Preface

INTRODUCTION

As technology has been improving distance education course delivery, online education has been growing in leaps and bounds. The most recent Sloan-C report stated that in the U.S. alone there were almost 3.9 million students taking at least one online course during the fall of 2007 term (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Distance education is generally defined as any form of instructional activities in which the instructor and learner are separated from each other in physical distance (Wang & Gearhart, 2006). This broad definition of distance education has provided for the wide variety of cases in this book. The best practices are based on those established by most accrediting agencies:

1. Institutional Context and Commitment
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. Faculty Support
4. Student Support
5. Evaluation and Assessment

Distance education is a field of constant change. The cases of this book will provide the reader with an excellent basis of best practices for distance course delivery and learning outcomes, program based cases, and cases from international authors. The field of distance education is often criticized for its lack of scholarly work to benefit the literature in the field. This case book will benefit the literature in a fast growing field.

OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of this case book is to provide practitioners in the field of distance education a case book that is a valuable reference of best practices in the field. Professional development is vital to practitioners of any field. In distance education, the field is constantly changing with the advances in technology and where best to provide professional development than through a reference case book for distance education practitioners.

The case book has several prospective audiences, among which are:

• Practitioners in the field of distance education
• Distance education program administrators
• A reference for libraries
• A potential textbook in distance education courses
• A resource for professional development in the training of distance education practitioners and faculty teaching at a distance.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The three sections of this casebook are designed to help provide the reader with cases on best practices of distance education, cases addressing emerging practices, cases on issues that developed as distance education grows, and provides an international perspective on distance education. The cases cover many of the critical topics in distance education today, such as cost and design strategies of distance course design, communication in distance courses, and dealing with student conduct in distance courses, developing distance programs to meet student needs and how to manage growth of distance programs, and use of new technology tools in distance courses.

Section 1 presents cases on the best practices of distance education and online learning, dealing with emerging practices and issues in the field.

In Chapter 1, Dr. Gera Burton sets the stage for the case book establishing best practices and guiding principles for distance education that have been in existence and refined for decades.

Chapter 2 is applicable to both academic and commercial use of distance education. Dr. Shalin addresses the dual-design strategies for the use of modules in e-learning.

Dr. Blakey addresses a developing best practice in Chapter 3, that of blended course delivery. Although many students like the flexibility of online learning, they are still more comfortable in the traditional classroom. This case discusses the issues related to developing blended course delivery.

Many institutions use learning (or course) management systems. In Chapter 4, Wang and Shao look at using quality assurance standards in a learning management system to provide objective-oriented assessment.

The costs pertaining to distance education programs are always a concern of institutions. Dr. Kendrick looks at the cost effectiveness of course redesign for distance education in Chapter 5. The case reviews both literature and application of cost effectiveness in distance education.

In Chapter 6, Drs. Wherry and Lundberg Windes look at student conduct in an undergraduate online program. In this case, technology should not the change the rules for student conduct. Student conduct in the online environment is often different than in the classroom and institutions want to protect academic integrity in distance courses. It is an important case for administrators.

A successful course delivery needs to closely align the course objectives with the course assessments. In Chapter 7, Lightfoot and Schwager demonstrate how application of instructional design principles help improve student learning outcomes.

In Section 2, the cases move to reviewing distance learning at the program level.

In Chapter 8, Moxley, Maes, and Anderson examine the challenges encountered in a distance education alliance, the Great Plains IDEA, a multi-institutional organization, from its formation and the lessons learned along the way.

Drs. Moore and Gimbert describe a case where distance education, through online learning communities, assist in the preparation of new teachers in Chapter 9. The e-tutorials provide electronic test preparation, virtual collaboration with peers, and e-coaching.
Distance education programs look to find their niche to provide the best learning experiences from their programs. In Chapter 10, Smith and Nagel investigate finding their niche in an external degree completion program in their case.

How quickly distance education is growing is the emphasis of the final two cases in Section 2. In Chapter 11, Dr. Blakey discusses the challenges faced by the institution and students when a distance education program grows. Dr. Gearhart discusses in Chapter 12, how a distance education program manages growth and maintains academic integrity through the development of policy and procedures.

The final section deals with distance learning from an international perspective with contributions from authors around the world.

In Chapter 13, Dr. Fainholc introduces wiki appropriation and the use of the Web 2.0 tool to assist in the development of learning strategies towards enhancing student comprehension in distance education courses.

A group of international researchers discuss, in Chapter 14, how the development of an intercultural project in the humanities using technology and based outside of the traditional classroom.

In the final case, Dr. Sharma discusses the emerging trends and best practices in student services of an international distance education program in India.

*Deb Gearhart*
*Editor*

**REFERENCES**
