Each year, EDUCAUSE surveys its members to ascertain one perspective on higher education’s information technology (IT) priorities. Across all Carnegie classifications and all sizes of colleges and universities, survey respondents identified faculty development support and training as one of the top 10 issues most important to resolve for the institution’s strategic success.

As IT becomes more robust and easier to use, it increasingly permeates academic activities in higher education. Course management systems let instructors easily integrate technology into their instruction. Online communication and information access expand a course’s range to wherever and whenever an instructor or student logs on. Higher network bandwidth provides a quick and efficient conduit to accomplish these activities.

As an increasing number of institutions adopt e-learning strategies, their successes depend not only on the availability of technology but also on the extent to which faculty and students are supported as they explore and develop innovative ways to integrate technology into the learning experience. Pedagogical practices must be adapted, technical proficiency becomes more important, and a reliable and robust technical infrastructure must be maintained in order to use e-learning effectively. These demands translate into a host of new instructor and student support requirements that institutions must address.

To help members understand the breadth and depth of the support issue, the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) conducted research to learn about the evolving student and instructor support requirements for online distance-learning courses, hybrid courses, and traditional courses that leverage technology. Specifically, we intended to:

- ascertain current instructor and student support requirements;
- discover effective e-learning support practices for infrastructure, training, and course/curriculum development; and
- examine longer-term e-learning support challenges.

This research seeks to highlight effective e-learning resources and support practices at selected institutions. We focused primarily on centrally administered departments that offer e-learning resources across the entire institution, including central IT departments, instructional technology departments, and central faculty resource centers. The research examines the issues from support providers’ and users’ perspectives. From the provider perspective, ECAR examines central resource...
organization structures, resource availability and effective practices, and the challenges presented by e-learning’s increasing popularity. From the user perspective, ECAR examines the e-learning course creation or adaptation process, challenges faced, and the effectiveness of support received for the process. The research also examines instructors’ and students’ technical proficiencies and support requirements.

**Important Contributions**

*Supporting E-Learning in Higher Education* is the third ECAR research study of 2003. This study is the result of 10 months of collaborative research conducted by ECAR and IDC, a provider of market intelligence and industry analysis. Richard Katz and I provided overall direction to the project, with important contributions from ECAR Fellows Robert Albrecht, Paula King, and Robert Kvavik. The IDC team was led by Paul Arabasz, director of consulting for IDC, with significant participation from Judy Pirani, president of Sheep Pond Associates. Dave Fawcett, senior consultant to IDC, played an important role as contributing author in the major study and is the primary author of several case studies. The work of the IDC team was augmented by numerous subject matter experts who provided significant leadership and thoughtful insight to the development of the online survey. A very special thanks to Carole Barone, vice president of EDUCAUSE; Susan Metros, deputy chief information officer at The Ohio State University; Kathleen Cristoph, director of DoIT, Academic Technology Solutions, University of Wisconsin–Madison; and Ruth Sabean, assistant provost, educational technology, University of California, Los Angeles, for their contributions.

Finally, we could not have conducted this study without the enormous goodwill and propensity to share that characterize our EDUCAUSE membership. Nearly 300 colleges and universities participated in the online survey in October 2002, and more than 50 individuals participated in telephone interviews and campus visits.

This study should be read in conjunction with other ECAR research bulletins and case studies on the topic of e-learning and instructional technologies in higher education. Higher education is fortunate to enjoy a professional IT community possessed of a great generosity of spirit and commitment to the common good. ECAR benefited enormously from this generosity during phone interviews and visits to numerous campuses while producing case studies that illustrate insights, techniques, and practices to be shared and emulated. This sharing of successes and failures represents an important source of experience for the reader. The complete list of individuals who generously gave their time and provided insights can be found in the Appendix of this study. We are indebted to each one of these individuals.

In particular, we would like to thank Stephen Harmon, director of instructional technology, College of Education, Georgia State University; Joel L. Hartman, vice provost for Information Technologies & Resources, University of Central Florida; David Baird, director, Innovative Technology Solutions for Learning, Colgate University; Paul Faber, dean of arts and sciences, Fort Hays State University; David DiBiase, head of the E-Education Institute, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University; and John Harwood, senior director, Teaching and Learning with Technology, The Pennsylvania State University for their enthusiastic help and commitment to making e-learning a pervasive part of their institutions’ learning experience.
ECAR Background

ECAR was launched on January 1, 2002, to create a body of research and analysis on important issues at the intersection of higher education and IT. ECAR is fulfilling its mission through a program of symposia and through the publication of

- biweekly research bulletins oriented to senior campus functional executives;
- detailed studies designed to identify trends, directions, and practices in an analytically robust fashion; and
- case studies designed to showcase campus activities and highlight effective practices, lessons learned, and other insights from the practical experience of campus leaders.

Since ECAR’s inception, two symposia have been held and close to 60 research publications have been issued. Its success as a research center and business enterprise depends in large measure on our reception with EDUCAUSE members and sponsors. Our members, as always, have shown great confidence in us and have shown their support by subscribing to ECAR despite a difficult economic climate for higher education in 2003. These members understand that particularly in tough times it is wise to invest in good research and analysis. ECAR has been especially fortunate to enjoy the support of an unparalleled group of sponsors. While Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, Datatel, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, PeopleSoft, SCT, and WebCT provide significant financial support to ECAR, they are truly more than financial sponsors. These companies believe that impartial applied research on critical issues in higher education generates a more informed marketplace of both buyers and sellers. These firms are committed to understanding their customers and helping them make the most effective decisions related to their technologies and products. Most impressively, these sponsors understand deeply and respect the importance of intellectual independence in the marketplace of fast-moving ideas.

Finally, as we have toiled in this field, other ECAR fellows are managing other elements of the ECAR program. Under the energetic leadership of Richard Katz, ECAR Fellows Robert Albrecht, Judith Caruso, Robert Kvavik, Dewitt Latimer, James Penrod, Gail Salaway, and Toby Sitko have proven to be remarkable colleagues. The EDUCAUSE staff under Brian Hawkins’ leadership is unfailingly superb and cooperative. Without their help, this study would not have been possible. EDUCAUSE is an enterprise that takes pride in excellence and strives for stellar performance. It is an honor to be part of such a dynamic organization.

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Endnote