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## Education Department Cuts New Distance-Education Grants

BY DAN CARNEVALE

WASHINGTON  
**T**HE DEPARTMENT of Education won't award as many grants for distance-education projects this year as officials had originally planned, because President Bush has proposed eliminating new financing for the program in the 2002 fiscal year.

So instead of making dozens of new three-year grants, the department is making a handful of larger grants, each for as much as the institutions would otherwise have received over three years. It is also paying off the second and third years of grants awarded earlier.

Officials at the department say they are paying off both old and new awards now because they are concerned that Congress might not appropriate enough money in 2002 and 2003 to pay out the full amounts of the grants on the regular three-year schedule.

### THE BUSH BUDGET

In his budget proposal for the Department of Education, Mr. Bush asked to cut off new financing for the program, which is known as the Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships, or LAAP. The grant program, which pays for innovative distance-learning projects, was started under President Bill Clinton with \$10-million in 1999. It received \$23.3-million in 2000 and \$30-million in 2001.

In Mr. Bush's proposed budget for the 2002 fiscal year, which begins October 1, the department's Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education would provide money to pay for the second and third years of grants that have already been awarded, although the department would not make any new awards. The president's plan would allocate \$51.2-million to the fund to pay for LAAP and other grants as well.

But officials at the Education Department said they aren't sure whether that money will actually be available when the spending bills are passed this year and in subsequent years.

After spending a year deciding how to allocate the \$30-million from the 2001 fiscal year, the department chose to finance six new three-year grants completely and to finish paying off all the other grants that had been awarded earlier. Sources said that the money was originally expected to pay for as many as 40 new grants.

Francesca G. Giordano, assistant department chairwoman for counseling, adult, and health education at Northern Illinois University's division of continuing education, is co-director of a project that will receive \$1,562,465, to be spent over three years.

### HELPING A NEEDY POPULATION

The grant will help Northern Illinois work with two adult-training centers in developing online courses to give people coming off wel-

fare better job skills. The money will pay for the development of the online courses as well as for access to computers at career-training sites. "It's a population that's been severely impacted by the digital divide," Ms. Giordano said.

She said that she was surprised to receive all three years' worth of money at once, but that department officials quickly explained

why. It doesn't matter how the money is allocated, she said, because the program will operate the same way whether the money comes now or later.

Kathleen P. King, associate professor of adult education at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education, in New York, oversees one LAAP grant that was awarded in the 2000 fiscal year.

Fordham works with three other colleges and organizations to provide online professional-development programs to elementary-school teachers.

The project first received \$588,798 from the 2000 fiscal-year budget, but received the full balance of \$1,419,215 from this year's budget. "We're going into our second year, and they're forward-

funding us," she said. "We're getting all our money immediately."

Ms. King said she thinks that it's a shame that fewer institutions will be able to receive federal help for their distance-education programs now that LAAP is being phased out. "I think it's a mistake," she said "I'd like to see the federal government involved in distance education."