



# PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

## NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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# University Distance Courses Cost More to Develop Overall but the Same to Deliver as On-Campus Courses

## Summary

**Evaluation purpose.** The North Carolina General Assembly directed the Program Evaluation Division to compare the startup and ongoing costs of distance education versus on-campus instruction throughout the University of North Carolina (UNC) System. This evaluation provides a history of distance education, a description of how UNC delivers distance education, and a comparison of costs associated with the development and delivery of distance education courses versus on-campus courses.

**Compared to on-campus courses, distance education courses cost more overall to develop but cost about the same to deliver.** The increased cost is largely due to staff support needed to create distance courses or for converting on-campus course content for distance delivery. On average, the cost to deliver distance education courses does not differ significantly from the cost of delivering on-campus courses.

**Distance education increases access to education.** Distance education is not new; however, the method of delivery for course instruction has evolved extensively with advances in technology. The flexibility of participating in courses at off-campus locations or through online courses provides a unique opportunity for the workforce. Faculty and staff design distance programs to help students retool with new skills or sharpen skills to keep pace with dynamic workplace demands.

**Technology has changed delivery of instruction in every setting.** Many of the UNC campuses asserted there was no clear distinction between distance education and on-campus instruction in terms of instructional technology. The level of commitment by campus leadership is an important component because it affects how campuses deliver and dedicate resources to distance education.

**Wide variation in distance education capabilities among the UNC campuses creates inefficiencies across the UNC System.** UNC General Administration is in a position to foster collaboration between campuses in the system that have more advanced technology resources dedicated to distance education and campuses that are impeded by limited staff and technology. This collaboration would achieve a more responsive, comprehensive, and unified distance education system.