The field of education is continually changing to reflect the needs and demands of students. These changes are seen through the adaptations to traditional and non-traditional pedagogies. The greatest impact on education came with the introduction of audiovisual technologies, computer technologies, the Internet, and the World Wide Web. Just as the industrial revolution impacted the educational system, the computer age has caused us to rethink how, when, and where we educate students. Institutions of higher education consider computer and Internet technologies to be the single most important IT issue facing their institutions over the next few years (Campus Computing, 2004). These technologies have not only had an enormous impact on traditional education, but have revolutionized distance education, which has been propelled to the forefront of educational debate.

Across the field, distance education continues to be a hot topic. Policy makers, administrators, teachers, and students continually discuss the ramifications of distance education. Its inherent value lies within the opportunities it provides for the learner. It also improves the overall quality of teaching, which is becoming widely recognized (Moore, 2007). After the initial excitement brought on by the impact of Internet technology, faculty shifted their focus to learning the pedagogy of designing and delivering quality programs, and researchers began the process of answering pressing questions. In addition to helping faculty adjust to pedagogical changes, administrators must channel their faculty away from traditional classroom roles to those driven by the information age. Students seem to adapt more quickly – their skill set being more advanced than the average faculty member. Students learn quickly how to benefit from the rigors and demands of distance education.

There are many myths about teaching and learning via distance education both in a synchronous and asynchronous format. For instance, Thomas Cyrs (1997) observed that “Some faculty argue vehemently and emotionally that students cannot learn as much, as well, or as effectively as in a traditional classroom.” Numerous research studies have been conducted indicating that students taking courses via distance delivery methods achieve on a level equally with students taking courses via traditional methods (Moore, 2007). In addition, students taking classes via synchronous Internet conferencing has been found to be as effective as traditional teaching. The research also indicates that students who were taught via e-learning reported: 1) the overall educational quality of the course improved, 2) access to education was more convenient, 3) course interaction increased, and 4) greater access to their professor (Deloughry, 1998).

It is clearly evident that students can and will learn through courses offered via distance delivery methods. It is the quality of instruction that impacts learning. Faculty need to further their skill set. Programs must have a dynamic engaging curriculum. Administrators must provide support – to faculty both financially and metaphysically. In the end it is still about the quality of the faculty teaching the
courses and developing the programs. In his book, *Teaching at a Distance with the Merging Technologies: An Instructional Systems Approach*, Cyrs outlined eleven qualities a teacher needs. These apply to teaching and program planning, designing, developing, and implementation.

*Qualities a Teacher Needs*
*(Cyrs, 1997)*

- The education of a college president,
- The executive ability of a financier,
- The humility of a deacon,
- The adaptability of a chameleon,
- The hope of an optimist,
- The courage of a hero,
- The wisdom of a serpent,
- The gentleness of a dove,
- The patience of Job,
- The grace of God, and
- The persistence of the Devil.

Finally, studies show inconsistency in online teaching and learning due to gaps between theories and practice (Irlbeck, Kay, Jones & Sims, 2006). Although there are numerous instructional design models/theories, designing a course can be challenging. Clearly there is an imminent need for guidance on building quality distance delivery programs.

**BUILDING QUALITY DISTANCE DELIVERY PROGRAM**

Leadership is the one area of distance learning that is often underdeveloped. Technology leadership should be a focal point on each level of the organization. Leadership begins in the classroom, whether a traditional or distance delivered classroom environment, with the instructor (Hoffman, 2002). This is true when building quality distance delivery programs. Instructors have a hand on both the pulse of the students and curricular needs of the course. Problems transpire when either the instructor does not have the appropriate skill set and/or is unwilling to adapt and/or develop the skill set necessary for planning, designing, developing, and implementing distance delivery courses and programs.

When this particular problem arises, leadership issues weigh more heavily on administrators. Administrators must see that support mechanisms are in place (e.g., technology support specialists, instructional designers, and trainers). This is crucial in sustaining success. It is essential that training not focus solely on hardware and software skills. The primary focus must be on pedagogy (Huffman & Rickman, 2003). Flexibility and convenience are essential for maintaining student and faculty morale. The goal of this book is to explore the convergence of issues that occur when building quality distance delivery programs… from pit-falls to success stories. It includes both research rich case-studies and best practices pieces, which are primarily focused on two overarching themes: leadership issues and teaching and learning.
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS BOOK

This book is intended as a case book targeting various issues that arise when developing a quality distance delivery program. This book addresses pressing needs in distance education by 1) connecting theory and practice, 2) addressing emerging leadership issues in distance education, and 3) identifying best practices in distance education teaching and learning. It targets educators globally, emphasizing leadership issues, teaching and learning issues, and multiple approaches to distance education. The overarching goal of this book is to bring together a collection of cases that not only can be used for teaching, but used as a resource for others who are foraging for answers on how to build quality distance delivery programs. At the theoretical level, it contributes to the knowledge base on distance education. It expands our understanding of the underlying issues, barriers, and pit-falls when tackling the task of building quality programs.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The four sections of this book are organized to maximize the experience for the reader. It begins with a brief history of distance education, provides guidance on a potpourri of leadership topics, tackles questions on the teaching and learning front, and ends with a wonderful chapter which looks at the future of distance education.

Section 1 provides a foundation from which to view the remaining chapters. It contains one chapter. In Chapter 1, a brief history of distance education is covered. Wendy Rickman and Cheryl Wiedmaier, University of Central Arkansas outline important key developments from the past.

Section 2 presents a theoretical perspective on leadership issues involved in building quality distance delivery programs. It contains eight chapters.

In Chapter 2, Carrie Boden and Gary Szirony, University of Arkansas Little Rock, research student perceptions. This two-part study examined student perceptions of a change in course management systems (from WebCT to Blackboard) at a university in the southern United States.

Peter Bruce and Robert Zheng, University of Utah, examine policies issues in Chapter 3. The case study examines the policies and practices for online education at one doctoral/research-extensive university.

Chapter 4 delves into the planning and implementation of an online program. Kay Bishop and Christine Kroll, University of Buffalo, share their experiences in the planning and developing an online program.

In Chapter 5, Shelly Albritton, University of Central Arkansas, details the findings of a research study that focused on implementing steps to improve practices and perceptions with online learning. How do we change faculty perceptions of online courses?

Chapter 6 looks at the overall issues of developing an online distance education program. Dianne Oberg, University of Alberta, takes us on a journey through developing a theoretical framework, analysis of research, government funding, and the challenges of on-going policy changes.

In Chapter 7, Shalin Hai-Jew of Kansas State University, uses the instructional design framework to reflect on practical ways to support quality e-learning. Supporting quality e-learning in an institution of higher education is a non-trivial task.

In Chapter 8, Virginia Garland, University of New Hampshire, presents a case study of best practice in leading an online school – New Hampshire’s Virtual Learning Academy Charter School. Visionary
leadership, administrative teaming and support for online learning are key components outlined in this chapter.

Finally Chapter 9, targets library support services for distance learners. Kshema Prakash of the Indian Institute of Technology – Rajasthan tackles the importance of the overall development of library services for both students and faculty.

**Section 3** presents a theoretical perspective on teaching and learning issues that emerge when building quality distance delivery programs. It contains eight chapters.

Chapter 10 address challenges of collaboration and continuous improvement for online courses. Kay Shattuck of Quality Matters, shares a quality assurance program for online learning – developed through collaborative efforts of a small group of online practitioners in Maryland.

In Chapter 11, Terence Cavanaugh and Elinor Scheirer of the University of North Florida, share the results of their study on using an interactive geographic map as a graphical form of dialogue. This map acted as an ongoing reminder of the class makeup, and was an instructor tool for consideration of synchronous activities and weather issues.

Chapter 12 addresses the age-old problem of learners assuming responsibility for their own learning. Melodee Landis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, looks the importance of using technology to support a constructivist instructional process.

Samuel Conn, Kentucky State University, and Simim Hall and Michael K. Herndon of Virginia Tech focus on how epistemic beliefs represent an influencing factor in efficacious eLearning course construction. Chapter 13 challenges institutions to determine whether online course development should alter in response to existing epistemic beliefs or strive to reshape epistemic beliefs through curricular and pedagogical design.

Chapter 14 examines a three-semester journey of an instructor’s efforts to augment face-to-face course delivery with online instruction. Angela Webster-Smith’s, University of Central Arkansas, mission was threefold: (1) to update a school-based organizational leadership course to become more relevant to the profession (2) to develop students’ proficiencies for building leadership capacity and organizational intelligence and (3) to cultivate relational, online learning communities.

Chapter 15 describes a case of using the wiki environment by a class of second year preservice teachers to discuss previously written geometry lessons, improve the lessons and build new ones. Wajeeh Daher of An-Najah National University use constant comparative methodology to analyze the experiences of the preservice teachers in working with geometry in the wiki environment and in developing their knowledge of geometry and its teaching and learning.

In Chapter 16, Gail Hughes and Rudo Tsemunh of the University of Arkansas Little Rock, examined the impact of collaborative learning and video lectures on students enrolled in online graduate research and statistics classes. Students’ comments suggested that the instructional methods brought the classroom to the online learner for many students, yet did not reveal a most preferred learning option.

Finally in Chapter 17 Nancy Gallavan, University of Central Arkansas, discusses the benefits gained from self assessing when teaching online. The chapter encapsulates the individual experiences of one faculty member on her journey into online instruction.

**Section 4** serves as the book end for this work. It contains one chapter. This chapter looks at the future of distance education.

In Chapter 18, a vision of the future is painted. Whereas Chapter 1 provide a brief history of distance education, in Chapter 18 continues the story by looking at emerging technologies and instructional strate-
gies. Tony Talbert and Adeline Meir of Baylor University outline important key developments that will impact the future of distance education.

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REFERENCES


