As opportunities in international agriculture continue to grow; so does the need for effective distance education delivery systems. As we overcome the technological obstacles which have hindered distance education we must now turn our attention to effective methods of instructional design and delivery of courses at a distance. This study was designed to examine student satisfaction with the instructional design of the Doc-at-a-Distance Program. Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University, Departments of Agricultural Education and Communications, began the Doc-at-a-Distance program in August 1999 to offer Texas residents access to a doctoral program that was place independent (Kelsey, 2001). One task faced by the program planners was to construct an instructional design system that meets the needs of students spread across the state. (Kelsey, 2001).

Methods

Students were queried about instructional design elements of the Doc-at-a-Distance program for the purpose of determining their degree of satisfaction with the design of the program. The following components were addressed: course format, sequencing of courses, integration of content between courses, access to educational resources, theory vs. practice, number of courses per semester, number of face-to-face meetings per years, balance between synchronous and asynchronous time, team assignments, collaboration on team assignments, time limits on exams, assignments, and feedback on assignments. (Kelsey, 2001)

Major Points

- Course format. Ten of eighteen students stated that they preferred the 8-week courses.
- Sequencing of courses. Fifteen responding that the sequencing was satisfactory.
- Integration of content between courses. Seventeen of the eighteen participants responded positively.
- Access to educational resources. Three students reported that they had difficulty with accessing materials from the local library due to inadequate.
- Theory versus practice. Thirteen students reported that the balance between theory and practical lessons was appropriate.
- Number of courses per semester. Students indicated that two courses should be the max.
- Number of face-to-face meetings per year. Eight students wanted two meetings a year.
- Balance between synchronous and asynchronous time. Balance was about right.
- Team assignments. The students reported team assignments as burdensome.
- Collaboration on team assignments. Students bypassed authentic collaboration stage.
- Time limit on exams. Ten students reported that they had no difficulty in completing.
- Assignments. Sixteen students stated that the balance was reasonable.
- Feedback on assignments. Students requested more feedback. (Kelsey, 2001).

Conclusions and Educational Importance

These findings will be used by faculty at both universities to improve student satisfaction with the instructional design of the Doc-at-a-Distance program. This study may serve as a guide for educators who are in the beginning phases of implementing a distance education program. Further studies are needed to examine the role that instructional design plays on student success in distance education settings.