

# Data Trends and Briefings

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North Carolina Community College System  
Planning, Accountability, Research & Evaluation

## Recent Trend in Distance Learning: Thriving DL?

*“Distance learning is thriving at North Carolina Community Colleges!”* This statement announces the success of distance learning (DL) in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). A natural question to follow is how thriving it is. What is student enrollment in distance learning in recent years?

Distance learning in the NCCCS involves three primary instructional methods of delivery: Internet courses, Tele-courses, and the NC Information Highway (NCIH), which is two-way video courses. The NCIH can have point-to-point sessions, multi-point sessions, or broadcast sessions with up to 16 sites. Tele-courses include Tele-web courses too. Other than these three primary methods of delivery, other non-traditional methods of instruction using distance learning were classified as Other DL courses for analysis. Other DL courses included Hybrid (on-line and face-to-face) courses, web-supported and/or web-assisted courses.

The overall curriculum student enrollment in distance learning (DL) in proportion to that of those in traditional learning (TL) courses indeed grew markedly from 1.7% in 1997-98 to 12.2% in 2003-2004. A comparison of the actual number of student enrollment in DL courses and those in TL courses can be found in Table 1. (Also, refer to Figure 1.) Please note the numbers presented in Table 1 are duplicated student headcounts and they reflect the number of student course registrations. In other words, it is misleading to generalize these numbers for “student enrollment in DL and/or TL exclusively.” (The same student who took a traditional course can take distance learning courses for convenience’ sake.) For a purpose of simple comparison, independent studies and cooperative education (Co-op) were excluded.

Table 1. Number of Curriculum Students in DL and/or TL (Student Course Registration)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
DL Courses	16,740	26,695	40,392	60,742	90,337	121,356	155,556
TL Courses	980,385	1,052,580	1,068,440	1,092,549	1,174,009	1,221,795	1,270,978
<b>Total</b>	<b>997,125</b>	<b>1,079,275</b>	<b>1,108,832</b>	<b>1,153,291</b>	<b>1,264,346</b>	<b>1,343,151</b>	<b>1,426,534</b>

\*Data source: Data Warehouse, NCCCS, Course/FTE Universe

\*\*Each year represents Academic Year, which consists of Fall, Spring, and Summer terms.

As seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, changes in Curriculum FTE (Full-time Equivalent) for DL were noticeable in DL Internet courses. The growth rates were 50.1% from 2002 to 2003 and 29.8% from 2003 to 2004. The growth rates in DL Tele-courses were decreasing during the same period of time. While the growth rates for the DL Tele-courses were decreasing an average of 8.8% during the three-year period, that of NCIH (two-way video courses) were steady after a 14.4% growth from 2002 to 2003, producing a sizable FTE. The growth rate in curriculum FTE for Other DL courses was phenomenal from 2003 to 2004 in particular: 200%. Coding changes for some TL classes — classes that included some DL features — to DL classes might account for much of this growth.

Starting from 2004-2005, these classes were classified as DL Hybrid, DL Web- supported and/or Web-assisted classes.

Table 2. Calculated FTE\* for Distance Learning

<i>DL Methods</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>
DL Internet Courses	6,347	9,525	12,368
DL Tele-courses & Tele-web courses	1,910	1,706	1,588
NC Information Highway (Two-way Video Courses)	791	905	857
Other DL Courses	217	340	1,019
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,265</b>	<b>12,476</b>	<b>15,832</b>

\*Total FTE including Fall, Spring and Summer, not Budgeted FTE which doesn't include Summer term.

In terms of curriculum FTE produced by DL as compared to TL (FTE ratio of DL to TL) for individual colleges, several institutions stand out in the past three years. (Refer to Table 3 in the Appendix.) The greatest FTE ratio of DL to TL occurred in College of Albemarle, Piedmont CC, and Stanly CC. The average FTE ratios of DL to TL for these colleges were 0.27, 0.20 and 0.18, respectively, during the three-year period. Those institutions are average size colleges in the NCCCS, total FTE — Curriculum and Continuing Education — ranging from 1,954 to 2,260 as of 2002-2003. Also of note were the FTE ratios of DL to TL in Forsyth TCC, Fayetteville TCC, Western Piedmont CC, Martin CC and Wilson TCC. The average FTE ratios of DL to TL for those colleges during the three-year period were 0.17, 0.16, 0.16, 0.13, and 0.12 respectively.

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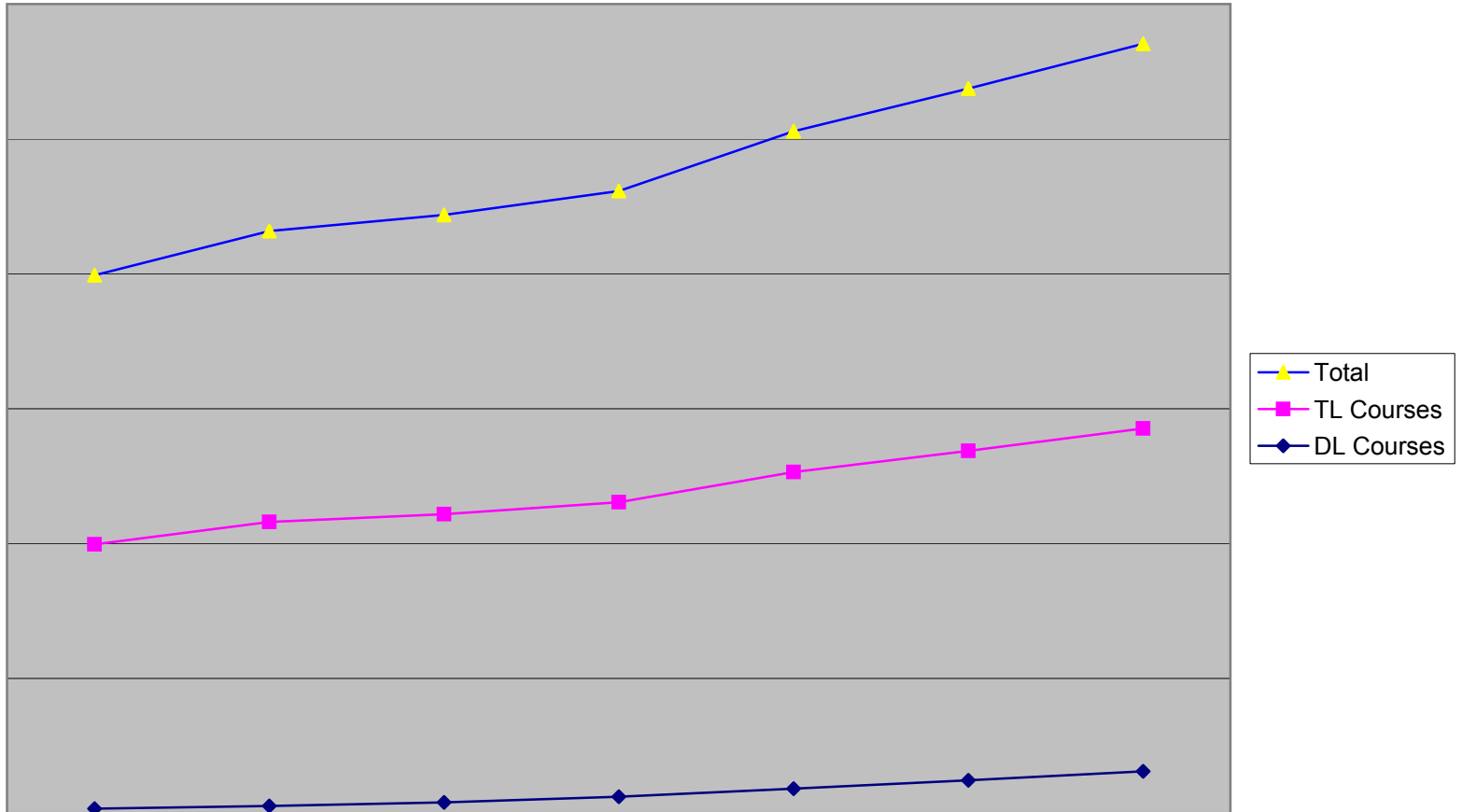
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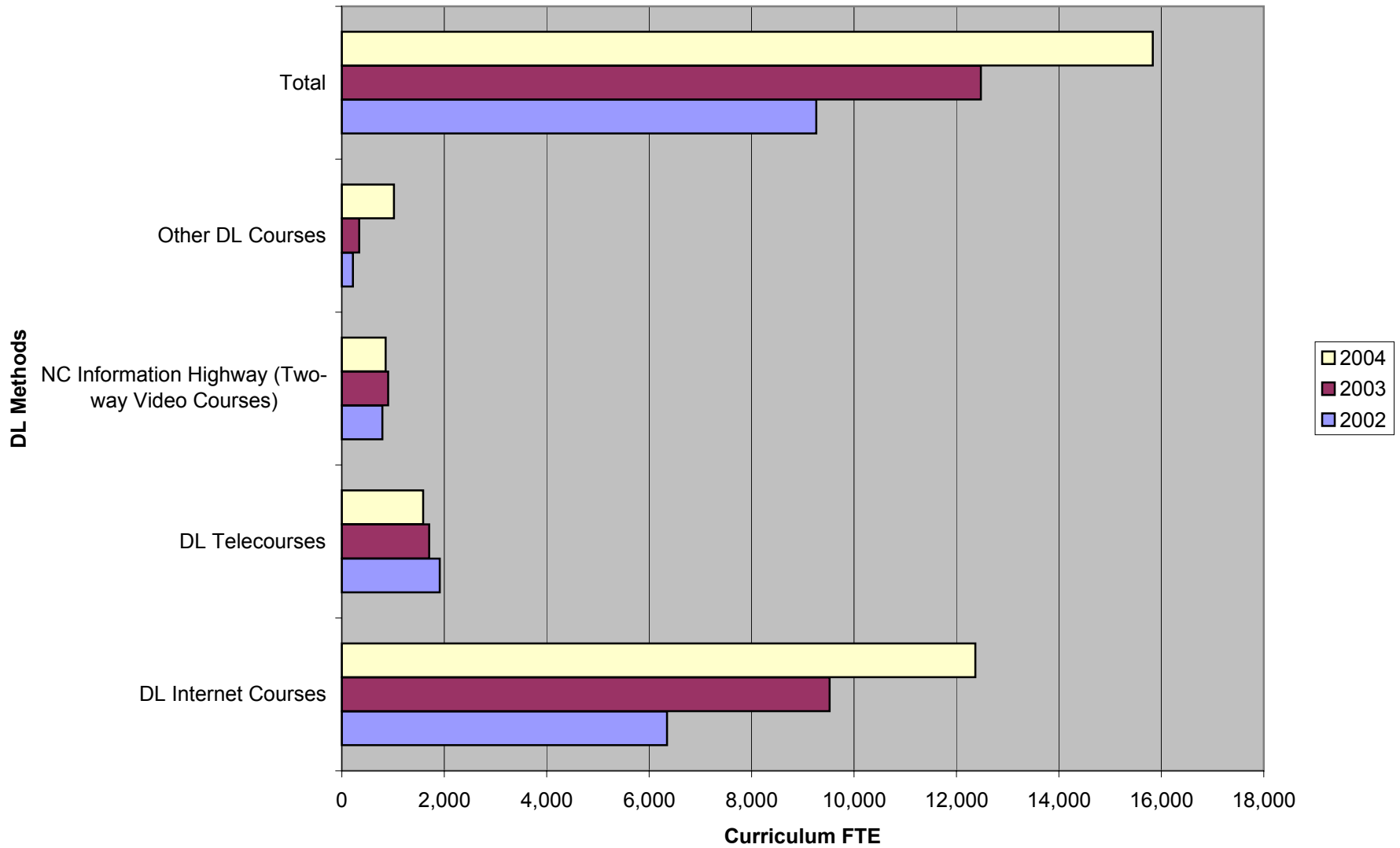
“College That Really Works” for North Carolina

**Figure 1. Number of Student Course Registrations in DL and TL, 1998-2004  
(Curriculum Only)**



	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
—▲— Total	997125	1079275	1108832	1153291	1264346	1343151	1426534
—■— TL Courses	980385	1052580	1068440	1092549	1174009	1221795	1270978
—◆— DL Courses	16740	26695	40392	60742	90337	121356	155556

Figure 2. Trend in Curriculum FTE for DL



Appendix: Table 3. Ratio of Curriculum FTE by College (DL/TL)

College	2001-2002			2002-2003			2003-2004		
	TL FTE	DL FTE	DL/TL	TL FTE	DL FTE	DL/TL	TL FTE	DL FTE	DL/TL
Alamance CC	2,784.64	90.81	0.0326	2,936.25	118.63	0.0404	3,223.88	188.28	0.0584
Asheville-Buncombe TCC	4,241.37	105.56	0.0249	4,382.76	147.5	0.0337	4,383.55	375.1	0.0856
Beaufort County CC	1,321.64	91.97	0.0696	1,377.39	126.43	0.0918	1,314.70	130.88	0.0996
Bladen CC	955.01	78.57	0.0823	1,183.61	4.69	0.0040	1,116.58	145.11	0.1300
Blue Ridge CC	1,504.20	78.32	0.0521	1,701.82	68.65	0.0403	1,747.69	107.97	0.0618
Brunswick CC	743.07	57.5	0.0774	811.38	56.35	0.0694	843.69	84.03	0.0996
Caldwell CC & TI	2,873.12	147.98	0.0515	2,863.70	235.19	0.0821	2,857.83	326.87	0.1144
Cape Fear CC	5,179.40	93.25	0.0180	5,755.07	168.38	0.0293	5,746.99	238.13	0.0414
Carteret CC	1,349.30	153.69	0.1139	1,382.85	169.22	0.1224	1,350.88	172.41	0.1276
Catawba Valley CC	3,029.50	401.69	0.1326	3,572.00	509.18	0.1425	3,762.95	637.47	0.1694
Central Carolina CC	3,336.19	403.06	0.1208	3,514.56	477.29	0.1358	3,508.37	516.32	0.1472
Central Piedmont CC	9,373.32	774.57	0.0826	9,627.45	1064.8	0.1106	9,564.09	1281.26	0.1340
Cleveland CC	2,220.03	15.84	0.0071	2,191.65	66.07	0.0301	2,286.93	118.44	0.0518
Coastal Carolina CC	3,268.64	211.91	0.0648	3,369.27	258.19	0.0766	3,523.70	289.85	0.0823
College of The Albemarle	1,440.59	265.24	0.1841	1,350.40	446.99	0.3310	1,359.03	408.88	0.3009
Craven CC	1,855.04	207.28	0.1117	1,966.17	291.95	0.1485	2,043.12	326.35	0.1597
Davidson County CC	2,067.24	157.16	0.0760	2,231.89	201.44	0.0903	2,503.23	252.32	0.1008
Durham TCC	3,458.36	157.56	0.0456	3,741.23	205.81	0.0550	3,716.32	263.25	0.0708
Edgecombe CC	1,696.99	91.68	0.0540	1,917.07	99.72	0.0520	2,027.06	109.37	0.0540
Fayetteville TCC	6,530.17	717.54	0.1099	6,673.83	1086.97	0.1629	7,071.81	1457.88	0.2062
Forsyth TCC	4,429.44	563.57	0.1272	4,724.86	808.09	0.1710	4,780.21	967.84	0.2025
Gaston College	3,605.44	164.29	0.0456	3,825.09	242.87	0.0635	3,883.27	315.59	0.0813
Guilford TCC	6,118.19	376.38	0.0615	6,154.87	495.79	0.0806	6,529.43	537.54	0.0823
Halifax CC	1,402.32	56.69	0.0404	1,463.16	116.88	0.0799	1,395.32	199.16	0.1427
Haywood CC	1,465.14	113.88	0.0777	1,575.88	157.93	0.1002	1,538.68	202.54	0.1316
Isothermal CC	1,692.50	2.47	0.0015	1,781.62	43.47	0.0244	1,892.28	81.94	0.0433
James Sprunt CC	1,168.62	38.81	0.0332	1,278.04	39.51	0.0309	1,252.16	39.44	0.0315
Johnston CC	2,768.85	84.95	0.0307	3,131.12	127.72	0.0408	3,184.75	148.41	0.0466
Lenoir CC	2,024.64	146.27	0.0722	2,010.87	195.37	0.0972	2,100.13	172.72	0.0822
Martin CC	668.87	38.6	0.0577	649.17	103	0.1587	673.64	117.37	0.1742
Mayland CC	1,005.08	82.31	0.0819	989.80	76.49	0.0773	984.81	92.69	0.0941
McDowell TCC	1,173.69	0.78	0.0007	1,197.66	1.56	0.0013	1,194.97	5.87	0.0049
Mitchell CC	1,623.34	61.76	0.0380	1,773.50	57.51	0.0324	1,804.57	70.73	0.0392
Montgomery CC	604.68	41.06	0.0679	713.76	43.84	0.0614	683.40	97.14	0.1421
Nash CC	1,790.92	91.97	0.0514	1,688.22	93.12	0.0552	1,738.88	144.51	0.0831

Appendix: Table 3. Ratio of Curriculum FTE by College (DL/TL)

Pamlico CC	289.14	14.25	0.0493	303.91	26.67	0.0878	294.29	15.91	0.0541
Piedmont CC	1,452.34	233.31	0.1606	1,602.01	347.97	0.2172	1,699.75	351.63	0.2069
Pitt CC	4,240.58	429.05	0.1012	4,295.83	529.25	0.1232	4,558.12	602.78	0.1322
Randolph CC	1,553.66	126.94	0.0817	1,633.56	220.34	0.1349	1,750.84	287.38	0.1641
Richmond CC	1,250.67	27	0.0216	1,479.24	21.47	0.0145	1,384.39	72.69	0.0525
Roanoke-Chowan CC	741.34	67.74	0.0914	790.02	79.2	0.1003	762.07	81.33	0.1067
Robeson CC	1,933.24	39.73	0.0206	2,022.09	27.47	0.0136	1,987.14	19.06	0.0096
Rockingham CC	1,619.21	104.89	0.0648	1,518.44	105.26	0.0693	1,707.70	138.41	0.0811
Rowan-Cabarrus CC	3,259.58	237.1	0.0727	3,391.78	231.41	0.0682	4,171.56	249.29	0.0598
Sampson CC	1,150.08	44.34	0.0386	1,257.76	62.01	0.0493	1,156.49	74.73	0.0646
Sandhills CC	3,081.32	81.41	0.0264	3,320.44	93.88	0.0283	3,413.03	148.28	0.0434
Southeastern CC	1,875.71	145.72	0.0777	1,911.20	165.72	0.0867	1,686.13	303.29	0.1799
South Piedmont CC	1,224.80	140.5	0.1147	1,289.48	163.59	0.1269	1,235.29	171.84	0.1391
Southwestern CC	1,460.23	115.37	0.0790	1,473.82	195.57	0.1327	1,470.48	228.53	0.1554
Stanly CC	1,282.00	192.07	0.1498	1,401.54	259.38	0.1851	1,467.72	319.22	0.2175
Surry CC	2,776.22	139.78	0.0503	2,874.38	149.32	0.0519	2,700.60	166.38	0.0616
Tri-County CC	1,141.09	2.44	0.0021	1,110.85	0	0.0000	1,006.36	14.7	0.0146
Vance-Granville CC	3,244.04	24.19	0.0075	3,414.71	42.69	0.0125	3,593.48	131.84	0.0367
Wake TCC	7,560.76	237.15	0.0314	7,921.49	405.54	0.0512	7,907.65	627.38	0.0793
Wayne CC	2,506.84	107.53	0.0429	2,667.06	134.28	0.0503	2,526.16	209.28	0.0828
Western Piedmont CC	1,910.32	234.33	0.1227	2,144.90	352.67	0.1644	2,133.13	421.53	0.1976
Wilkes CC	1,933.78	170.41	0.0881	2,148.57	221.34	0.1030	2,122.60	258.03	0.1216
Wilson TCC	1,429.93	185.12	0.1295	1,493.01	234.62	0.1571	1,631.89	314.76	0.1929
Total:	139,686.42	9,265.34	0.0663	146,974.06	12,476.25	0.0849	149,955.77	15,831.93	0.1056