

## Mental Health Research Showcase 2005

Distance learning at the Post Secondary Level: An opportunity for the Mentally Ill.  
Austin Albert Mardon, American Public University System

**Purpose:** To discuss the option of distance learning post-secondary education  
**Importance of Problem:** For many of the mentally ill post-secondary education can be a way of gaining self esteem and increasing their earning power in potential future employment. Distance learning can be a solution for the unique problems that many people with severe mental illness suffer in starting and completing post-secondary education.

**Description of Initiative:** The main reference source for distance learning in North America and the Commonwealth is the following book Bear's Guide to Earning Degrees by Distance Learning, 15th Edition. Three case studies will be examined including the author of severely mentally ill individuals that successfully completed distance learning at the post secondary level in Alberta. Two of the individuals gained distance learning undergraduate degrees from Athabasca University and the author completed a distance learning graduate degree and is currently a part-time instructor at two online universities. Great flexibility in terms of course delivery and accommodation exists in the authors opinion exists in distance learning programs as compared to more traditional classroom environments.

**Key Findings:** After a key word survey it was found that there was no literature on how the mentally ill might avail themselves of distance learning especially with the power of the online internet learning experiences. It would be of interest for future study if the flexibility of use that exists in the distance learning as to whether this indicates a greater chance of success in terms of completing specific courses and also degree programs.

**Conclusions:** Distance Learning is an option that might address the distinct social systemic problems that exist in the traditional cookie cutter 'bricks and mortar' classroom institutions.