when newcomer to an institution can encounter difficulty.

1. *Unmet Expectations:* The job or program is not what the individual expected. For example, the role of distance education faculty may require that faculty

assume more administrative responsibility than a traditional faculty model (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). Also, the role of distance education faculty requires that members plan well ahead, be highly organized and ensure that there is a constant flow of communication between faculty and student. Faculty hired to a distance education environment not understanding these issues up front may experience the unmet expectation factor of transitioning to a new higher education position. In a random telephone interview of five Western Governors University (WGU) online faculty members, each responded that their job was not what they expected. Administrative duties and the issues of organization and constant expectations for communication were other reasons cited.

2. *Unwritten Information:* Organizational information is not accessible to newcomers. Often organizations have an "oral tradition". Individuals who have been acculturated know information but it is not necessarily available or easily accessible to new people. "Newcomers have a strong need for information on their specific roles, on how their roles fit into the big picture, and on formal and informal organizational realities" (Leibowitz et al., 1991, p. 45). For new online students, information must be accessible to them for their

programs through a coherent website or they can be confused. Communication is one of the most pressing issues for online students and faculty alike (Lynch, 2001).

3. *Need to Feel Competent:* Another transition area that can lead to difficulty is the need to feel competent. Literature shows that early success is likely to equal more success (Berger, 1992). Also, Cravener (1999), discusses a faculty development model built on psychosocial theory. She finds that certain faculty may be resistant to technology training for a variety of reasons. These reasons include more senior faculty member stating that they are unable "to understand a word she says" (p.2) when discussing a technology trainer. More senior faculty members were less likely to be open to training than less senior members. It was postulated that reasons for resistance might have been feelings of incompetence.
4. *Making Connections:* The final transition stage that can cause difficulty is making connections. According to Howell et al. (2003), "isolation may affect instructor satisfaction, motivation and potential long-term involvement in distance learning" p. 6. Making connections is also important for online students. Lynch (2001), reports that students who drop out of distance

learning often give isolation as one of the top reasons for leaving.

To conclude, understanding possible areas of difficulty for new online faculty and students from a transition perspective may help an institution identify issues that make integration into the institution difficult. Institutions can address these junctures with appropriate strategies to help ensure that new students and new faculty stay the course. Possibly the most important consideration when designing strategies to help students and faculty bridge transition is to design programs that will help individuals master their own ability to change (Cashman, 2000).

#### Helping Bridge the Gap

Since new online students and new online faculty may be experiencing transition issues, it appears that it would be important to find methods to integrate both groups successfully into the institution. Good fit recruitment may be the first step in finding individuals that will view the transition to a distance education faculty position or a distance education degree program as positive. They have self-selected (Seidman, 1996). However, even if an institution does a good job of recruitment, integration is still a concern. Individuals facing a sink or swim attitude may leave (Leibowitz et al., 1991). One way to integrate individuals into an institution is to employ online orientations or development courses. Crosby

and Schnitzer (2003) state that as soon as online faculty have been hired they should participate in an orientation. "An online program is preferable, and required...the purpose of the orientation program should be to acquaint and assimilate" p.4. . They go on to say that remote faculty is particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation and state that an online orientation can be a positive first step to integrate new distance education faculty into the institution. The University of Illinois has recognized the need for online faculty development and was recently recognized by the Sloan Foundation for offering the most, "exemplary faculty development program in the nation" (Santovec, 2003). This particular program addresses the need to help train online faculty in designing meaningful online content. Gold (1999) examined an online faculty development course to help prepare teachers become literate in an online environment. Faculty participating in the online course significantly changed their attitudes towards working in an online environment. After participation they perceived that working in an online environment promoted more interaction than in a face-to-face environment. And Young (1999) states that online faculty who are fully supported and have adequate training to the online environment help keep students. Berkeley College implemented an online faculty resource center that went a step beyond online faculty orientation and workshops. The

Berkeley resource center is important to faculty since it is used to disseminate information about college policies, procedures as well as view samples of courses. Online faculty use the discussion boards to build community as well (Clerkin, 2002). And Valentine (2003) states that the online learning environment could be influenced positively by orienting participants to the technology. This would reduce participant anxiety - including instructors.

Vodanovich and Piotrowski (2001) state that a national survey of faculty shows that they feel the drawback to Internet based instruction for them is lack of formal training. Wilson (1998) states that "Technical support and technical training ranked among the top five concerns" (for online faculty) p. 9. Article after article in the literature identify training and support as key issues for them. Howell et al. (2003) report that the need for faculty development, support, and training is cited as one of the top five concerns in the rapidly growing field of distance education. Though this is an issue of real concern and cited as likely to become even more significant over the next year, "it is not yet among their top ten uses of time or resources" p. 5. The lack of training could easily be identified as a transition issue for newcomers to the field and to a distance education institution. If the following is true, then it would appear that training needs to become a priority:

Many people think that the words access and success are interchangeable terms. In the end, technology

provides only access. It is up to the teacher, trainer, or faculty member to ensure success - whether the medium is videoconferencing, videocassettes, or distance education via computer (Williams, Paprock, & Covington, 1999, p. 15)

Online orientations for faculty could help bridge that gap.

Orientation and training for students have been recognized as ways to ease transition in traditional brick and mortar institutions of higher education (Seidman, 1996). Lynch (2001) reported that after implementing an online orientation, online attrition at a university was reduced an average of fifteen percent and re-enrollment increased to ninety percent. Lorenzetti (2001), states that, "it's a given that students need an adequate orientation to expectations and requirements before starting a program of study". She discusses Regent University's online orientation model and states that students learn about the time requirements of online courses along with becoming familiar with Regent's online platform and technology. Orientation eases the student's transition to Regent's online environment. After orientation she states that, "although students may learn that distance learning is not an exact fit with their own learning style, the isolation clashing with a strongly extroverted personality, for example, it rarely changes their mind" p. 2.

Finally, if both new distance education faculty and new online learners are viewed as individuals that may have some difficulty with transition to the online environment then it seems that it would be smart to help them bridge the gaps.

Online orientations are one way to ease transition for both groups. According to Lorenzetti (2002), "a successful program must provide two key elements - quality services directly to the online students and quality services to the online faculty" p. 1.

#### Build It and They Will Come

In creating an online orientation for Regent University, feedback from faculty and students and research concerning other online orientations was used to create the current system. Information that students needed to succeed was defined as 1) developing comfort with the online learning environment; 2) basics of hardware and software requirements; 4) ISP requirements; 5) university resources (Lorenzetti, 2001). The online orientation at Regent was built as a course required for all new students and lasts approximately one week.

Lynch (2001) describes the creation of an online orientation for new distance students implemented after reviewing drop rates at a distance university. The online orientation addresses the following in the new course; 1) need for interaction and community; 2) practicing use of technology and the university interface; 3) to reacquaint the students with learning strategies; 4) to set students expectations. The course lasts six weeks. Drop rates were dramatically reduced after implementation.

At Western Governors University (WGU), a distance education competency-based university, an online orientation entitled Education Without Boundaries (EWB) was created for students.

Previous to EWB, students at WGU were oriented to the university by their mentors, "...who, sometimes in all honesty, had a hard time remembering to tell you everything. Also, with few exceptions, WGU students never met one another. Eventually students asked, 'Where is everyone else'" and sometimes, 'Is there anyone else'" (Western Governors University, 2003, p. VII). Due to these factors, lack of student community and lack of an organized way to help students understand their university and programs, the decision was made to create an online orientation. The course was and is text driven with accompanying exercises and assignments. Decisions concerning content for the course, and therefore for the book, were made by researching orientation programs and by relying on knowledge from staff members previously involved in traditional college orientations. However, there was a lot of concern and consideration for how learning objectives could be met using delivery technologies (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). There was also real concern about lack of a bonafide course management system (CMS). A course management system allows for the creation and maintenance of online learning environments (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). Typical features of a CMS include:

- Asynchronous Communication
- Synchronous Communication
- Online Testing
- Home Pages
- Security
- Course Management and Design
- Student Management

- Student Site Tracking
- On-Line Tutorials
- Automatic Sequencing of linked course documents
- Content Reordering and searching capability (Barron & Lyskawa, 2001) and (Belanger & Jordan, 2000)

Unfortunately, WGU had already invested in a student information system that contained a rudimentary message board component including the ability for live chat and calendaring. So while it would be a much better solution to offer an online orientation using a CMS, the message board system is what was available. This is where some of the issues mentioned in Belanger and Jordan (2000) concerning course administration arose. WGU's rudimentary messaging system originally had no management capabilities. There was no interface between the online orientation course containing the message board and the enrollment section of the course and grading, for example. The staff relied on an excel sheet that was emailed between many different teams. When WGU was only enrolling twenty students per month, the errors created by this system were quite small and did not cost time and did not raise student ire. However, when the university began enrolling two to three hundred students a month, the errors generated by the excel spreadsheet became overwhelming. The excel sheet contained student names, emails and eventually, grades. The Director of Admissions spent much time cutting and pasting information and then mailing it

between various departments. Overall, probably one of the biggest issues that arose from EWB for new students is that it was the first real online course offered by WGU. While WGU brokers courses with a total of about forty-five education providers, the institution had no experience building and/or offering its own courses. While staff had identified and created a course, there was no understanding of who would have a stake in the course, who would need to be trained, and how to manage all of the information (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). EWB had become tied to the Bursar, Enrollments, Financial Aid, Admissions and finally, Academics. As the original excel sheet passed through many hands, errors were compounded such as recording grades. WGU learned the hard way that a CMS will save money. For example, Belanger & Jordan (2000) state that research suggests that labor costs account for over seventy percent of operating costs in institutions of higher education. CMS systems have been proven to reduce those expenditures by, "about four percent for a traditional lecture-based course, and by sixteen percent for a course remotely delivered using instructional technology" p. 114. WGU staff and faculty were spending inordinate amounts of time attempting to rectify excel spreadsheets concerning the orientation course. Eventually a management system was built onto the current system eliminating the need for the excel spreadsheet. However, the time and money

spent paying staff to rectify, record and type by hand was substantial. Poor customer satisfaction would also need to be factored into the overall expense. Of course, the cost of building a management system onto the present system was very expensive. The decision to not invest in a CMS was costly.

Other issues that made use of the message board platform difficult include the student's inability to edit his or her writing, which causes embarrassment for students coming to class the first time. They want to put their best foot forward and feel awkward if mistakes are made in their first postings to the course. As stated earlier, early success is likely to equal more success (Berger, 1992) and students new to technology who feel embarrassed may feel less successful. Comfort in the first few weeks of a program and particularly the first class are also related to retention and feelings of success (Oromaner, 1998). Studies show that attrition is most likely to happen within the first few weeks. Other issues that caused both student and facilitator discomfort included a lack of ability to search and sort messages on the board and also a limited number of allowed characters per post.

While there were a number of concerns that were not positive about the online orientation course system, there were some positive. The first is that this system introduced students to WGU's online campus and kept them there. The online

system is also quite simple so does not require participants to have extraordinary computer or connection resources. An individual with a 28.8 connection speed can participate. Also, the system includes a synchronous component as well as the asynchronous message board allowing facilitators to hold online chats. Evaluations show that the real-time chat is a popular feature of the online orientation course. The other positive fallout from the course was recognition that there was a need for a help desk every day of the week. One was implemented. Previous to EWB there had been no organized effort in the direction.

As time has progressed, EWB has continued to use the same course messaging system. However, the addition of the course management tool ended the large number of hours staff and faculty spent following up on information that should have been readily available. With the growth of the university, EWB for students has become a team effort as well. Current efforts include a team revisiting the content of EWB for each program and each degree level. However, possibly the most interesting issue to arise from this project has been a recognition that new faculty and new students struggle with the same issues and that for a program to be successful, these issues need to be addressed up front to guide the program. In the end, these

issues are equally as important as considering what platform and CMS may work the best.

### The ADEPT Model of Training

(Academics, Distance Education, Personal, Technology)

Throughout this paper, a case has been made that both new students and new faculty to an online environment share many of the same concerns. Both groups may also be attracted to an online environment for the same reasons - one of them flexibility. It is also suggested that newcomers starting a job or beginning a degree program are faced with transition issues. An online institution that understands issues and phases of transition from the outset can help ease new student and new hire difficulties by implementing strategies that target transition issues. It has been suggested that online orientations are one way for a distance education institution to aid new students and faculty in overcoming issues of transition by providing them with necessary tools to be successful in the online environment. Western Governors University, a competency-based, distance education institution discovered through implementation of an online orientation that both new faculty and new students had the same types of issues when new to the organization. WGU has implemented a model of training (ADEPT) to guide content for helping new students and new faculty

acclimate to the online environment illustrated in the following pages.

As stated above, the ADEPT Model (Academics, Distance Education, Personal and Technology) assumes that both online faculty and online students face the same types of issues when beginning a new program or job in distance education. The model gives course facilitators and builders a way to understand and organize materials for an online orientation to a particular institution.

#### Illustration of the Adept Model of Training

As outlined above, each aspect of the ADEPT Model indicates an area of concern that needs to be addressed in an online orientation to help participants become successful as students or faculty.

1. *Academics*: Most adult students re-entering degree programs in both traditional or distance programs need to be reacquainted with academic disciplines. For example, writing is a common academic concern for undergraduate and graduate students while mathematics can be a real concern for undergraduate students (Western Governors University, 2003). For faculty new to a distance-learning environment, understanding how his or her academic discipline is practiced in an online environment can also be a concern (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). New faculty hires

working in the competency-based environment of WGU find that "getting their arms" around how their academic discipline is practiced in that model can be a challenge. As Williams et al. (1999) state, "human learning capacity provides us with a basis for ongoing, almost limitless, adaptation to the environment. However, our emotional, psychological, and social needs constrain the adaptive range within which our learning ability can operate" p. 77. Online faculty can find that adapting to both an online environment and a competency-based model within that environment can be difficult. Therefore, an online orientation for new students and new faculty needs to address academics. For students, introducing them to academic disciplines and writing practice may be one way to help ease the transition. A chapter in the EWB text is dedicated to writing that can be used by most undergraduates and helpful to graduate programs requiring written work. This chapter can be used beyond EWB. Other chapters in the text addressing academics include a chapter on reading and one on assessment preparation. Another chapter includes electronic searches and research. An eLibrary tutorial is included as an assignment. For the future faculty online orientation, information concerning how their

discipline fits into the environment, and how it is practiced seem necessary for success.

2. *Distance Education*: Distance education includes two areas that must be mastered to be successful:
  - 1) Understanding the online campus environment and ability to navigate that environment;
  - 2) Understanding the model of distance education practiced by that particular institution since definitions of distance learning can be quite different between institutions (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). Both students and faculty need to know how to navigate and understand the online campus environment. For example, students who do not understand WGU's model of competency-based education and do not understand how to navigate WGU's online campus environment are likely to drop out (Western Governors University, 2003). Also, if a student is not technologically literate, he or she will not be able to get to a point of attempting to understand how to navigate a distance education institution. Chapters that address these issues in the EWB text include communicating online and discussion of the WGU model. In creating a faculty orientation, the same issues need to be addressed since in order to feel good about "working with the new technology" and "adapt to a changing teaching role" (Williams et

al., 1999), p. 76) they must understand the distance education model and how to navigate the distance learning environment. Even if faculty has worked in a distance education environment previously, the platform for delivery and definition of distance education may be quite different (Belanger & Jordan, 2000).

3. *Personal*: Most adults entering degree programs in both traditional or distance programs encounter some sort of personal issue while beginning or during the time of their enrollment. These issues often include problems with time issues and prioritizing. Most online students have families and work (Howell et al., 2003). Adding school to an already busy life requires some practice. A chapter on prioritizing in the EWB text with accompanying assignments allows a student to look at their roles - husband, father, teacher, and student. Another chapter is about communication style and another looks at learning styles and personality styles with a spin-off of the Myers-Briggs. For faculty new to the distance education environment it is important to note that personal issues are evident as well. As stated in Williams et al. (1999), "It is typically easier or more comfortable to think and do things the same way..." and "As we talk about speeding up the actual

transfer of technology, we begin to realize that the starting point for rapid and successful change usually comes from somewhere inside the individual's comfort zone" p. 77. Faculty responsible to impart knowledge and direction to students in a new environment may feel overwhelmed. Also, technology for faculty working out of their homes can begin to feel intrusive.

"There's a negative story as well," contends Nielsen. "You could argue that technology has made us far more reactive, made us multitask more, and made it harder to be thoughtful, sit down, and just do a project. Now, thanks to technology, you have 20 tasks you have to do at the same time. You have all these windows open, all these e-mails and instant messages to respond to right away. So many of these new applications are more disruptive than helpful. We're still only partway through the transformations that PCs will bring to us, and many of them will be good." (Guteman, 2003).

On online orientation for faculty needs to apprise new online faculty of the personal issues that can arise when taking on a job in a new, fast-changing environment.

4. *Technology*: Most adults attending distance education universities need to have a basic knowledge of technology. While most all students need to know how to keyboard and use the computer for basic assignments, distance education requires

a student to have a very basic knowledge and ability to communicate online. The computer is the student's voice. If he or she is unable to attach a document to email, to log in to the course message board, to participate in a chat room, he or she is likely to drop out before even getting started. Currently an assignment is included in the EWB orientation that addresses Student Tech Ability in the first week. If students answer "no" to a majority of the questions, they are unlikely to be successful at WGU in the short-run. Also, students without computers in their homes are likely to drop out as well. It would be important up front for a university to identify students who are technologically ignorant and without a computer. These students could be channeled into a course to bring them up to speed. Faculty also may suffer from technology woes. As cited earlier in this paper, training and technology is one of the top concerns for faculty in a distance education environment (Howell et al., 2003). An online orientation for new faculty needs to address faculty competence in technology and provide an environment that encourages lack of embarrassment over this issue.

To sum, there appear to be four major areas for training when addressing adult students entering degree programs. These include academics, distance education, personal issues that arise from being new, and technology. Those just beginning a position with a distance education institution need to have a base understanding of technology; they need to understand the model of distance education and then how to navigate the online campus. Students and faculty alike need to translate academic backgrounds into present situations and personal issues may be encountered as well. These include time issues, prioritizing, offices in the home, and acclimatizing to a culture that is quite different from a face-to-face college environment. Suffice it to say that what affects new students in a distance education environment will affect new faculty as well. The ADEPT Model is a way to organize thoughts and build content for training around what is important to know.

### Conclusion

This paper has made a case that new students and new faculty in a distance environment experience many of the same issues. Institutions that recruit distance learners and distance faculty may benefit from understanding transition models so that issues of transition can be addressed up front. Faculty and students in transition may have a more positive experience and may be more likely to remain with an institution

if these issues are understood and addressed. It has been illustrated that this may benefit all involved - students, faculty and the institution. Online orientations have been discussed as one strategy that can be implemented to ease transition for faculty and students alike. The ADEPT Model of training can aid those building online orientations. The issues inherent in being a new distance learner and distance faculty are outlined through the ADEPT Model and content can be built around what is important to know. Implementing online orientations using the ADEPT Model should help online faculty and students like Joel, Dimitri, Jack, and Shannon realize their goals. Their success becomes the success of the institution.

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