



Thursday 16th June 2011

Time: 14:30 - 15:00

## **Framing The Distance Experience: Towards a Critical Understanding of What it Means to Distance Teach**

**Speaker:** Sarah Hayes, Aston University

### **Abstract:**

Improved technologies offer many choices for communication and feedback and perhaps now comparisons between distance and face-to-face experiences are outdated, when so much time is spent by all 'online'. In 2008, in *Distance Education*, Goodyear and Ellis stated: 'Educational technology research has spent too long trapped in a paradigm of simplistic comparisons....ignoring a whole range of difficult but researchable practical issues whose resolution is essential to take up' (Goodyear & Ellis, 2008).

To better understand practical issues and raise critical awareness about distance teaching, we interviewed 40 academic staff within Languages and Social Sciences at Aston University in Birmingham. The sample spanned Sociology, Politics, English and Modern Languages. Staff currently engaged in distance teaching, and those with no experience, were asked to comment on issues of administration, communication, institutional and technological aspects. Recurring themes were identified.

Many studies evaluate learner experiences in minimal ways, measuring 'student outcomes' on individual courses, rather than complete academic programmes (Merisotis, & Phipps, 1999). Few undertake systematic inquiry to research consistent themes emerging for staff across a range of disciplines and backgrounds. Do lecturers see distance teaching as an extension of what they do in the classroom, as entirely different, or something in between? Do they want to distance teach? What counts as distance teaching these days? What are the benefits and pitfalls?



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Is technology closing the communication gap? What are the 'essentials' to plan for when constructing a new distance course? Here we share our results, with reference to current literature on this topic.