Responses About Remote Participation on Doctoral Committees
Community College Leadership Program
Oregon State University
January 2010

Positive Responses:

I think it would be very helpful for those students who have to travel so far, as well as the committee members who are having to travel. I don't see any problems with making the change.

Julie Kopet
Director Workforce Development Programs
Corrections Education
Portland Community College

If asked to participate on a doctoral committee, I would prefer to have this as an option over traveling to Oregon. I would need to know far enough in advance to reserve appropriate room/technology at my institution and I would need to have OSU initiate the call.

Sue Lorimer, Ed.D.
Vice President of Instruction
Folsom Lake College

Here are my thoughts:

0. To what extent would this pose a problem for the remote committee member, in your opinion? [financially, technologically]

    I think it would be more of a technological than financial issue for most. It depends on the actual technology (laptops vs high end equipment) used for the two-way conferencing though. It would be very important to a) use a very easy and reliable system and b) have technical support readily available. Who would be responsible for set up? The phone should still be there as a backup.

• Might such two-way video result in enhanced participation by the remote person; or would it not make any difference? Again, in your opinion.

    If it is relatively glitch free, and a high quality connection, I think it could enhance the participation by the remote person and could potential put the student at ease (seems more personal, ability to read their face, etc.) It might turn some committee members off though if they are particularly uncomfortable with technology. It might also constrain freedom of movement for the committee overall depending on camera line of
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sight. I would want to get info from committees that have already used video conferencing technology before deciding anything.

• What other issues might be of concern with such a change?

If the technology is good enough, this type of remote participation may make it easier to attract committee members who live at a distance and might not be interested otherwise due to time or financial constraints. Of course the converse could be true if it ends up being expensive or hard to use.

Sue Goff
Dean, Career & Technical Education
Mendocino College

Participation via ITV or two-way video would not create any problem for me and it would enhance my participation when I am at a distance.

Michelle Andreas, Ed.D.
Associate Director, Education Services
State Board for Community and Technical College

Some thoughts: Most outside committee members are fairly high ranking in their institutions, I'd guess (e.g., Ed Brewster) so they probably have good support to call upon to arrange technology for them. The idea of having two-way video also moves their participation out of the auditory realm alone--myself, I'm more visual, so I'd tend to be in favor of it all around.

Catherine Forte
Tutoring Center Coordinator
Bates Technical College

Greetings from Doha, Qatar! As one who required remote participation by committee members on more than one occasion during my program, and who conducts meetings from remote locations around the world, I would endorse the use of 2-way video. With the rapid progress of technology, the cost of multiplexing audio/video has plummeted. Today, a laptop, Skype and a $20 webcam is sufficient for a committee member to participate remotely with audio and video connectivity.

I know from personal experience that participation in a meeting can be enhanced by adding video to the usual telephone connection. It can be difficult to gauge the mood in the room, and the subtleties of the interactions when you are limited to audio. Having 2-way video also helps the remote participant to feel more engaged.

The only issue I can see is for those who are currently in the process. To suddenly impose a new
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restriction is very unfair to participants who have already made commitments to their committee members. Perhaps a gradual move from “strongly recommending” 2-way video for those who have already constituted a committee to a “required for remote participation” for new students position might help ease the transition.

My 2 cents worth. Hope this helps.

Expect success,
Rob

Rob Fuller, Ed.D.
Director, Entrepreneur Development Programs
Rady School of Management
UC San Diego

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Neutral Responses:

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For me, I would need to know what type of video technology would be used. If what I have available at the college is not compatible with the technology that OSU is using, then I would not be able to participate in that way. Being in a rural, small community, we do not have access to a Kinkos or other business where you can rent the use of such equipment.

As someone who attended one meeting via phone, I feel it is important to meet in person for the first committee meeting and for the defense. I think that shows respect for the student and the process. For the other meetings, attending remotely makes it more palatable to agree being a committee member.

Thanks for asking!
Susan

Dr. Susan J. Wolff
Wolff Designs

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Darlene, we use two-way video for some of our meetings. It can work but there is number of constraints/considerations. Scheduling, having technology help, who pays, training for faculty, and slow transmission interfering with discussions. These can be overcome but the committee would have to have some built in flexibility and reasonable expectations. I foresee some difficulty for the student adding another dimension to factor in when scheduling.

Steve Smith
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Director, Curriculum Support Services
Portland Community College

I can't be certain about my external committee-person's situation, but every community college in Washington is connected with a two-way video connection.

Some of us have aging equipment but I think this set up would be possible. I would think this would better engage the remote committee member and create a richer experience for all.

My concern would be how well the room is arranged to enable this remote access. I have seen poor arrangements and excellent arrangements where the committee member almost seemed to sit at the table. Technology is still dependent on the people who set it up and they don't always understand how it will be used. In case of technology failures, we still need a conference phone for backup.

Thank you for asking for our input.

Sincerely,

Mindy Coslor
Dean of Library Learning Resources and Basic Skills
Norwood Cole Library
Skagit Valley College

Negative Responses:

Thanks for asking about the proposed change. I think the video-conferencing should be an option but not be required at this time.

1. To what extent would this pose a problem for the remote committee member, in your opinion? [financially, technologically]

Even though PCC has extensive technology, it is hard to schedule video-conference rooms as they are in high demand. If the grad school is thinking about using Skype or other personal conferencing packages, I am not sure that technology is sufficiently advanced to be able to handle PowerPoint or other visuals as well as the student’s verbal presentation. Not sure how robust the audio is on some of these systems. I also worry about the interoperability of systems across colleges. If video conferences were required, I expect we would need tech support on each end. PCC would not charge me for use of its systems but other colleges may have fees in place.
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• Might such two-way video result in enhanced participation by the remote person; or would it not make any difference? Again, in your opinion.

The participation, especially the non-verbal interactions, may be enhanced but that will only be as good as the technology allows. Certainly it could be an improvement over audio-only but only if the video system is solid.

• What other issues might be of concern with such a change?

I am concerned that this adds another level of uncertainty for the student and the major professor. Worries about the stability of the video-conferencing system will be added on top of the usual preparations for the exams/defense.

I like the direction of this thinking but I suggest that it is too soon to implement. Perhaps for those interested in experimenting could do some testing/trials for us. Heavens, we had a heck of a time getting a computer projector at Silver Falls ;-) 

Hope you are thriving,

Charmagne D. Ehrenhaus  
Dean, Math, Engineering & Social Sciences  
Mount Hood Community College

While I believe that this is a great way to grow inclusion on graduate committees and may even allow more global participation I believe that it should be phased in. While technology is moving quickly in this area it is still not as widely used on campuses. I would encourage language that allows it as an option but does not require it.

I do greatly appreciate OSU's commitment to using technology as a forum of both instructional methodology and student engagement.

Sincerely,  
Dave Pelkey  
Director of Student Life  
Tacoma Community College

As a "remote" committee member, from time to time, I can offer the following:

1. Setting up a two way video incurs an expense regardless of the "remote" members location because it requires setting up video equipment and connections. Even if the "remote" member is at a location (e.g., a college) that has the equipment and technical staff to do the work, it costs that college the wages of the staff and the expense of the
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equipment. This has always been looked at as a contribution or negligible expense for the institution doing the work. But, it always has been a real expense and, now, when there are fewer staff and lower funding available, it is an even bigger cost issue for the institution.

2. For a remote member like myself who is no longer at a college, it is expensive to go to a facility (usually a for profit location like FedEx/Kinko or the like).

3. If it is assumed that "remote" members will make an arrangement at a college to use their facilities, you're back to the issues in my first point. In addition, it means the "remote" member is obligated to make the effort to contact a local college, convince them to take on this task and then follow through in making it all happen in line with the schedule of the other committee members on campus. (This last point, meeting the schedule of the on-campus people, has been a big issue every time I've been a "remote" member. The campus-based people always control the meeting time. So, if a video conference requirement is established, availability of the "remote" person would have to be the driver for the meeting time.

I hope these make sense. If not, please give me a call.

Best wishes,

Bill Becker
Adjunct Instructor, CCLP, OSU
Former Executive Vice President, Mount Hood Community College
Former Interim President, Mount Hood Community College

I have committed to Dr. Vaughan that he may participate on my committee remotely. As a retired individual living on the east coast, I anticipate that he won’t easily be able to avail himself of two-way video at his home in order to participate. While Skype has made the use of two-way video much easier than it used to be, I think the technological hurdle presented by implementing it might be just enough of a deterrent that Dr. Vaughan would withdraw from serving. This departure would definitely be a loss of valuable expertise and the contribution he could make to the committee.

As one that has participated in hundreds of meetings that included remote participation by telephone, by myself or others, I can attest to the value the remote participants bring to the meeting. While video has the potential to improve that participation, it also has the potential to detract due to the increased technological complexity and the risk of that technology not functioning correctly.

I’m sure I’ve not shared anything here that you’ve not already considered in this matter. My opinion is that adding this requirement is putting in place a potential hurdle that will not significantly improve the participation of remote committee members and has the potential to cause the loss of valuable participation by those who are currently willing to serve.
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Ralph Orr  
Former President, Eastern Arizona College;  
Former President, Tillamook Bay Community College

To what extent would this pose a problem for the remote committee member, in your opinion? [financially, technologically]

From experience, I will suggest that this consideration may eliminate potential committee members who might consider participation. In my case, my remote committee member is located in Seattle and knows me from previous academic participation. I feel confident with his support, guidance and input. To create what might be considered restraints or barriers for remote participation inevitably could eliminate quality individuals from participating in the committee process.

I see no practical purpose in making it more difficult than it already is in establishing relationships with committee members, students and programs.

Note: I am anticipating that my committee member be present at my oral presentation even if it means at my cost. This of course will be a financial barrier for me.

Might such two-way video result in enhanced participation by the remote person; or would it not make any difference? Again, in your opinion.

Two-way remote communication is a possibility, however, this too might be a logistical barrier.

What other issues might be of concern with such a change?

If the change does happen, I do hope this will only take effect to subsequent participates within our respective graduate programs.

I hope this helps.

Edward Esparza, MA  
Lead Academic Advisor  
Washington TRIO Expansion Program (WA-TEP) Central Washington University Academic Achievement Programs