The Different Kinds of Technologies Used in Distance Education

The kinds of technology used in distance education is changing all the time. The more advanced technology gets, the more advanced distance education gets. At the very beginning, there was radio and pamphlets. Today, there are videoconferencing, online textbooks, and so much more!

The distance learning program in Wisconsin, breaks down a few of the technologies here:

Audioconference
An audioconference connects instructors and students using standard telephone lines for real-time discussion. Course times are scheduled and can include the entire class or small groups.

Multimedia
Course material is available on CD, DVD, videocassette, audiocassette, or other types of stored media. Multimedia courses may combine text, graphics, audio, video and other elements. Material is designed to be flexible, self-paced, and modular. In some cases, access to the Internet is required. The students learning choices influence how material is presented and reviewed.

Online
Online courses are delivered over the Internet and are usually web-based. Courseware management systems (D2L, WebCT, Blackboard, and others) are often used to organize content, activities, communication, and assessment. Some courses may have specific computer hardware and/or software requirements.

Print
Course packets, textbooks and other materials are sent to students through the mail. Students submit lessons by mail, fax, or in some cases, e-mail. Assignments, exams and completions are self-paced within an agreed timeframe.

Telecourse/Datacast
Telecourses are highly produced videotaped course segments broadcast at scheduled times by television stations (public TV and others) or local cable access channels. Textbooks and study guides provide students with assignments and direction. Some courses require additional independent work through the mail. Datacasting is the transmission of text, graphics, video, audio and other media over the airwaves along with the digital television signal. Datacast course materials can be downloaded to a computer or viewed on a television.

Videoconference
A videoconference connects instructors and students in simultaneous two-way communication. Everyone may see and speak with each other for real-time discussions. Videoconference sites are located worldwide in public and private locations, including schools, government agencies and businesses. Some types of videoconferences can be delivered directly to the desktop.

Webcast
A webcast captures and records audio, video, slides and other types of digital data, then synchronizes it as a single streamed media presentation. The course is either viewed live over the Internet or linked to later. Instructors can interact with students by various means: email, chat, scheduled audioconferences, or other methods.

Webconference
A webconference combines the use of a Web browser for visuals and an audioconference for discussion. Students and instructors communicate and collaborate in real-time. Students can show and receive graphics, draw, add text, demonstrate Web sites, share documents and use Web chat. Students can interact with each other to create new collaborative content during the course.