Preface

Information Communication Technologies for Human Services Education and Delivery: Concepts and Cases covers main areas of education and practice of disciplines engaged in the human services. These include policy, community work, community education, field education/professional practicum, health promotion, individual and family work, human rights advocacy, group work, multidisciplinary teamwork and program management and evaluation. Information communication technology has facilitated access to authors from around the world including Australia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, India, the United States of America and Canada with backgrounds in social work, education and computer science.

The human services sector has been somewhat slow to embrace new technologies, particularly when compared with other areas such as marketing. Beginning ICT developments in the human services have focused primarily on basic functions to facilitate the collection and management of large quantities of data about clients by government bureaucracies. In social work education there was initial skepticism that interpersonal communication skills could be taught online due to the importance of critical reflection and relationships in social work practice. It is ironic that today the Internet is used primarily for interpersonal communication. Early developments in social work education saw ICT tools used for distance education courses for students who were unable to attend on-campus, primarily due to living in rural or remote locations and were not considered a viable option for those who could access an on-campus education. Human services educators and practitioners are now predominantly using ICT tools to augment existing practices rather than adopting one approach only. However they are proceeding with caution, and rightly so, to ensure that ICT tools are used to improve the quality of education and human services. In doing so it is necessary to be vigilant about the maintenance of professional practice standards and key ethical considerations, particularly respect for client confidentiality and responsible use of ICT tools. These exciting and innovative practices that are now occurring in human services education and practice are presented in this book.

Information Communication Technologies for Human Services Education and Delivery: Concepts and Cases is useful for students, educators and practitioners in the human services field who want to improve their understanding of different ICT tools and learn how to apply these. It is relevant for all disciplines in the human services including social work, psychology, legal studies, youth work, community work and welfare studies. It is also pertinent for other courses in the health field such as medicine, nursing and occupational therapy. The multidisciplinary nature of the book lends itself to all disciplines that work with people and want to use ICT tools to further develop and enhance professional skills and improve organizational processes. Instructional designers will gain insights into the range of activities conducted in the human services and how these might be best supported by ICT. The concepts and cases presented in this book are based on sound theoretical underpinnings and practice experiences.

This book is divided into two main sections. Section I focuses on ICT tools and human services education with Section II concentrating on ICT and human services delivery. The book concludes with
an Afterword that endeavors to look into the future to anticipate ongoing developments and innovations in the use of ICT in human services education and practice.

SECTION 1: ICT AND HUMAN SERVICES EDUCATION

Approaches to the use of ICT in education are presented within the context of education for a multidisciplinary human services workforce. A range of approaches are considered predominantly using a “blended approach” of ICT and face to face delivery. These include creating and sustaining community in a virtual environment to develop inter-professional skills. A focus of skill development is on reflective practices using online role-plays and group work principles and processes in virtual situated learning environments. Issues for professional practice cultures in the online environment are considered within a global context.

In Chapter 1 Jennifer Martin, Elspeth McKay and Linette Hawkins, from social work and Business Information Technology RMIT University in Australia, explore technological developments in the human services and the educational requirements of a skilled labor force. They argue that learner experiences can be enhanced by adopting a “blended approach” that includes face- to- face and online activities. The human computer interaction spiral is presented as an innovative approach that provides a model for integrating theory and practice for ICT design and application to the human services. A key message in this chapter is the importance of adopting an informed and reflective approach to the use of ICT that incorporates a variety of learning approaches and architectures. Ultimately student needs and the knowledge and skills required by the human services workforce will influence the most appropriate mediums to use.

Chapter 2, by Christine Greenhow and Beth Robelia from the University of Minnesota in the United States of America, combines knowledge and skills in education and science to explore the opportunities for educational and social benefits from social networking sites for human services education and practice. Insights are provided into the uses of social networking sites and how these can be used by human services education students, practitioners and clients to achieve personal and social goals of knowledge and skill development and networking. Social and emotional development can be supported by social networking sites as they provide spaces to express emotions, deepen friendships and demonstrate creativity. Self reflection and mutual self help can occur for those experiencing similar challenges. The authors demonstrate how private networks can be constructed to facilitate work with clients without exposing private information online.

In Chapter 3 Lesley Cooper from Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada and Sally Burford from the University of Canberra in Australia draw upon considerable experience in using collaborative online learning as a successful strategy for teaching social work. They demonstrate the application of group work concepts and techniques to promote collaborative learning in an online environment; particularly the concepts of group formation, stages of group development, and communication. A number of case illustrations are used from Cooper and Burford’s practice experiences to demonstrate the creative application of ICT tools for social work education covering activities such as supervision and controversial issues involving professional ethical considerations.

The application of asynchronous online role-plays to develop communication skills is presented in Chapter 4 by Belinda Johnson and Kathy Douglas from RMIT University in Australia. They draw upon their experiences using online role plays to assist students developing skills in self reflection and the integration of theory and practice. A number of models and strategies for online role-plays, drawing upon the e-learning “conversational framework,” developed by Dianne Laurillard (2002) are presented.
A case study demonstrates the use of Wikis and blogs in online role-plays to teach mediation. The authors argue that a blended approach to teaching and learning using face to face and online technologies provides for a superior learning experience resulting in human services practitioners who are better equipped for practice.

The use of online role-plays is examined further in Chapter 5 by Sandra Jones from RMIT University in Australia who demonstrates how virtual situated learning environments (VSLE) can assist with the development of skills for a multidisciplinary human services workforce. She demonstrates how VSLEs are created as “real world” authentic learning experiences to develop skills in multidisciplinary teamwork. This is achieved through participation in complex online role-play scenarios. VSLEs provide students with opportunities to experiment with different approaches and see the consequences of their actions. These online role-plays draw upon local and international experiences using a range of disciplines to reflect the reality of the workforce. A case study shows how a virtual community centre is used to develop employability skills for students in the human services.

Chapter 6, by Lisa Harris from RMIT University in Australia, examines design aspects of the e-learning environments to foster virtual social networks and student learning. She is particularly interested in the significance of community for students studying online and the social and cultural implications of new technologies. This chapter reports on a qualitative research project designed to explore the meaning of community for students studying online. Using three fundamentally different types of online learning environments as case studies, this research explores the relationship between the constructed online learning environment and the development of social learning support networks. This research is of particular significance for the design of online learning environments using social learning support networks to enhance knowledge and skill development in the human services.

David Colachico from Azusa Pacific University in California is also concerned with how to create and sustain community in a virtual world in Chapter 7 as he examines how virtual communities are formed and maintained. He explores different notions of community and how being a community member involves negotiating relationships that require commitment, mutual engagement and reciprocity; not unlike face to face relationships. A range of features are considered for developing, and participating in online communities, such as the centrality of motivation and the willingness of members to actively participate if the community is to be sustained. This chapter highlights the importance of a deep understanding of the issues that engage members and challenge the community with interactions based on the knowledge, expertise and preferences of its members. An emphasis is on the high level of care and attention required for the cultivation and support of online communities if they are to succeed.

The next two chapters are concerned with the use of ICT to support professional practice/field education in social work education and also highlight the importance of community for successful learning online.

In Chapter 8 Marion Brown reviews the use of online technologies in the national online field education seminar program of the Dalhousie University School of Social Work in Nova Scotia in Canada. The chapter explores how knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes of student practitioners are developed in this national online program. This includes consideration of critical reflection processes, the content in the field education courses, expanded contextual analysis and online seminars. A framework of critical success factors is presented highlighting the significance of social networks and sense of community. The importance of active engagement by both students and teachers is stressed, for the deep learning and critical reflection required of social work field education to occur.

Chapter 9, by Linette Hawkins from RMIT University in Australia and Supriya Patanayak from India, considers the increasing reliance upon ICT to support international field education placements. They share their experiences supporting social work students from Australia on international placements in India.
is acknowledged as an important tool for students on placement whether local or global, albeit ancillary
to the core nature of field education comprising “real life” as distinct from “virtual” field practice. They
consider the on-call/on-site supervisory presence as a critical component of field practicum.

The second section of this book examines the use of ICT tools in the delivery of human services with
case studies provided to demonstrate the application of these.

The first chapter in this section, Chapter 10 by Jennifer Martin and Elspeth McKay from RMIT
University in Australia, introduces a design process for developing useful information communication
technologies for the human services. Central to successful design is an in-depth knowledge and understand-
ing of user needs and requirements. The stages involved in the design process are presented in this
chapter and include: user and task analysis, persona and scenario development and the establishment
of measurable usability goals. A case study illustrates the application of this design process to develop
a Web enabled electronic work requirement awareness program (e-WRAP) for people recovering from
mental illness seeking employment. The authors urges social workers to use these new technologies to
improve service provision and enhance quality of life without compromising ethical standards of practice;
particularly in relation to client confidentiality, privacy and self-determination.

Chapter 11, by Lesley Cooper from Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada and Dana Fox and Diane
Stanley-Horn from Athena Software in Canada, explores the practical applications of case management
software for practitioners in health and social services.

These authors have collaborated to develop practical applications of case management software in
practicum programs and in the human services. They use ICT tools to empower organizations through
easing administrative burdens, facilitating the coordination, communication and supervision of service
delivery and enhancing an organization’s ability to demonstrate the benefits of those services to their
clients, communities and funding bodies. Using “Penelope” case management software as an illustration
the authors provide practical examples of the ways agencies can make the transition from using ICT
tools for basic data collection to performance monitoring and demonstration of effectiveness.

In Chapter 12 John Lannon, a software designer/developer and human rights activist from the Sena-
tor George Mitchell Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Leeds Metropolitan University in the
United Kingdom, examines the role of ICT in human rights monitoring and advocacy. He analyses tools
and techniques used to document human rights abuse and outlines the opportunities and pitfalls associ-
ated with the use of ICT tools by human rights organizations. He stresses the importance of rigorous
documentation to underpin human rights work and argues that access to information enables human
rights promotion through reflection and learning. While much of what is reported may never be used to
build a case against the human rights offenders, it sets in motion processes that ultimately lead, through
empowerment, to greater protection from abuse, persecution and oppression.

The author of Chapter 13, Poline Bala from the University Malaysia in Sarawak, explores the role
of ICT tools for community development activities in rural Sarawak in Borneo. She looks specifically
at the e-Bario project which she and a team of researchers initiated in the Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak
in 1998, and examines social change connected to the use of ICT. She suggests that real-life situations
can change the purpose of technologies, and the ways in which they are used may differ greatly from
what was envisaged at the outset; what she refers to as the “social shaping of technologies.” She sup-
ports this by demonstrating how the introduction of ICT as developmental tools have been mediated and
reconfigured by the intricate interplay of social, political and cultural conditions specific to the Kelabit.
These technologies have been partly integrated with, or subordinated by existing practices, internal
values and socio-political arrangements in the Kelabit community.

Paul Henman from the University of Queensland in Australia, author of Chapter 14, has a profes-
sional background in both computer science and social science. In this chapter he examines how social
policy can be used to develop, implement and evaluate social policy. At the same time social policies are developed in response to ICT innovation and use. A “governamentality framework” is used to illustrate how ICT can be understood as a mechanism for governing individuals and populations. The main message of this chapter is that ICT is central to the practice of contemporary politics and power in a manner that simultaneously alleviates and adds to social problems. The use of ICT in Australia’s national income security agency, Centrelink is discussed to illustrate the main concepts presented.

In Chapter 15, Hyunjung Kim and Michael Stefanone, both from the Department of Communication at the State University of New York at Buffalo in the United States of America, explore online knowledge sharing for health promotion and community education. A model of “e-Mavenism” is presented to examine factors that influence online knowledge sharing. These include social network size and topic salience. They argue that people have a greater desire to share information with others online when they feel a sense of altruism or obligation to do so; expecting the message will be helpful to others. The authors recommend that human services educators and practitioners target weak tie online relationships for health promotion and community education activities.

The book concludes with an Afterword by Dennis Perry, who has pioneered the introduction of ICT information systems for state and federal governments in Australia. He provides a chronological overview of the use of ICT from a personal and political perspective. He looks at both old and new approaches and explores some of the ethical issues of security and privacy associated with the adoption of online technologies. He concludes that the challenges are many but that change is inevitable and perhaps may occur at a faster rate than we might have imagined.

*Information Communication Technologies for Human Services Education and Delivery: Concepts and Cases* is the first book of its kind offering a significant contribution to knowledge of the application of ICT tools in education and practice in the human services. All of the ICT tools currently available are presented with the application of these grounded in an extensive range of theories and practices. A multidisciplinary approach sees collaboration between authors with backgrounds in ICT, human services, education and management; with a number of authors qualified and experienced in more than one of these areas. Theories and practices from the human services include the disciplines of social science, psychology, social work, mental health and law. Those specific to ICT are; computer science, instructional design, information management, information systems, communication and science and engineering. The integration of knowledge from these diverse disciplines by authors from around the globe provides breadth and depth and makes for a comprehensive and authoritative text.

The concepts and models presented are consistent with Australian national indicators identified for “good teaching practice.”

These include:

- Clear explanations by teaching staff;
- Helpful feedback on learning progress;
- Teaching staff motivate students to do their “best work”;
- Teaching staff work hard to make the course interesting;
- Teaching staff make a real effort to understand the difficulties students may be experiencing with their learning;
- Teaching staff put a lot of time into providing feedback and commenting on student work (*RMIT, 2009*).

Care is needed to establish learning environments that foster a sense of community and provide clear instructions on roles and how to participate effectively. Active engagement by both staff and students,
and adequate organizational support and infrastructure, are critical to support the effective application of ICT tools in both human services education and practice. The concepts and models presented in this book promote “best practices” in the human services with ICT tools used to assist with:

- Promoting social change;
- Problem solving;
- Empowerment and liberation;
- Enhancing well being (IFSW, 2000).

This book highlights the importance of adopting, or developing appropriate ICT tools to support the desired learning or practice experience to further the cause of social justice and human rights.

REFERENCES
