Practitioners and theorists alike are going to flock to this newest book by Dr. Lee Chao. Specifically addressing the creation of online computer labs, this is a must-read for anyone in a school or corporation responsible for designing, developing, managing, or evaluating computer labs. As the author of this compendium so rightly points out, the challenges encountered when hosting online computer labs in support of technology-based courses are many. Funding computer labs is perhaps the most obvious. Several chapters (and parts of chapters) offer excellent tips on how to estimate, subsidize, and steward monies set aside for such facilities. Lack of experience caused, in part by the limited history of web-based teaching, is highlighted by two chapters that together address server, network, security, maintenance, evaluation, and related issues. Certainly, for any practitioner in the field, this book offers much to consider.

Managers of online computer labs also have their thread in this book. Section IV: Management of Online Computer Labs, covers the gamut of issues related to tools, maintenance, performance, and testing and evaluation. As a result, Strategies and Technologies for Developing Online Computer Labs for Technology-Based Courses will become, I predict, a desktop reference guide for computer technicians as well as a textbook for courses in information technology management.

Of personal importance, the chapter on computer lab planning was of special benefit. For anyone who has been faced with developing lab design documents, requests for proposal, or vendor evaluation rubrics, Chapter III: Online Computer Lab Planning, is a rich resource for preparing these documents. I often wished for a resource such as this when evaluating a stack of vendor proposals for lab hardware, software, and networks.
For the computer “geeks” (fondly acknowledged here) who work daily in labs supporting web-based education, Section III: Development of Online Computer Labs, is replete with practical, hands-on recommendations for dealing with servers, networks, client-centered systems, and lab security. Configurations are suggested, router farms are proposed, client configurations proposed, and recommendations for backup power systems included for consideration.

The final section of the text introduces trends in online teaching that will surely impact online computer labs in the near future. Issues associated with using online collaborative tools, learning management systems, and the global market for online education are discussed. Managers of both web-based education programs and computer technician alike should read this portion of the book.

All in all, Strategies and Technologies for Developing Online Computer Labs for Technology-Based Courses addresses many of the really tough areas in online computer lab implementation. I highly recommend the book for those in responsible positions of web-based education. You would do well to consider the text when confronted with designing, developing, implementing, or evaluating these facilities in support of your education mission.

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