

---

# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE research

---

THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

**TITLE** Distance Education Leaders' Perspectives: A Study of How Select Higher Education Institutions Implement and Lead Online Distance Education Programs

**RESEARCHER** Laura J. Hummell  
Department of Educational Leadership  
East Carolina University (Greenville, NC)  
Unpublished doctoral dissertation: March 2008

**OBJECTIVE** This study serves to enrich the leadership of online distance education programs by delineating and analyzing the online distance education leaders' experiences, theoretical beliefs, educational backgrounds, and perspectives.

## METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling lead to the selection of 10 online distance education leaders at select universities across the United States for this study. Seven were between the ages of 56-65 years of age. All held graduate degrees (seven held doctorates), and everyone had at least seven years of distance education experience. There were four men and six women in the sample. Each participant completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (Self) and also participated in a semi-structured interview.

## KEY FINDINGS

The respondents indicated that they engaged in Enabling more frequently than any other leadership practice, followed by Encourage and Challenge, and then Inspire and Model. The author concludes: "Based on the interviews and research data gathered, higher education institutions like the universities for which the participants work desire transformational leaders to direct distance

education departments. Transformational leaders like those interviewed seek to alter the existing institutional composition and influence people to accept new missions or innovative ideas. Such leaders focus upon organizational change, which is essential in the constantly changing environment of online distance education” (p. 99-100).