

# Opportunities via Distance Education: A Survey of Large Animal Practitioners and Animal Health Professionals

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## Introduction

Enhancements in the fields of digital information exchange provide new opportunities in educational delivery. Practicing animal health professionals may desire to further their education in order to maintain state licensure, improve their skills within a specialty field, or advance within their career field. Delivering this training via distance would allow participants to gain expertise and certification while maintaining their present career status.

## Materials and Methods

During the fall of 2007, the Beef Cattle Institute at Kansas State University and the Institute for Academic Alliances conducted an online survey of large animal practitioners and animal health professionals. Participants were recruited from the AABP and AVC listservs, which serve practitioners and by direct contact with five animal health companies. Participants were emailed a direct link to a website within the KSU main website containing the survey, which was delivered by Axio, a delivery software program.

## Results

Of the 172 participants from this audience who completed the survey, 122 (62%) indicated that they were practicing or technical services veterinarians, and 75 (38%) were animal health sales representatives. Of the distance learning options offered on the survey, 34% of respondents indicated that they had interest in

taking courses apart from any type of degree program, 30% had interest in some form of post-graduate certification, 18% had interest in a Masters of Business Administration, 14% in a Masters of Science, and 4% had other interests. On a scale of 1 (lowest) through 5 (highest), respondents ranked their interest in learning more about: beef cattle production/efficiency 2.6; business management 2.4; cattle health and well-being 2.4; environmental issues 2.2; employee safety/training 2.0. Forty percent of respondents had previously taken some type of online course, while 60% had no experience with online courses. Internet connection types included: 79% cable/dsl, 16% satellite, 13% dial up, 10% cellular wireless and 7% other. Of the concerns raised by respondents, course quality, self-discipline, and professor contact were the most prevalent (52%, 46% and 28%). When asked if they would pursue online distance learning within the next five years, 24% of respondents answered Yes, 66% answered Maybe, and 10% answered No. Ultimately, 83% of respondents requested information pertaining to K-State online training programs in their interest field.

## Significance

While the respondents were recruited from a technologically biased pool because the survey was delivered via the web, these results indicate that there is a standing market for distance based education in the veterinary and animal health industries. Professionals would like to continue their education while maintaining their present job and career status.