
Distance Learning Survey Results

By

**Commander Patrick K. Hawkins, SC, USN
Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management**

Introduction

In April 2000 the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) undertook the task to determine the training needs of the security assistance community. To accomplish this task a security assistance training survey was developed to quantitatively assess the training needs in terms of course delivery methodology. DISAM currently uses a traditional classroom instructional method of teaching at the DISAM facility on Wright-Patterson, AFB, Ohio and various on-site locations throughout the world. DISAM as well as many other activities throughout the world are relying more heavily on the internet and telecommunications technologies. Subsequently, it is a natural progression to explore the possibility of using these technologies to provide training to distant locations at reduced cost, increased efficiency and convenience.

DISAM collected data from respondents using the commercially available software program, Perseus Survey Solutions for the web V2.0, a product of Perseus Development Corporation. This program allowed for the creation and distribution of survey information by collecting, analyzing and reporting results to the survey administrator. The Perseus program allowed for the establishment of a collection file, which was downloaded and the data set was analyzed for trends. The format of the survey allowed the respondent to answer the various questions as well as defining specific goals that were desired. Respondents were asked to note their preferences for studying multimedia lessons delivered via the personal computer either in the workplace or at home. DISAM did not record or maintain data on the identity of the respondent, ensuring complete anonymity. Data were collected over a period of several months.

Data Collection

Data collection was straightforward. Each respondent was requested to identify the organization or assignment which best described their work location, number of years working in security assistance, and grade or rank. In addition, the respondent was requested to respond to a number of questions concerning prior attendance in formal DISAM training courses, either in resident at Wright-Patterson AFB or one of the numerous on-sites. Each respondent was requested to respond to having previous experience with distance learning or web-based training and if the respondent had a preference to either internet/web or CD-ROM media format. The survey asked if the respondent would participate in security assistance training via the internet/web or CD-ROM and if their preference was to study during duty hours, off duty hours or a combination. Finally the respondent was asked if the virtual classroom were provided, which topics in security assistance would be most beneficial to the respondent and were any other topic areas that were not covered that needed to be covered in the virtual classroom.

Results

A total of 274 responses were received on the survey with the majority, 62 percent, from three general organizations, SAO/DAO, implementing agencies and DoD field activities. (Figure 1). Of the 274 responses over 50 percent (139) had five or more years in a security assistance related position and additional 59 (21.5 percent) between one and three years of experience. (Figure 2) Of the respondents 36.5 percent were in pay grades GS-12/13 or O-3/4 which is consistent with

the known demographics for the security assistance community. (Figure 3) GS-14 or O-5 made up an additional 17.2 percent. Most had attended at least one traditional DISAM course during their career (56.2 percent) with 23 percent attending three or more. (Figure 4) Most, 65.7 percent, have never previously participated in distance or web-based training. (Figure 5) If given a preference to a mode of either web-based (internet) and/or CD-ROM media, most respondents 62 percent indicated either internet/web or CD-ROM was acceptable. (Figure 6) An additional 20.4 percent indicated only the internet as an acceptable medium. CD-ROM was the least acceptable with 15.3 percent. (Figure 7) When asked if they would participate in security assistance training via internet/web or CD-ROM-based Virtual Classroom, an overwhelming 84.7 percent responded favorably. Those responding favorably to the distance learning alternative indicated a preference for either during regular duty hours (46.0 percent) or a combination of both on and off-duty (38.7 percent), while 12.8 percent indicated a preference for off-duty hours only. (Figure 8).

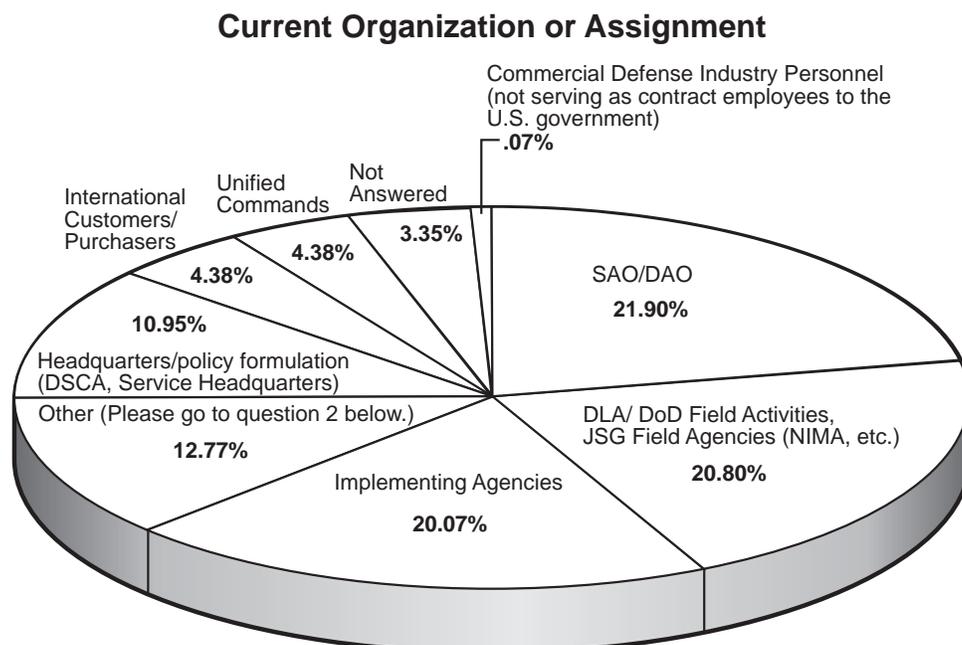


Figure 1

In addition to general questions concerning preferences, the survey requested the respondents to indicate topics they would be most interested in if the CONUS Orientation course were offered via Virtual Classroom. Overall, the average response was favorable with an average of 3.1 on a scale which ranged from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (completely interested). (Graphs 1 and 2). The respondents were required to grade each topic area currently offered in the CONUS Orientation course and indicate their level of interest. The most requested topics were foreign military sales process (3.7), foreign policy, legislation, and the security assistance budget (3.6), FMS agreements - terms and conditions (3.5), FMS acquisition policy and process (3.5) and security assistance funds management (3.4). The least favorable were topics on introduction to security assistance (3.1), introduction to the security assistance organization (3.1) and international armaments cooperation program (3.1). Even though these three topics exhibited the lowest overall scores an average 3.1 indicates a moderate interest in the subject topics.

Years in Security Assistance Related Position

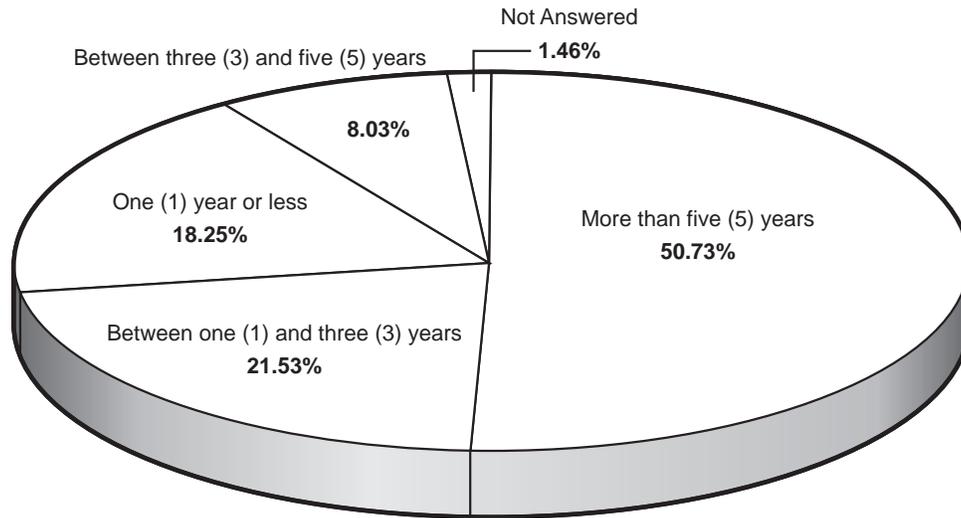


Figure 2

Discussion

What is Distance Learning?

Distance learning is a structured, flexible alternative for the student unable to attend traditional classroom courses using a variety of media to include computer conferencing, compressed video services, independent study, interactive television, on-line (internet) and satellite video-conferences. (Northcentral Technical College Program). In this survey, DISAM only explored using the future student's personal computer via the World Wide Web or through a combination of web-based and CD-ROM media.

Discussion of Survey Results

In the past, most distance education (learning) focused on adult learners, with an increase in alternative work arrangements, coupled with flextime and work-at-home arrangements has led to greater individual responsibility and learner autonomy (Spodick 1995) The concept of distance learning has been in existence for many years, recent studies have indicated that about one-third of the nation's 2-year and 4-year post-secondary education institutions offered distance education courses in the 1997-1998 academic year with another one-fifth planning to start offering such courses with the next three years with an estimate of 54,470 different distance education courses offered, (Lewis, Snow, Farris and Levin, 2000). Distance education in the United States is not nearly "high tech" as everyone imagines while video conferencing and real-time transcontinental virtual classrooms may be the wave of the future, today's distance learning often employs the more common technologies of video cassette, CD-ROM, local TV broadcasting and electronic mail, (Helf, 1999).

The onset of web-based internet access and the web page development of many organizations both private and public has highlighted the ease and convenience of exploring distance learning as an alternative to the face-to-face classroom setting. Some respondents expressed concern over losing the interaction among the instructor, "a live professor" and the students. However, there were just as many respondents that thought the idea of the virtual classroom was a viable alternative. Distance learning allows the student to learn and continue

their education and work at their individual pace. The author does not dispute that a significant amount of learning is realized in the classroom environment where ideas can be discussed and fully understood.

Years in Security Assistance Related Position

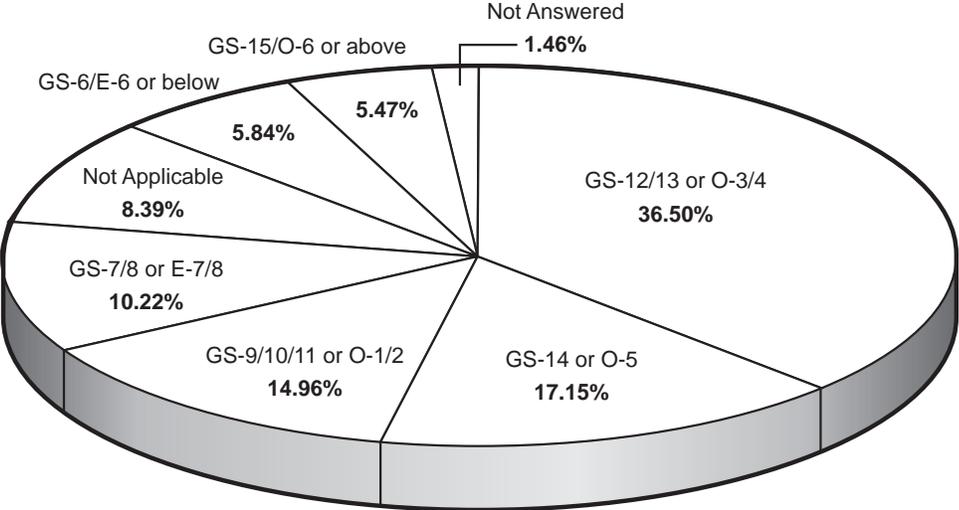


Figure 3

Number of DISAM Courses

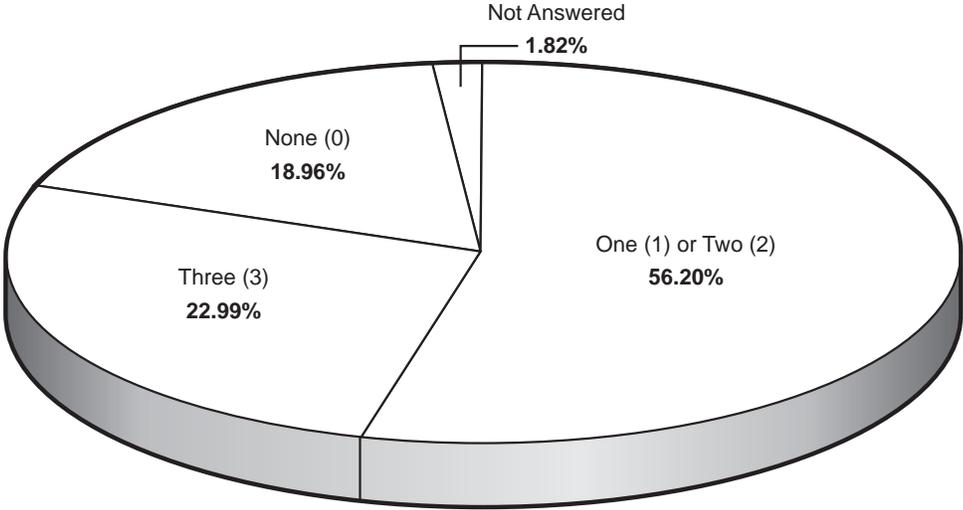


Figure 4

Within the security assistance community, training of the workforce beginning with baseline knowledge of the security assistance process is paramount to mission accomplishment. The reduction of the workforce and increased demand for productivity are driving factors in the exploration of an alternative method of keeping the community trained. Some respondents to the survey addressed this issue and expressed concern that personnel cutbacks would not permit them to find time during normal working hours to participate in training. It is critical to train the workforce in the unique aspects of foreign military sales process but equally important to keep

the workforce current in an increasingly changing environment. A number of respondents commented on the need of refresher training on selected topics would be beneficial for personnel that had a great deal of experience but may need assistance specific issues.

Previous Distance Learning Participation

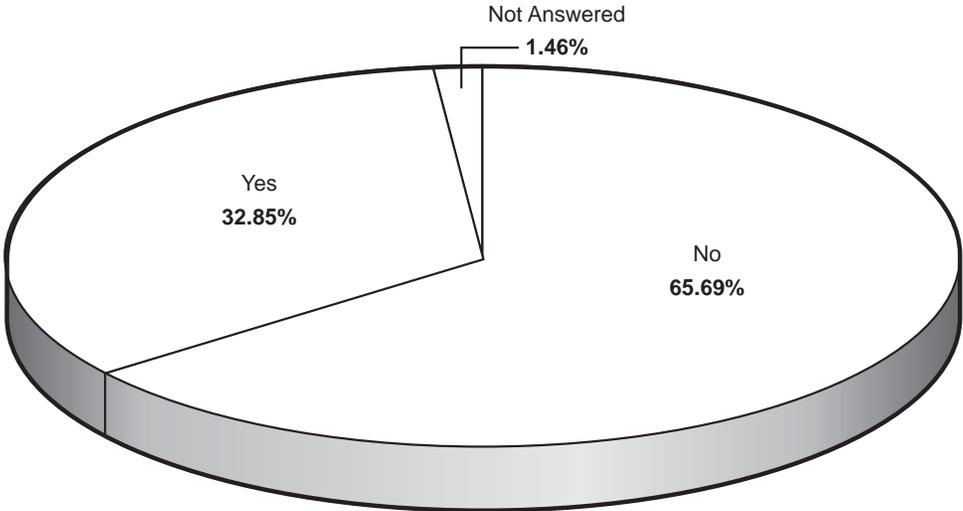


Figure 5

Media Preference

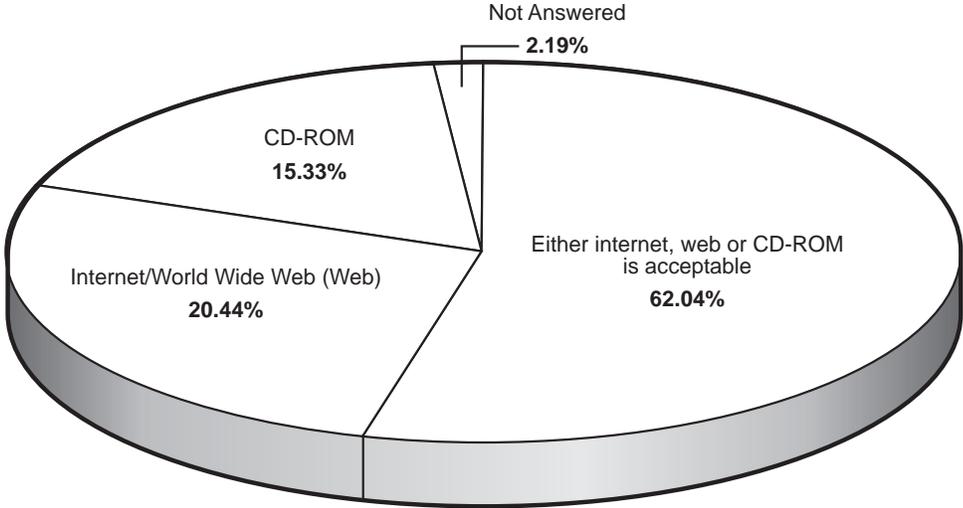


Figure 6

In a recent DSCA employee survey, employees felt they were adequately trained to produce high-quality work. The increasing workload and the reliance on performance measurements to drive improvements in quality, cost, and timeliness indicate that exploring an alternative method of learning is appropriate. Distance learning is not the overall solution to time management in training. There are a number of challenges that must be overcome for distance learning to be a viable alternative. These include, just to mention a couple, technological literacy including computer literacy and loss of content in the technology, and providing information

rather than instruction, (Spodick 1995). In addition, concerns were expressed in the survey that guidelines must be in place to insure minimum standards for each agency to give time, space, adequate resources and privacy necessary to successful completion of the course. These comments implied that distance learning would occur during regular business hours. Distance learning can occur during off-duty hours using computers at the student's resident. The data in the survey are split on this issue, 45.85 percent indicated a preference for distance learning during regular duty hours, 12.8 percent on off-duty hours and the remaining a combination of off-duty and duty hours. Personal home computers are more commonplace today then ten years ago. A recent April 1999 survey conducted by *CommerceNet/Nielsen Media Research* discovered that 92 million people have access to the internet. Individual commands will have to establish policies for training during duty or off duty hours. Based on the responses obtained in the survey the majority would utilized the opportunity if presented regardless of the time of the training.

Training Via Internet

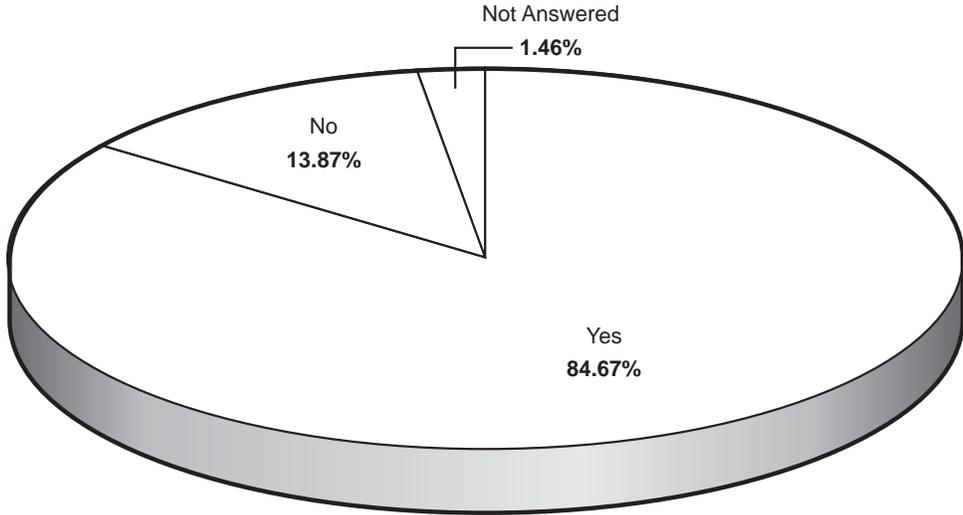


Figure 7

Time Participation

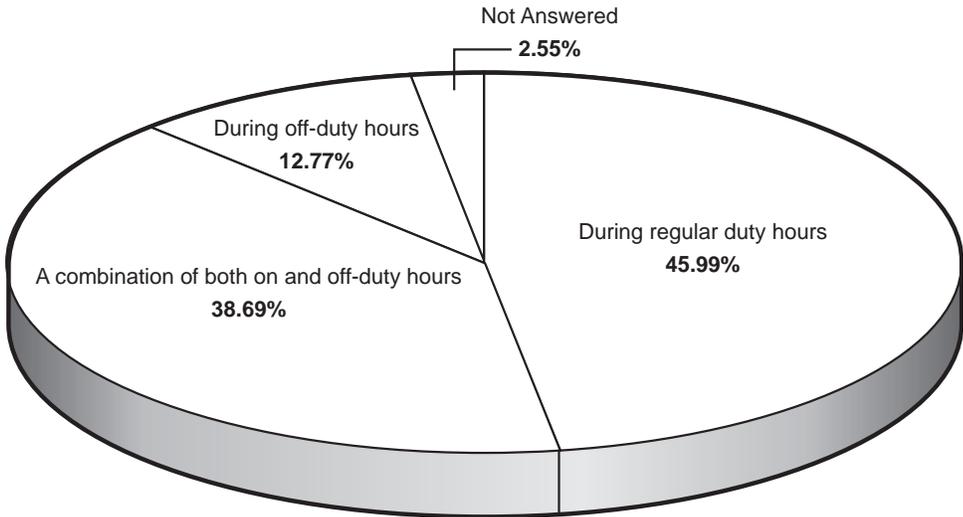
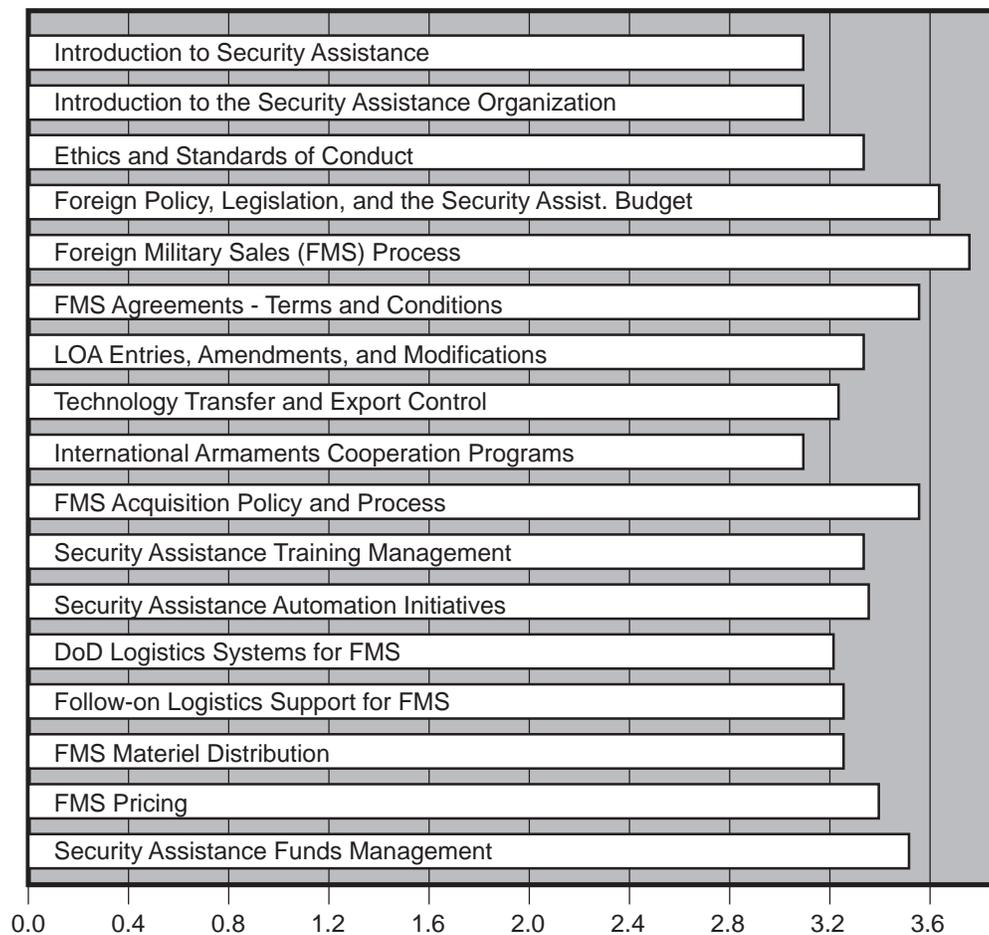


Figure 8

The respondents indicated a preference for a number of topics to be included in the virtual classroom with foreign military sales process and foreign policy, legislation, and the security assistance budget. Both these topic areas are covered extensively in the DISAM CONUS (SAM-C), CONUS Orientation (SAM-CO) and Overseas Course (SAM-O). Those topics are time sensitive and changes occur frequently. The virtual classroom would provide a means of keeping the security assistance community informed of changes. Overall, acceptance of all topics was high.

Topics in Security Assistance

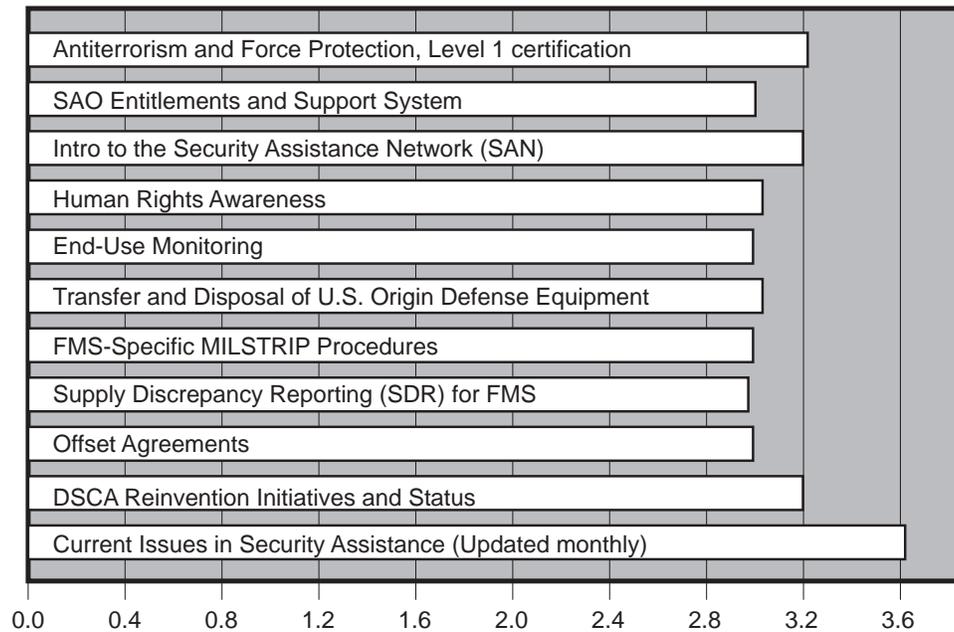


Graph 1

Conclusion

Based on the results of the survey, distance learning is a viable alternative to the traditional classroom instruction. Distance learning allows the student to use a combination of web-based or CD-ROM media to stay current in the fast-paced security assistance environment. Each self-paced learning course may be taken at the student's time either on or off-duty based on the individual command's policy.

Advanced Topics



Graph 2

About the Author

Commander Hawkins is an assistant professor and has been at DISAM since December 1995. He is a graduate of the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California and holds a Master of Science in materiel acquisition management from the Florida Institute of Technology. He is the Deputy Director of Research and the functional coordinator for contracting and acquisition topics in all DISAM courses.

Bibliography

Spodick, Edward F., 1995, *The Evolution of Distance Learning*, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library.

Helf, Gavin, *Front Line*, Spring 1999, "Revelations about Distance Learning in Central Asia."

Lewis, Laurie; Snow, Kyle; Farris, Elizabeth; and Levin, Douglas, Spring 2000, *Education Statistics Quarterly*, "Distance Education at Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1997-1998."

North Central Technical College Programs, <http://www.northcentral.tec.wi.us/distance/>.