Preface

Today’s online educational settings are composed of diverse employees and students, each with varying degrees of technological expertise, career expectations, and professional experience. As such, organizational leaders need to identify differences among all members of the educational institution and develop a strategic plan for communicating and collaborating across all members of the institution. This book presents chapters that will assist college administrators, faculty members, and other higher education employees in improving communication and creating collaborative efforts in an online setting. For example, this book will assist members of the online community in improving communication across generations, working collaboratively on cross-discipline projects, designing curriculum that fosters critical thinking for students, and using social networking tools for creating community. This book addresses questions such as:

- In what ways can educational leaders, faculty, and students improve communication and creative collaborative opportunities?
- How can social networking tools build community and promote collaboration in the online classroom?
- What are some guidelines for working effectively in virtual teams?
- How can curriculum foster collaboration for students and faculty?

The chapters will advance the current scope of research in support of communication and collaboration in online settings by focusing on the ways all members of the educational institution can create community fostering personal and professional growth for all.

Often, members of the online community work in isolation. Collaboration across varying disciplines and departments can foster unique professional development activities as well as create a stronger connection to the entire online community. Effective communication is essential in every organization. Communication topics to be addressed include managing conflict, working effectively in virtual teams, and use of social networking tools, critical thinking, intercultural communication, and online leadership.

While a major topic includes communication, the book is applicable across disciplines. Since there is a considerable amount of interest in building learning communities, faculty, course designers, student services officers, and other leaders in higher education would be interested in the topic. Collaboration in a virtual setting will also appeal to a wide range of educational leaders and faculty. This book targets those who work in an online setting, manage others from a distance, teach students in an online format, and work together with others across disciplines on collaborative projects. The topics and issues presented in this book will assist the prospective audience (e.g. faculty, students, researchers, practitioners, college administrators) in strengthening communication and collaboration in virtual settings.
Although a wide range of topics are discussed, the main emphasis is how to effectively communicate and collaborate with others in an online setting. In order to organize the chapters, there are two sections. Section 1 focuses on social media, social networks, and online learning communities. The chapters in this section discuss various topics such as: online collaboration, cross-discipline initiatives for collaboration, leading and managing virtual employees, learning communities, online learning in a global society, social networking tools for enhancing communication and collaboration, technology tools that enhance learning (separate from social networking tools), and ethical standards for online communication.

Section 2 focuses on how to promote successful communication and collaboration in the classroom through training and faculty development. The critical topic of promoting student success through practical solutions is also addressed. The chapters in the second section discuss topics such as: communication across generations, training and mentoring, working effectively with virtual teams, engaging faculty in professional development and collaborative projects, use of critical thinking in communication and collaboration, innovative ways for promoting student success in the online classroom, joint partnerships and strategic alliances in higher education, collaborative course design and assessment.

SECTION 1: SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The first chapter “Communication Between Higher Education and Social Networking Sites” by Jodi Whitehurst and Jim Vander Putten of the University of Arkansas – Little Rock, explores the rhetorical roles employed by participants on Facebook and connects findings to research concerning communication and collaboration in higher education. Data indicated that messages on Facebook were used for cooperation and coordination but not necessarily collaboration. Most relevant to the theme of this book, the chapter adds to existing scholarship by suggesting ways Facebook could be used as a valuable communication tool to navigate the growing complexities of American colleges and universities.

The chapter “Building Collaborative Virtual Communities in a University Department of Early Childhood Education for Wikipedia Article Authoring” by Jim Prentzas and Galini Rekalidou of the Democritus University of Thrace School of Education Sciences in Alexandroupolis, Greece, discusses how collaboration plays an important role in teacher education and in this context the chapter discusses issues regarding the incorporation of wikis in teacher education curriculum. The most recent corresponding approaches are categorized according to different views and the most important findings are discussed. An approach aiming to create collaborative virtual communities for Wikipedia article authoring in a university department of early childhood education is also presented. Preliminary results show a positive response of the pre-service early childhood teachers.

The third chapter by Dustin De Felice, Michigan State University, and Luz María Ortiz Alcocer, Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo, titled, “Building Collaborative Virtual Communities in a University Department of Early Childhood Education for Wikipedia Article Authoring” by Jodi Whitehurst and Jim Vander Putten of the University of Arkansas – Little Rock, explores the rhetorical roles employed by participants on Facebook and connects findings to research concerning communication and collaboration in higher education. Data indicated that messages on Facebook were used for cooperation and coordination but not necessarily collaboration. Most relevant to the theme of this book, the chapter adds to existing scholarship by suggesting ways Facebook could be used as a valuable communication tool to navigate the growing complexities of American colleges and universities.

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The next chapter, “Building and Maintaining Relationships through Social Media,” by Alisa Agozzino from Ohio Northern University, discusses the integration of social media tools into daily practices through monitoring, teaching, and collaboration allows those in higher education to build and maintain relationships with key publics. From devising social media goals and objectives, to monitoring channels, to evaluating efforts, social media can be integrated into the higher education arena. Throughout this chapter, multiple dimensions of social media tools and the various ways those in higher education can integrate those tools into operation will be exposed and elaborated upon. In an effort to provide readers with best practices, ideas will be shared to present those in higher education with optimal ways to connect, build, and maintain relationships with others both internally and externally.

In the fifth chapter, “Making Sense of Building Online Learning Communities,” online learning is analyzed by Justina Kwapy from Grand Canyon University. She details how online learning has increased dramatically in the past decade. Both students and instructors are conducting their learning in a virtual community. In order to have a successful virtual learning experience, students and instructors must possess the skills and tools necessary to create virtual learning communities that mirror the traditional classroom, yet bring the virtual world to their fingertips. This chapter emphasizes the best ways for instructors to ensure a productive and successful learning environment where students can get the most out of the virtual learning experience.

The next chapter is titled “Using the International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) to Build a Learning Community” by Rosalind Latiner Raby, California State University, Northridge, and University of Phoenix, Southern California Campus. In her chapter, she profiles a program that uses on-line simulation to internationalize the community college curriculum. For the past two decades the International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) has used active learning and collaborative to link cross disciplinary concepts and enhance overall student comprehension. In the process, the INMP helps to build a cohesive learning community that begins with student teams, continues with classroom learning, and transcends to multi-college classroom dialogue.

The seventh chapter, “Connecting Communication to Curriculum and Pedagogy in Online Environments,” focuses on curriculum, and the author, Marius Boboc, from Cleveland State University, relies on the analysis of communicative patterns, discursive sequences, and instructional strategies featured in an entirely online graduate-level course featuring a combination of compulsory and optional chat sessions. Findings emphasize the use of communication dynamics to promote social presence and socially mediated learning in online learning communities supported by required synchronous discussions. Recommendations relate to building online communities centered on creating collaborative experience by means of focusing on employing a flexible pedagogy that takes into account student characteristics, appropriate instructional and technological tools and strategies, course cadence or pace, creating and maintaining an online learning community, as well as clear and engaging communication.

The next chapter, “Working Collaboratively in Virtual Groups,” by Shelley Stewart and Valerie J. Janesick from the University of South Florida, focuses on how online communities must inherently work in virtual spaces. This chapter provides guidelines that educational leaders, faculty, and students can follow to improve communication, manage conflict and work together productively in virtual settings, leveraging technical tools that are free, accessible, and easy to use. The aim is to advance communication and collaboration in online spaces by focusing on the ways virtual group members can cooperate, fostering positive outcomes, professional experiences, and organizational growth.
The last chapter in section 1 is titled, “If You Build It, They Will Come: Create Virtual Student Organizations,” and the author, Elizabeth G. Donnellan from Kaplan University, profiles elements of developing virtual student organizations. This chapter details for readers how to form, maintain, and/or develop virtual student organizations. The chapter includes a case study of the growth of a virtual student club chronicling obstacles and solutions, strategies for using social media tools, and guidelines for promoting collaborative online communities of students. The information in this chapter will be of interest to administrators, faculty advisors, and student leaders alike. This information provides a unique bridge between research data and practical application to assist college communities in the development of virtual student clubs.

SECTION 2: TRAINING, FACULTY DEVELOPMENT, AND PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS WITH PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

In the first chapter of section 2, Benjamin J. Cline from Western New Mexico University looks at the Aristotelian concept of ethos and considers its usefulness as a tool to teach civility in an online classroom. While public outcry and a growing body of research demand that civility be taught in our online classrooms, most classes do so by using a punitive approach, rather than a practical reason. Aristotle taught that civil behaviors could have practical benefits to the individual. By applying that concept to the online communities we create as teachers, we can help our students understand the advantages of civil communication, which can also be applied in other online communities of which our students are a part. The chapter is titled “The Concept of Ethos as a Tool for Assessing Civility.”

The next chapter, “Tone and Attitude in E-Mail Communications and the Online Classroom,” by Melissa A. Miller from Kaplan University, discusses challenges of communicating through email. In the online classroom, e-mail has emerged as a predominant communication method between students and faculty. Despite many benefits of e-mail, including ease of use, familiarity of the technology, and rapid response times, there are numerous challenges faculty face when sending and receiving e-mail correspondence with students. However, appropriate tone and attitude in the faculty members e-mails can help mitigate the challenges the medium presents. When written and read effectively and purposefully, e-mail is an effective communication and collaborative tool for students and faculty.

The next chapter focuses on the adult learner and the unique challenges of online communication with an aging population. The author, Linda Salter, writes in her chapter, “No Adult Left Behind: Older Adults in Virtual Environments,” that the nation is experiencing a major demographic shift resulting in an aging population. Also, at this time, more adults are returning to school later in life. The purpose of this chapter is to expand the book’s theme of creating collaborative online communities in higher education with a discussion of how to enhance that experience for older members of such communities.

The next chapter by Denise Passmore, from the University of South Florida is titled “From ‘Sage on the Stage’ to Facilitator of Learning: A Transformative Learning Experience for New Online Nursing Faculty.” This chapter examines the experiences of nursing faculty who transitioned from live to online teaching. Successful faculty discovered the importance in transforming from a traditional classroom teacher to a facilitator of learning. To support this new paradigm, faculty development should focus not only on technology and pedagogy, but also new methods to teach and communicate with students in this environment.
The next chapter is “Moderating the Effective Co-Creation of Knowledge in Asynchronous Online Conferences” by David Starr-Glass from the International Programs (Prague) of SUNY Empire State College and focuses on how discussion conferences are a standard feature of online distance learning courses. The author provides a place for sharing ideas, consolidating understanding, and creating new knowledge about subject matter. Although moderators need to work publically to ensure optimal communication flow, they also need to work off-stage, gaining knowledge of participants, addressing participation problems, and developing cultural awareness of participants. The chapter focuses on these off-stage enactments, particularly in dealing with military learners. This chapter contributes to building online communities of learning and allowing collaborative experiences and knowledge creation to materialize. The chapter will provide guidance for online instructors, insight into faculty development initiatives, and encouragement for all who participate in online distance learning experiences.

The next chapter intends to answer the following question posed by the book editors: “What are some guidelines for working effectively in virtual teams?” Study teams can often be difficult to navigate in person, and with the added dimension that a virtual experience brings to developing trusting, successful working relationships, different working guidelines are needed. The authors collected data from various stakeholders involved in developing an online program, namely students, faculty, and administrators to determine a model to better meet the needs of online learners. The chapter outlines how an institution of higher education needs to tend to the contextual structure and course organization in order to ensure a successful collaborative online learning experience for students. This chapter is authored by Mette L. Baran and Janice E. Jones, from the Doctoral Leadership Studies Department of Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is titled “Online Learning: Guidelines for Team Effectiveness.”

The next chapter, “Killing the ‘Quit Point’: Constructivist Instructor Collaboration to Increase Student Retention” by David Becker, Jr., from the American Public University System, concerns the use of a Constructivist perspective to improve student retention at the post-secondary level in online education. Whether online learning is actively under attack or not, there is no question that retention levels can be improved at all institutions. Student retention remains an issue in higher education and many colleges are attempting their own fixes. The collaboration included in this chapter is a different perspective that would help improve retention statistics for any college that would be willing to mandate such collaborative efforts.

The next chapter by a trio of authors, Alex Rayon, Mariluz Guenaga, and Iratxe Menchaca, all from the DeustoTech-Learning Research Group at Deusto Institute of Technology in Bilbao, Spain, is titled “Collaborative Teaching Experience at the University of Deusto” and discusses teaching and learning scenarios from a competence-based model which fosters collaborative work in their university. This chapter details how to use the technology for the purpose of teaching and learning online which these authors have used as a foundation concerned with the use of technology in the classroom and testing different ways to engage students in the learning process for their competency development. Among specific teaching and learning strategies discussed arise mobile- and game-based learning, with collaborative scenarios using platforms such as Google Apps for Education and Blackboard Collaborate. This chapter details how these technology tools have become very useful for both teachers and students.
The next chapter of this section, “A Distributed Community of Practice to Facilitate Communication, Collaboration, and Learning among Faculty,” by Mayela Coto from the Universidad Nacional in Heredia, Costa Rica, shows how a distributed community of practice, designed to facilitate faculty professional development, affects communication, collaboration and learning among the community members. The importance of a community of practice for faculty professional development lies in its potential for transforming the process of learning in identity formation. The topic is relevant for the book because a community of practice might create the social context in which faculty learn and improve their teaching through a collaborative experience of sharing, negotiation, and reflection.

The next chapter is “Creating a Collaborative Community in Online Environments” by Jessica Decker, Valerie Beltran, Mark Matzaganian, Nancy T. Walker, and Sammy Elzarka, from the University of La Verne, USA. This chapter addresses the importance of structuring online environments to encourage collaboration among participants. As many institutions of higher education turn to technology to facilitate interactions, strategies are needed that develop a sense of community in a context that is often isolating.

The last chapter, by Heather Miller, Tom Cavanagh, and Annissa Furr, is titled “Communication and Collaboration Strategies for an Effective Online Professor.” This chapter draws on the best practices and experiences of online faculty that work effectively communicating and collaborating with their students. With the continued growth of online learning, gaining the insights of experienced faculty can improve student learning though building positive peer to peer and faculty to student relationships. This is related to the theme of the text, as this information will assist the prospective audience, online faculty, administrators, students, and researchers in strengthening communication and collaboration in virtual settings.

Throughout this book, we have focused on the challenges of communicating and collaborating in online settings and forwarded ways all members of higher educational institutions can create community and foster personal and professional growth for all. Our intention was to elicit diverse faculty and administrative experience, and with our authors writing about their experiences from all over the globe, this was achieved. The book will expand existing models of online communication to include use of technology including social networking tools and other forms of computer-mediated communication to create collaborative experience for administrators, faculty, students, and other members of the educational community.

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