Preface

Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. – Nelson Mandela (1918 - 2013), South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, politician, and philanthropist

INTRODUCTION

As e-learning has evolved into a global change agent in higher education, it has become more diverse in its form and applications. While e-learning has become the primary form of distance education, it is also transforming instruction on campus (Sener, 2015). To this end, e-Learning in the context of this book includes all forms of technology or digitally-enhanced learning to include blended learning (sometimes referred to as hybrid learning) and online learning. In addition, because of the tremendous and pervasive growth of e-Learning, the primary focus for the book is on quality.

Quality in the field of e-learning is an especially diverse field because it brings together the field of education, technology, and economy in order to contribute to societal development, to innovate formal, nonformal, and informal learning opportunities, and empower learners as citizens to take part in our emerging learning and information societies. (Ehlers & Hilera, 2012, p.1)

While there are many areas within e-Learning that quality should exist, this book highlights some of the most important areas: program planning, quality standards, and institutional support, faculty support, student support, and online course development.

OBJECTIVES

In an era of tightening institutional budgets, ever increasing online enrollments and greater calls for accountability from multiple directions, the need for online program administrators to continually assess the quality of their overall operations has never been greater (Shelton, Pedersen, & Holstrom, 2014, p. 394). Our goal with the publication is to bring together a diverse group of thought leaders from the field to showcase issues of higher education quality from multiple perspectives.

While many of the chapters focus on the higher education landscape in the United States, an international focus is also apparent in a few of the chapters. Additionally, throughout the publication, readers
will notice a broad range of research directions from model development to case studies and from the use of qualitative to quantitative research methodologies. This book also contains a number of practical illustrations to further shape the discussion and application beyond the focus of the chapter.

This range of research methodologies, directions, subjects and findings was intentional in order to investigate the amorphous topic from as many perspectives as possible. That said, it is important to remember the single thread running throughout each of the chapters is a focus on quality.

*Quality in e-learning has become a leitmotiv in educational policies, an imperative for practitioners, and a huge demand for learners. Achieving high quality is a much debated and sought-after goal in all segments of education. It is, however, not so much characterized by its precise definition but rather by its positive connotation. The word quality (from the Latin word qualis) means “composition” or “characteristic.” In everyday language, however, the term is used to distinguish a characteristic of an object as being of a higher calibre than that of another object. We can observe that the debate is not characterized by empirically accurately defined and operationalized ideas, but is made up of a dense bundle of a broad range of arguments, objectives, convictions, and procedures. (Ehlers, 2007, p. 96)*

**TARGET AUDIENCE**

From the very beginning, this book was envisioned to have multiple target audiences. Our organizing principle for the book focuses, in large part, on highlighting different sections of the book for different audiences.

While the primary audience is higher education administrators including online and blended learning leaders at all levels, several chapters focus on relevant student and faculty support areas. Since students and faculty members both play such an important role in the success of e-Learning programs, several dedicated chapters focus on their unique needs. Additionally, those individuals also involved in course development, such as instructional designers and instructional technologists, are also a target audience for the book and a set of chapters showcase topics of relevance for individuals in these roles.

While e-Learning touches so many different stakeholders, we see this book also having general relevance for a large array of individuals in different roles. For example, governing bodies or accreditation agencies may find chapters germane to their work. Equally valuable may be chapters for higher education research and consulting firms as well as e-Learning service providers.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

Throughout the four sections of this book, the primary focus is on quality e-Learning operations, learning environments (from both the learner and faculty perspectives), as well as course development and design. While the chapters in a section have a common audience or theme, they are each quite different with regards to their foundations and conclusions.

1. **Quality Standards and Institutional Program Planning:** This set of chapters focuses on the quality standards and recommendations institutions focus on when they plan and implement e-Learning
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programs. Whether focusing on institution-wide initiatives or programs within specific colleges/schools, each author provides relevant lessons learned and implications for others to consider when focusing on program planning.

2. **Student Support:** Within these three chapters, the authors offer insight into research to support best practices for online student success. These chapters focus on student readiness, satisfaction and retention which are all critical for building and sustaining healthy e-Learning programs. Understanding the strongest correlations and predictors of student satisfaction, for example, can serve as a strong differentiator among competing e-Learning programs in today’s hyper-competitive marketplace.

3. **Faculty Support:** Five chapters provide observations on the faculty role. Whether it is attitudes or perceptions, the role of the faculty member in quality e-Learning environments cannot be underestimated. Within these chapters is a focus on points of transition, from teaching face-to-face to teaching online as well as the role of both full and part-time faculty members teaching master courses. While all of the chapters are focused on the general area of faculty support, each looks at the faculty and institutional role from a slightly different perspective.

4. **e-Learning Course Development:** The final four chapters each share a unique approach to online course development. Whether through a specific design model, development of rich content learning objects or re-shaping a course through personal experience, each of these chapters highlights the importance of course design, development and deployment.

**FULL INTRODUCTION OF THE SECTIONS**

**Section 1: Quality Standards and Institutional Program Planning Is Highlighted in Chapters 1-5**

Chapter 1, *Garnering Faculty Buy-In to Improve Online Program Quality: Implementation of the Online Learning Consortium Scorecard to Encourage Shared Governance*, provides a detailed case study of the implementation and use of the Online Learning Consortium’s (OLC) Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs. The OLC Scorecard is a comprehensive process for evaluating the quality of an e-Learning program delivered fully online and can become a holistic measurement instrument with which to understand strengths and weaknesses in an institution or school’s online program. This case study focused on how to best involve faculty in the decision-making processes that fit within the constraints of their institutional culture and organizational behavior.

Chapter 2, *Exploring Chinese Faculty Perceptions of Quality Standards for Online Education*, explores how U.S. quality indicators for e-Learning are perceived by Chinese faculty who teach online. Thirty-one quality indicators from the U.S. literature were analyzed to develop a survey that was administered to 400 Chinese online faculty and their teaching assistants at a Chinese institution. The study indicated that U.S. quality indicators for online education were perceived by Chinese faculty as relevant and valuable and suggests that context can play a role in quality evaluation.

Chapter 3, *Improving U.S. College Graduation Rates with Quality Online and Blended Degree Completion Programs: Lessons Learned*, this chapter examines degree completion programs available in the U.S. and makes the case that there is a need for more workers with earned degrees to provide the innovation required to maintain future American economic vitality. Online and blended education will
play an important role in addressing America’s lagging adult college degree completion rate. The chapter reviews the e-learning approach as a highly effective model for serving the adult degree completion population and describes a successful program that was created at Long Island University.

Chapter 4, From 0 to 60: The Case Study of a School of Education’s Successful “Online Start-Up,” reports case study findings from a school of education that within just two years offered a total of 61 online courses with high student and faculty satisfaction and with limited upfront investments. The researchers examines how this online program start-up developed and how they involved quality online instructors and developed student and faculty buy-in. This case study highlights the importance of consistent policies and expectations about online courses, as well as how decisions were made about the specific courses to be offered online. The chapter ends with interesting insights regarding the experience and recommendations for other institutions needing to deliver academic programs via e-Learning methods.

Chapter 5, Moving eLearning Forward: A Study of the Impact of the Continual Changing Landscape of eLearning, incorporates current research along with a review of the administration of an e-Learning program at a traditional university. The author examines the characteristics of a strategic online administrator needed to champion the online program, reviews the challenges of integrating e-Learning in a traditional institution, and discusses models for developing the e-Learning program of the future. The chapter also includes research supported models and frameworks to support daily management of an e-Learning program.

Section 2: Student Support Themes Are Incorporated into Chapters 6-8

Chapter 6, A New Model of Online Student Service in the Digital Age: Increasing Retention Based on Service Satisfaction, provides a case study analysis of Wilmington University’s e-Learning program that experienced a large amount of students dropping an online course. This research explores why this problem of students dropping a course existed and how to solve it. Student survey and administrative data were examined for clues to student expectations and satisfaction with current academic and co-curricular services. The chapter also includes technical and support service needs associated with online learning factors that facilitate course completion and recommends interventions to help keep students on track to complete courses.

Chapter 7, DELES Analysis of E-Learning Environments: Satisfaction Guaranteed, provides the findings of a recent study on the online learning environment characteristics that lead to student success. This chapter highlights a quantitative study that utilized the Distance Education Learning Environments Survey (DELES) to test the effects of student-centered learning constructs on student satisfaction in online courses. The results of this study showed personal relevance and authentic learning had the strongest correlations with student satisfaction, whereas the strongest predictors of student satisfaction were personal relevance and instructor support. As enrollment in online learning programs continues to increase, this research can provide important insight into the design of effective online learning environments in order to improve the quality of the student e-Learning experience.

Chapter 8, The Relationship between Individual Student Attributes and Online Course Completion, investigates the existence of a relationship between scores on the Individual Attributes subscales of the SmarterMeasure™ online learning readiness indicator and successful course completion. Although
weak relationships were demonstrated in this study, e-Learning administrators can glean best practices that utilize online readiness assessment strategies within all online courses, to be completed within the first two weeks of the semester. The implications of this study include a recommendation for screening for online student readiness, providing support to online students, and training college staff and faculty.

Section 3: Faculty Support Includes Chapters 9-13

Chapter 9, *Exploration of Faculty’s Perceptions on Technology Change: Implications for Faculty Preparedness to Teach Online Courses*, analyzes faculty perceptions during a course management system transition to determine if faculty perceptions of adopting new technology have an effect on their stress levels which may affect faculty preparedness, perceptions, and behavior. In addition, this chapter discusses various reasons for the inevitable challenges institutions face to remain competitive and the core of the challenge is remaining abreast of evolving technology needed to maintain enrollments, and for teaching and learning.

Chapter 10, *Arranging and Rearranging Practice in Digital Spaces: Professional Learning Amongst Teacher Educators*, investigates an online learning program from the perspective of educators transitioning from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. In this study, seven academics from a single institution participated in a six-month conversation around sites for practice, challenges, and curriculum decisions made while teaching online. This research provides insights into the dilemmas faced by teacher educators while transitioning their practices and highlighted institutional and pedagogical practice conditions necessary to enable transition to new instructional modes.

Chapter 11, *Ensuring Quality: The Faculty Role in Online Higher Education*, examines the important and integral role faculty play in the quality of online learning in higher education. The study provides a working definition of the online faculty role and identifies considerations for faculty practice. The chapter also explains the results of a thematic analysis of the requirements and expectations of the major stakeholders involved.

Chapter 12, *Ready-to-Teach Online Courses: Understanding Faculty Roles and Attitudes*, probes the roles and attitudes of experienced full-time and part-time faculty teaching online courses called master courses. These course were pre-produced using a subject matter expert, an advisory committee, and a technical development team. This recent qualitative study revealed that faculty members associated personal teaching experience with the quality of the course and that instructors were not resistant to teaching with master courses. In addition, the online faculty were highly satisfied because the master courses worked well for both instructors and students while meeting the faculty members’ personal and professional needs.

Chapter 13, *A Framework to Assess Appropriate Interaction to Meet Accreditation Quality Guidelines*, offers a framework to assess purposeful interaction, which promotes learning in e-learning. Based upon principles of instructional design and accreditation criteria, this framework can guide the development of e-learning courses and also recommend planned instructional interactive activities that must be embedded in teaching-learning strategies. The authors also suggest that appropriate interaction be determined by established institutional guidelines, policies, and accreditation standards and call attention to credit-hour regulation guidelines.
Section 4: e-Learning Course Development
Concludes the Book with Chapters 14-17

Chapter 14, *Improving the Quality of Online Learning Environments: The Value of an Online Specific Design Model*, offers a model for online course design called Proactive Design for Learning (PD4L) (Sims, 2012; Sims & Jones, 2003). This chapter suggests how the elements of an online specific model can serve as design guidelines and become a framework for designers and developers to create quality teaching and learning environments. The author recommends that online learning requires a constructivist-based, learner-centered, innovative, team-based (collaborative), and personalized experience that incorporates emergent and interactive elements to support communication and knowledge creation and effective learning.

Chapter 15, *Building Quality Online Courses: Online Course Development Partnership and Model*, proposes a model for a systemic approach to online course development that provides consistency, an efficient workflow, and a collaborative team of faculty and instructional design support members. The authors also discuss the importance of implementing an online course development model into an e-learning infrastructure in order to support quality and faculty and student success.

Chapter 16, *E-Learning and the Disciplines: Lessons from Applied Linguistics*, this chapter illustrates how one academic re-shaped e-learning through the lens of his own specialization, generating insights that potentially benefit online instruction across the disciplines. In addition, an applied linguistics stance on e-learning offers critical insights into online communication, pedagogy and enhancing a sense of community.

Chapter 17, *Designing Blended Learning Strategies for Rich Content*, offers an overview of the foundations necessary to mount a successful blended learning model for medical education. Today, with an immense amount of photorealistic and high quality medical information available as well as the availability of content management systems and virtual learning environments, opportunities exist to develop media rich content for e-Learning applications in medical fields. This chapter also highlights how far e-Learning has advanced with the use of rich digital content and multimedia learning objects to improve teaching and learning in order to develop the new skills needed medical students in our digital age.

CONCLUSION

The quote used at the beginning of the preface was quite purposeful. As Nelson Mandela stated “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

This book showcases how individuals on campuses around the world are shaping their work and their impact to bring about change, to identify areas of strength or opportunities for improvement and ultimately to realize success. If we were to quantify in years the experience of the various authors who contributed to this collection of chapters, we would be in the hundreds of years. Because of this experience and the fact that each higher education institution is different, the authors have approached their chapters from their unique perspective. This diversity of perspectives is what makes this book “a dense bundle of a broad range of arguments, objectives, convictions, and procedures” (Ehlers, 2007, p. 96).
REFERENCES


