THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA REPORT ON EXPANDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH STATE-FUNDED DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The University of North Carolina General Administration

June 2012

APPENDIX UU

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Legislation in 1998 provided enrollment funding for UNC distance education[1]. This report documents the growth of UNC distance education programs and their role in meeting the high priority education and economic development needs of the State.

- State funding for UNC distance education degree-credit instruction, first provided in FY 1999, is achieving the intended legislative goal of expanding access to higher education opportunities for North Carolinians who otherwise would be unable to obtain an undergraduate degree, graduate degree, or licensure in a teaching specialty. High quality degree programs are being developed and offered throughout the state in subject areas that are responsive to the workforce and economic development needs of North Carolina; for example, almost a third of all distance education instruction is related to K-12 teacher education.

- The unduplicated number of individuals enrolled in UNC distance education courses (including students enrolled in regular term programs who choose to take a distance education course) increased by 50.9% from fiscal year 2007 to fiscal year 2011— from 44,225 individuals to 66,746. Site based programs account for 260 of UNC's distance education programs, which are offered at 36 community colleges as well as at public school locations, military bases, health care settings, regional centers, and graduate centers. Although these programs are site-based (as requested by community colleges, military bases, hospitals, and public school systems), many of them use blended instruction with some online or two-way video components.

- As of November 2011, 272 online degree, certificate, and licensure programs were offered through UNC constituent institutions and listed on The University of North Carolina Online website. Online enrollments are increasing in their proportion of overall distance education student credit hours (SCH's) taught. In the five years from FY 2007 to FY 2011, online student credit hours taken by distance education students increased by 88.6%, from 152,854 to 288,339.

- In fall 2011, students who are 26 and older accounted for 77.7% of distance education enrollments compared to only 18.5% of regular term enrollments. This indicates that UNC distance education programs are reaching non-traditional higher education audiences who otherwise would not have access to these programs.

- A growing percentage of distance education enrollments are minority students; from fall 2007 to fall 2011, the percentage of minority students taking only distance education courses increased from 22.4% to 24.0%.

- Careful needs assessments are conducted before programs are developed, and programs authorized are those that would be most beneficial for the economic growth and vitality of North Carolina communities.

---

[1] Distance education refers to formula-fundable instruction delivered off campus for credit (whether face-to-face, electronically mediated, or a combination of methodologies) whether a single course, a certificate program, or a degree program. Traditional regular term refers to formula-fundable instruction delivered on campus by any methods for credit.

Expanding Access to Higher Education through UNC Distance Education Programs

Enrollment Growth

In response to the enrollment funding provided by the General Assembly for UNC distance education programs (both site-based and online), the number of students enrolled in these programs has increased steadily every year since this funding was first provided in FY 1999. Unduplicated headcount enrollments over the course of a full year (Fall, Spring, and Summer sessions) increased by 22,521 from Fiscal Year 2007 to Fiscal Year 2011—from 44,225 individuals to 66,746 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Growth in Unduplicated Headcount Enrollment in UNC Distance Education Programs, FY 2007 – FY 2011
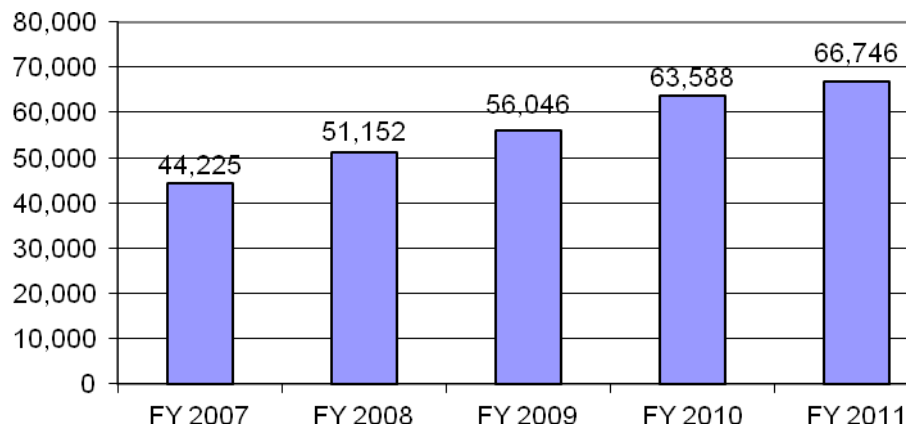
[Note: Unless otherwise noted, data will be presented for distance education instruction funded by the UNC enrollment funding model. UNC distance programs also enroll a number of individuals (8,382 unduplicated headcount in FY 2011) for whom UNC does not receive distance education enrollment funding. Typically these are either non-NC residents receiving distance instruction out of state (including foreign countries), or they are students enrolled in specially funded contract or customized distance programs that do not receive enrollment funding.]

Another indication of growth in UNC distance education activity is the increase in student credit hours (SCHs) taught in each fiscal year. These SCHs increased from 330,039 in FY2007 to 512,764 in FY2011 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Total UNC Funding Model Distance Education
Student Credit Hours: FY 2007—FY 2011**
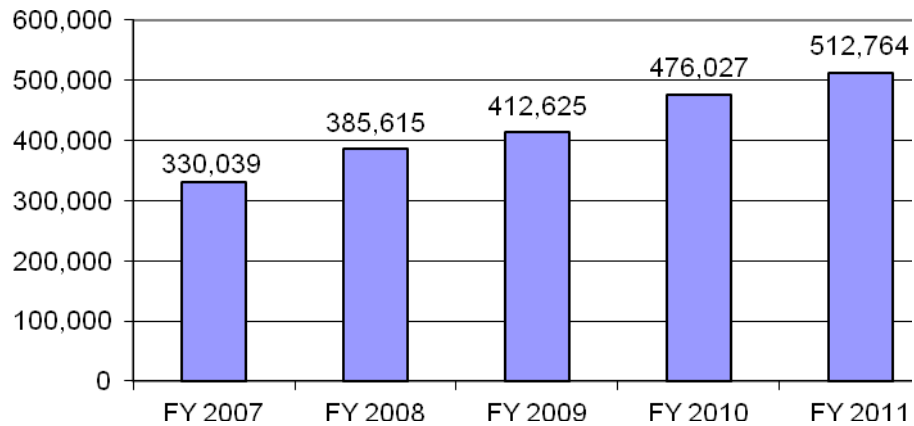
Production of these distance education SCHs varies by UNC constituent institution, with some institutions more active in offering distance education programs than others. SCH production by UNC constituent institutions for fiscal years 2007 and 2011 is presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Funding Model Distance Education Student Credit Hours (SCHs)
Produced by UNC Institutions: FY 2007 & FY 2011**
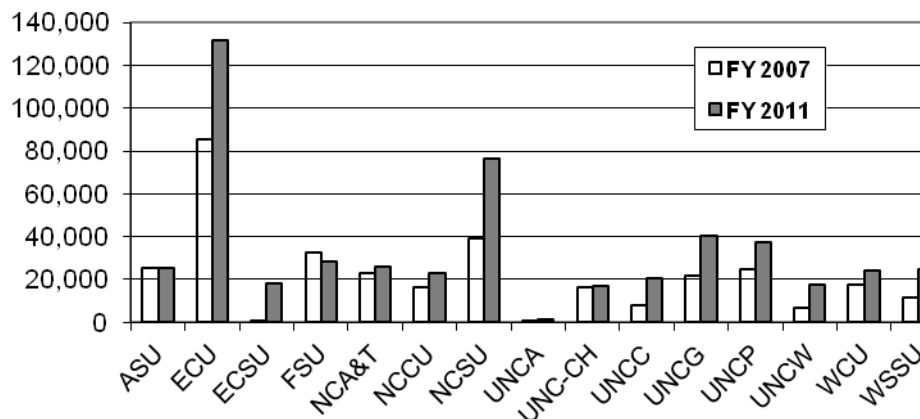
Enrollment in distance education programs includes students who take only distance education courses and those who take both regular term and distance education courses (Table 1). From fall 2007 through fall 2011, the number of students who took only distance education courses increased in fall 2007 through fall 2009 and decreased in both fall 2010 and fall 2011. Budget constrains appear to have affected the growth rate of distance programs.

Table 1. Distance Education Enrollment by Type of Students, Fall 2007 – Fall 2011

|	Taking Only DE Courses		Taking Both Regular Term & DE Courses		Total (Taking Any DE Courses)	
	Number	% Change from Previous Year	Number	% Change from Previous Year	Number	% Change from Previous Year
Fall 2007	18,526	15.6%	9,473	12.8%	27,999	14.6%
Fall 2008	22,223	20.0%	10,727	13.2%	32,950	17.7%
Fall 2009	23,820	7.2%	14,530	35.5%	38,350	16.4%
Fall 2010	21,685	-9.0%	15,672	7.9%	37,357	-2.6%
Fall 2011	20,854	-3.8%	15,929	1.6%	36,783	-1.5%

However, growing numbers of regular term students are choosing to take distance-learning courses, generally online (Figure 4). Students appear to be mixing distance education courses and regular term courses. The combination of those enrolled in distance only and those enrolled in distance and regular term courses constituted 16.7% of the total enrollment in fall 2011 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Distance Education Enrollment by Type of Students, Fall 2007 – Fall 2011
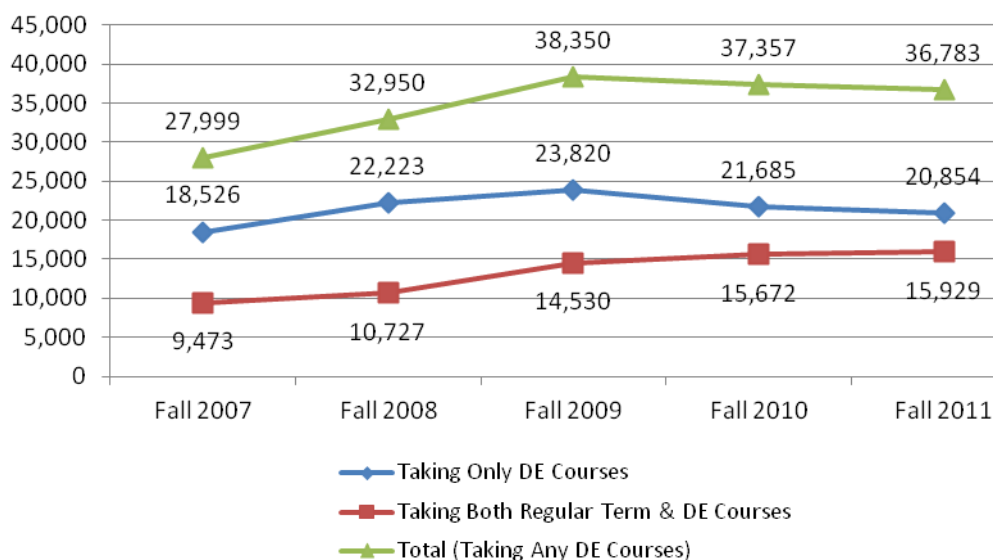
Figure 5. Percent of DE Enrollment Over the Total Enrollment
Fall 2007 – Fall 2011
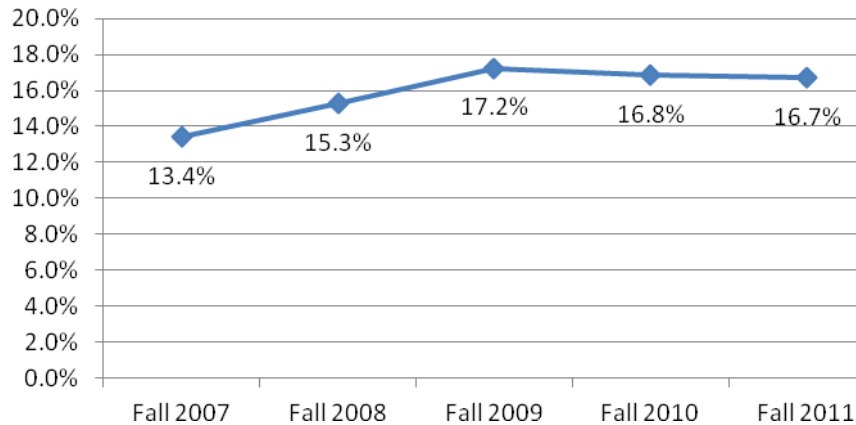
UNC has 546 authorized distance education degree programs. Of these, 272 are offered online: 65 undergraduate programs, 105 graduate programs, 2 doctoral programs and 100 certificate/licensure programs. Although programs are offered in 22 of the National Center for Educational Statistics' Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) content areas, 5 of the 29 content areas account for more than half of UNC distance education activity (- Table 2). Of all credit hours taught via distance education in 2010-11, the subject areas with the largest number are: Education (26%), Business (9.6%), Nursing (7.4%), and Health Professions other than Nursing (5%).

Table 2. Top DE Student Credit Hour by Subject Areas

DE SCHs	SCHs	% of Total
Top 5 Subject Areas:		
Education	133,376	26.0%
Business	49,372	9.6%
Nursing	38,173	7.4%
Social Sciences	28,447	5.5%
Other Health Professions	25,533	5.0%
Sub-Total	274,901	53.6%
Other Subject Areas	237,863	46.4%
Total	512,764	100.0%

Site based programs account for 260 of UNC's distance education programs, which are offered at 36 community colleges as well as at public school locations, military bases, health care settings, regional centers, and graduate centers. Although these programs are site-based (as requested by community colleges, military bases, hospitals, and public school systems), many of them use blended instruction with some online or two-way video components. UNC off-campus degree programs are increasingly incorporating technological modes of instructional delivery, and almost all use some form of e-mail or web-based sites for information and communication. A majority of courses

5

still conduct some instruction in the traditional or "face to face" manner, with faculty instructors traveling to the instructional site. In 2008-09 individuals in every county in North Carolina were enrolled in site-based or online distance programs offered by UNC campuses.

Online Education

The University of North Carolina Online

In July 2007, UNC launched The University of North Carolina Online (http://online.northcarolina.edu/), the official online site providing organization and integration services and resources to assist UNC institutions with increasing access to high quality degree-credit online programs for North Carolina residents.

As of November 2011, 272 online degree, certificate, and licensure programs were offered through UNC constituent institutions and listed by The University of North Carolina Online. Online enrollments are increasing in their proportion of overall distance education student credit hours (SCH's) taught. In the five years from FY 2007 to FY 2011, online student credit hours taken by distance education students increased by 88.6%, from 152,854 to 288,339 (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Online Student Credit Hours Taken by Distance Education Students
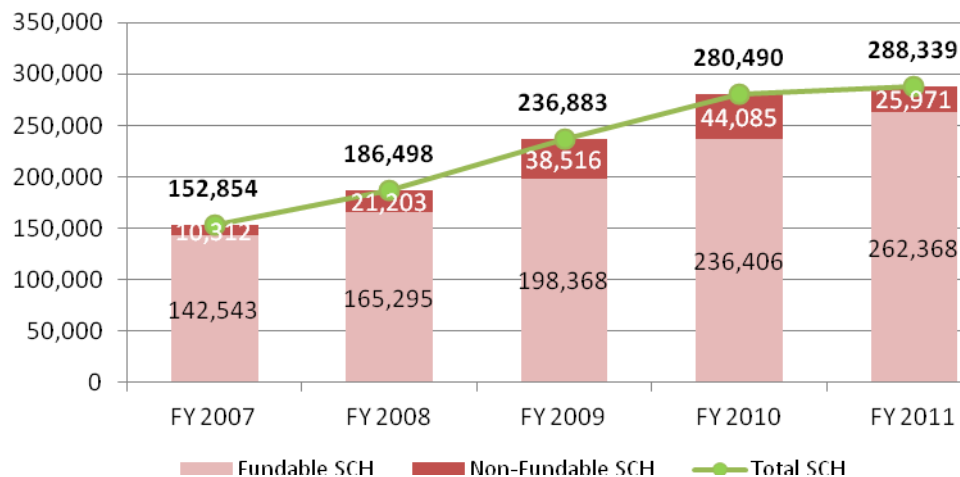
It should be noted that online courses taken by students on campus also increased steeply (100.4%) over the same five-year period, going from 149,636 to 299,891 student credit hours from 2006-07 to 2010-11. Overall, 89,909 individuals took a UNC online course in 2010-11, a 65.6% increase from 54,296 in 2006-07.

Online Academic Services

UNCGA's Online Services has coordinated the development of two services for online and distance education students that are accessible through the Online Academic Services site, http://services.northcarolina.edu/.

The **inter-institutional course registration system**, which became operational in fall 2008, enables a student at one UNC institution to easily register for an online course offered by another UNC institution. This helps students obtain needed courses in order to graduate on time, it increases the resource efficiency of online courses with increased enrollments, and it helps institutions avoid duplication of online courses.

The most recent development is the expansion of a distance education **exam proctoring system** that enables students to search for available exam proctors in their area. The system is an elaboration of a system first developed at East Carolina University, and UNCGA has provided funding to ECU to hire an exam proctoring coordinator for the state. The site currently lists 315 exam proctors located around the USA, and more proctors will be nominated or volunteer, subject to verification by the system coordinator.

New Distance Education Degree Programs

From July 2011 through May 2012, a total of 17 distance education programs (either site-based or online) were reviewed by UNC General Administration, authorized for delivery, and added to the inventory of all authorized degree-related distance learning programs for the University of North Carolina; 5 site-based programs and 12 online programs.

As a reminder, authorization of distance education programs is conducted by UNC General Administration. The rationale, as stated in the UNC Policy 400.1.1.2, is that proposed distance education programs must be a part of the Academic Program Inventory (API) before the program can be offered off-campus or online. Because distance education programs have already gone through the UNC Board of Governors approval process and the programs already exist in the API, the review and authorization for distance education programs is conducted by the UNC General Administration Division of Academic Affairs.

The following information for each UNC institution offering new distance learning programs is listed below. The CIP code, the title of the degree, the abbreviated degree title, the county of location, whether the program is available via the Internet or the North Carolina Information Highway (NCIH), and the date the program was authorized.

Authorized Distance Education Programs (July 2011 through May 2012)

Appalachian State University

51.3801	Nursing	BSN	Caldwell	July 2011
13.0401	Elementary Education	BS	Cleveland	Sept. 2011
13.1203	Middle Grades Education	BS	Catawba	Sept. 2011
51.3801	Nursing	BSN	Internet	February 2012
30.1101	Gerontology	MA	Internet	February 2012
13.0409	School Administration	MSA	Internet	February 2012

East Carolina University

30.0601	Security Studies	MS	Internet	May 2012
13.0403	Adult Education	MAEd	Internet	May 2012
13.1314	Physical Education	MAEd	Internet	May 2012
13.1315	Reading Education	MAEd	Internet	May 2012
51.2706	Health Informatics and Information Management	MS	Internet	April 2012

North Carolina Central University

43.0103	Criminal Justice	BS	Wake	July 2011

UNC Charlotte

13.1209	Child & Family Dev.	BA	Iredell	Sept. 2011

UNC Greensboro

13.1299	Master of Education in Latin	MEd	Internet	July 2011
19.0901	Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies	MS	Internet	April 2012
13.401	Educational Leadership	Ed.S.	Internet	April 2012

Western Carolina University

51.0701	Master of Health Sciences	MHS	Internet	April 2012

Characteristics of UNC Distance Education Students

Analysis of the characteristics of UNC distance education students confirms that many non-traditional higher education students are enrolling in distance education programs. In fall 2011, students in distance education courses had the following characteristics:

Gender: Due to work and family obligations, many women are likely to be unable to relocate to a UNC campus. UNC distance education programs are achieving their intended effect of reaching these non-traditional higher education students in their home communities. Women are enrolling in UNC distance education programs at a higher rate than for regular term programs. Table 3 shows the gender distribution of UNC fall 2011 enrollments for students only enrolled in regular term courses, students only enrolled in distance education (DE) classes, and students enrolled in both regular term and distance classes.

Table 3. Enrollment in Types of Courses by Gender, Fall 2011

Gender	Total Fall Enrollment	Taking Only Regular Term Courses	Taking Only DE Courses	Taking Both Regular Term & DE Courses
Female	56.7%	54.9%	66.5%	64.3%
Male	43.3%	45.1%	33.5%	35.7%

Note: Increasingly, students choose to take a mix of regular term and distance education courses. Tables 3 and 4 show that a higher percentage of females and some minority students choose to do this.

Race/ethnicity: It is important for UNC distance education to make higher education opportunities available for all racial and ethnic groups of North Carolina. Table 4 shows the racial and ethnic distribution of fall 2011 UNC enrollments for students enrolled only in regular term courses, only in distance education courses, and in both regular term and distance courses. For African American students, it is interesting to note that although the percentages of these students taking only distance education courses is lower than the percentages of these students enrolled only in regular term courses, the percentages of these students enrolled *both* in regular term and distance courses is substantially higher than their percentages for only regular term. The percentage of minority students participating only in distance education is also increasing; from fall 2007 to fall 2011 the percentage of minority students increased from 22.4% to 24%.

Table 4. Enrollment in Types of Courses by Race/Ethnicity, Fall 2011

Race/Ethnicity	Taking Only Regular Term Courses	Taking Only DE Courses	Taking Both Regular Term & DE Courses
African American	20.7%	17.0%	36.4%
American Indian	0.8%	1.5%	2.2%
Asian	3.4%	2.4%	2.2%
Hispanic	4.3%	3.0%	2.7%
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
White	61.7%	68.6%	50.1%
Non-Resident Alien	4.0%	2.4%	1.3%
Two or More Races	1.8%	1.1%	1.1%
Unknown	3.1%	3.9%	4.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Age: Another important goal for UNC distance education is to reach older place-bound and working adults in North Carolina. While over half (59.2%) of regular term students are in the traditional college age range of 21 or younger, Figure 7 illustrates that UNC distance education programs are succeeding in reaching the non-traditional college-age population. Students who are 26 and older account for 77.7% of distance education enrollments compared to only 18.5% of regular term enrollments. US Census Bureau projections indicate that the older population in North Carolina will grow rapidly over the next decade; thus this trend regarding older distance education students is likely to continue.

Figure 7. Age Distribution of UNC Students Enrolled in Regular Term and Distance Education Courses, Fall 2011
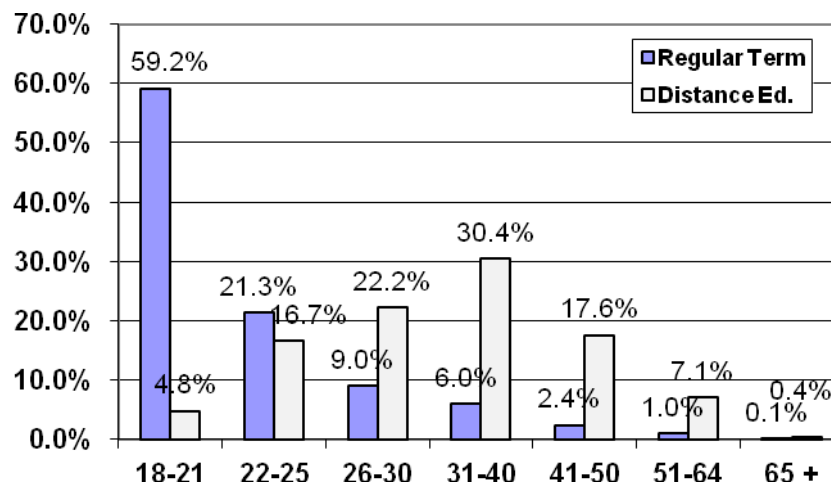
Residency: As with regular term degree programs, students enrolled in state-funded distance education programs are largely North Carolina residents. In fall 2011, 88.8% of UNC distance education only students were North Carolina residents compared to 84.5% of the UNC regular term only students. (Student credit hours produced by non-North Carolina residents taking UNC courses out-of-state are not counted for state enrollment funding and are not included in the data presented in this report. Non-North Carolina resident instruction taking place inside North Carolina does qualify for enrollment funding, but the non-residents must pay the regular out-of-state tuition that would be charged on campus.) Of the total distance education enrollment, including distance education only and regular term students who took distance education courses, 91.9% were North Carolina residents in fall 2011. Among those who were out-of-state, many were from neighboring states and the east coast, such as Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, and DC area. Some were from foreign countries.

Degree level of student: Because many UNC distance education programs are designed to serve the higher education needs of working adults, many programs are offered at the graduate level for teachers, nurses, and others who wish to pursue advanced degrees without leaving their home community. Thus, as Figure 8 illustrates, a majority of UNC distance education students are enrolled in master's degree programs. (UNC distance programs offer only the final two years of baccalaureate degree programs off campus—one reason for the lower percentage of distance undergraduate students.) UNC General Administration has provided incentive grants to encourage development of a number of baccalaureate degree programs in critical need areas such as teacher education, health professions, and technology.

Figure 8. Distribution of UNC On-Campus and Distance Education Students by Degree Level, Fall 2011
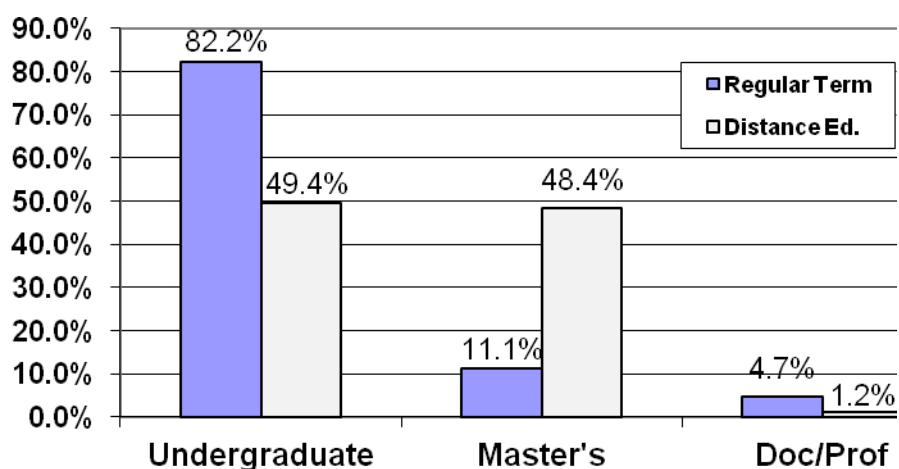
Conclusion

As highlighted in the Executive Summary and documented throughout this report, state enrollment funding for UNC off-campus and distance education degree-credit instruction is achieving its intended effect of expanding access to higher education for North Carolina citizens unable to relocate or travel to a UNC campus and reducing the demand on limited on-campus enrollment capacity. The enrollment funding has enabled UNC campuses to make crucial investments in faculty training, staff support, and information technology that are needed to offer high-quality instruction in a rapidly evolving and expanding distance education environment.

Instructional quality is paramount in developing these distance education opportunities, and policies and assessment procedures are in place to assure this. Costs of instruction are monitored carefully, and ongoing attention is being given to developing cost-effective programs through efficient use of information technology and collaboration and coordination among UNC campuses. UNC distance education programs are planned with the goal of raising the educational attainment level of North Carolinians and thus improving their economic and social well being. Careful needs assessments are conducted before programs are developed, and programs authorized are those that would be most beneficial for the economic growth and vitality of North Carolina communities. Consultation with other state partners (*e.g.*, the North Carolina Community College System, public school systems, Area Health Education Centers [AHEC], and professional associations) in planning and delivering quality distance education programs is a high priority.