

## BOOK REVIEW

Daniel V. Eastmond, *Book Review Editor*

# ***Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning, by Caroline Howard, Karen D. Schenk, and Richard Discenza***

**Scott L. Howell**

*Brigham Young University*

*Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning*, by Caroline Howard, Karen D. Schenk, and Richard Discenza. (Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing, 2004, 368 pages, \$59.95)

Given a list of book review choices, I jumped at the opportunity to review this book because of who the editors are, the title of the book, and, most importantly, the timely topic: *Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning*. The editors Caroline Howard, Karen Schenk, and Richard Discenza are seasoned scholars, thought leaders, and experienced professionals in the burgeoning field of distance

education and online learning. Their contributions to the field in recent years have been many and significant.

Scanning the table of contents for this volume, I was somewhat surprised to observe a number of chapter authors from around the world, (i.e., United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Canada, and New Zealand). On second thought, however, I realized this reach of authorship and experience further validates the ubiquity and globalization of online and distant learning.

The book's subtitle, *Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning*, was the dominant theme throughout. The editors organized the book's 16 chapters around three thematic units: (1) strategies and paradigms, (2) course

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• **Scott L. Howell**, Division of Continuing Education, 299 HCEB Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.  
E-mail: Scott.Howell@byu.edu

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development instructions and quality issues, and (3) building an organization for successful distance education programs. Each chapter and unit, either openly or indirectly, addressed the challenge that online learning was bringing to the traditional educational paradigms for administrators, faculty, students, and infrastructures. As I read this book, it became evident that for any new online and distance learning initiative to succeed, its director, staff, and faculty would need to know as much about change management as they do online and distance learning. The editors divided the 16 chapters into groups of four, seven, and five chapters respectively and distributed them over the following three units: (1) strategies and paradigms, (2) course development instructions and quality issues, and (3) building an organization for successful distance education programs.

Two of the three editors for this volume, Richard Discenza and Caroline Howard, joined distinguished professor Murray Turoff in writing chapter 1. This chapter was appropriately situated as the first of 16 included in this volume since it established the groundwork for the thesis: "changing educational paradigms for online learning." The authors boldly asserted that distance education and online learning are now permanent fixtures in the higher education landscape and may even be providing a better education than their traditional counterparts. The authors identified some of the changes they believe will come as the educational paradigm shifts and adapts to new technologies and pedagogical models, including (1) the introduction of collaborative learning in all modes of instruction, (2) more emphasis on better trained and effective teachers and not just more productive researchers, and (3) added responsiveness to market and educational consumer pressures. This sentence from the chapter abstract sums up not only this chapter but also much of the book itself: "Distance programs are accelerating changes that are challenging students, faculty, and the university itself." Each chapter addresses some of the changes that its authors anticipate because

of the widespread proliferation and adoption of online and distance learning delivery models, including role changes for faculty, more emphasis on teaching by university administrators, the commoditization and transferability of courses, hybridization of instructional methods, and increasing competition.

The longest chapter in this book (2), "Design Levels for Distance and Online Learning," by Judith V. Boettcher was also the best, especially if an institution is or will be engaged in strategic planning initiatives involving online and distance education. Unfortunately, even the chapter's 34 pages weren't enough to adequately cover the author's "six levels of design for learning." These levels included an assemblage of 135 questions for institutions that are developing their own strategic plans. The six levels of design that the author used to frame this chapter are: (1) institutional; (2) infrastructure; (3) degree, certificate, or program; (4) course design; (5) learning activity; and (6) student assessment. Boettcher also integrated at the program level discussion the ACTIONS planning model of Tony Bates and at the learning activity level the Vygotskian theory. (To someone unfamiliar with Vygotskian theory, some additional background information and term definition would be required beyond what the author provided. The absence of term and keyword definitions was noticeable not only in this chapter but throughout the book.) If an institution is or will be involved in online and distance education strategic planning, an earnest effort to answer these 135 across the six levels of design promises to save consulting fees and inform critical decisions.

Chapter two fits nicely with chapters 13, 14, and 15, since the latter ones are strategic planning case studies for different universities (two in the United States and a consortium of four in Germany) that successfully established new online, distance education graduate programs (i.e., pharmacology, business administration, and information and communications technology). The authors describing the experience of the two U.S. universities explained how they

were able to build financially self-sustaining online distance education programs and secure an acceptable return on investment through careful strategic planning. Chapters 13 and 14 reminded administrators tasked with a similar responsibility of building out distance education programs to start small and not proceed faster than the university administration, faculty, and resources are prepared to go. Chapter 15 exhibited the beneficial results of more-autonomous-than-most professors in their departments from four different universities cooperating on a rapid build for a new German program. They also emphasized the importance of not overlooking marketing analysis, repurposing of content across other courses and even other institutions, administrative and institutional support, technical infrastructure, and evaluation.

One of the primary changes that everyone seems to agree on is the changing role of faculty as the educational paradigm becomes more learner rather than teacher centered. Some have written about the traditional role of faculty being unbundled as teams of professionals and specialists assume the previous roles of faculty. In chapter three, an expert in online communication and facilitation from the United Kingdom discussed the role of the online facilitator—or e-moderator, as preferred by the author—which may or may not be filled by the faculty member. This chapter emphasizes the importance of the role of e-moderator at multiple levels of student need and engagement, as was the call for training and then more training. Unfortunately, Figure 3, intended to visually present the “framework for training,” was inadvertently omitted from this chapter.

The first three chapters (5, 6, and 7) of section II, Course Development Instruction and Quality Issues, focused on instructional design (5), The Educational Process Model (6), and success factors or indicators in distance education (7). Chapter five was a brief tutorial on basic principles of instructional design and andragogy in today’s technological context. Chapter six read like an annotated bibliogra-

phy of distance education reference materials organized around a systems model, that is, inputs, processes, and outputs. While it is one of the longer chapters it is a good compendium on distance education; it will be especially helpful to the professional who is new to the field. Chapter seven reflected an effort to identify distance education indicators of success. The authors/researchers reviewed the literature and then created an instrument that was administered to their MBA students. From a factor analysis, five constructs emerged as indicators of success: (1) interaction with professor, (2) fairness, (3) course content, (4) classroom interaction, and (5) technology and value. The chapter appendix includes an instrument, a help to others trying to create their own student rating instrument.

Chapters eight and nine focused on online assessment. Chapter eight broadly examines online assessments including discussions, portfolios, journals, and self- and peer-assessments; chapter nine takes a narrow view, comparing the perceived assessment experiences of two small MBA classes—one online and the other at a distance. However, the importance of including online assessment strategies and effects in this volume cannot be overstated. The same publisher of this volume is scheduled to publish in 2005 a three-volume series, titled *Online Assessment and Measurement*. This series promises to more completely discuss what several chapters in this volume (27 pages total) can only briefly and superficially consider.

The two German authors of chapter 10 contrasted a nonlinear course development and delivery model for the Web with the linear models used for programmed instruction and computer-based training. They acknowledged the expense of developing multimedia materials and the need to repurpose instructional pieces and parts for multiple instructional contexts. They also weighed the advantages of designing and developing learning objects in a Web-based, hypertext, modular format to facilitate repurposing of content and to better individualize content to the student’s learning

style. In chapter 12, an architecture professor put forth his own model of a university-based e-commerce archive for the multimedia content and learning objects he and others are developing. He posited that universities, faculty, and developers would benefit, primarily financially, from creating a virtual bookstore for students to purchase simulations and other multimedia content just as they do texts. Missing in their writing about learning objects was mention of the international Merlot project (<http://www.merlot.org/Home.po>), which has been building a repository of multimedia content for many years, nor did they adequately address the importance of technical standards and tools for learning objects, e.g., SCORM and XML, to ensure compatibility and transferability.

Chapters four and 11 discussed the effects instructional technology and economic globalizations are having in creating a smaller and more homogenous world. The authors insinuated that the very strengths of online learning in enabling wider access to and richer presentations of education to the masses may also be its weaknesses as individualism and cultural diversity are threatened by what they see as the massification and commoditization of education. Chapter 4 called for the best of both the *global* and the *local* in online learning; its authors used the term “glocalization” (used by the World Bank Institute and others) to capture the idyllic—not necessarily the most efficient—combination and integration of the global with the local. The chapter also included an

abbreviated case study involving outreach efforts to aboriginal communities by the Royal Roads University in Canada. Chapter 11 analyzed e-mail content and patterns from students enrolled at either the University of the South Pacific or Central Queensland University. The authors hypothesized that since certain cultures are more traditional and foster less interaction than others with their lecturers, that some students will be more “silent” than others in their e-mail communication. While this study was quasi-experimental, it did underscore the importance of distance educators’ beginning to recognize the impact that educational globalization will have in online learning communities. These chapters serve as a timely reminder to distance education administrators and instructors of the need to anticipate, understand, and manage cultural differences in their programs as they “go global” in this new educational paradigm.

While the quality and fit of some chapters in the book was uneven and some author quotations seemed excessively long, some chapters will appeal to most distance and online educators. Almost certainly readers, especially those engaged in strategic planning, will find within this book insight, ideas, and explanations that will assist in their own efforts to anticipate and adapt to the “changing educational paradigms for online learning.” At this time of revolutionary change in online and distance learning, I am a better and more informed educator for having read this book.