I worked for three years putting together training programs for film and television directors while employed at the Directors Guild of America. At that time, the early 1990s, directors were clearly interested in learning all they could about the use of computers both for evolving traditional video and film forms and what was then called “multi-media.” The use of computers in digital editing and special effects was discussed widely, but additionally many directors were aware that a new medium was emerging, one that may be a source of future employment for them. Consequently, they flocked to the educational programs I developed—both lectures on advanced uses of computers in film and video production and hands-on laboratories where they learned tools for creating new media. I also arranged for demonstrations and tours of multimedia production facilities. Ill-fated early companies such as Phillips CD-I, 3DO, and Answer Interactive Television are some of the companies that come to mind. It was fascinating to observe Hollywood directors as they watched these demonstrations because they understood the way new computer applications resembled the film and video production process they were expert in, but also how they were different. I could tell by their questions, particularly about user interaction issues, that they understood that this was a new medium.

Almost a decade has passed since this experience, but the impression stayed with me. As I began to work as an administrator in broader educational subject matter and became involved in developing CD- and web-based courses, I remembered the reaction of the film and television directors. They were searching for an understanding of the principles of this new medium, and how they as “authors” could use this new technology to their advantage. For this group of Hollywood directors the biggest issue was control: they are accustomed to controlling viewers in very precise ways. In fact, one way great Hollywood filmmaking is defined is by the degree to which the director is in control of the audience’s point of view and effectively manipulates its members into thinking and feeling specific ways at particular times. Alfred Hitchcock, the great director, is a perfect example of the type of control directors often exercise. He is said to have so meticulously
engineered his movies in advance that he admitted to boredom during the actual shooting of his movies. Many contemporary directors such as Spielberg, Lucas, and Coppola exert similar control over the viewing experience. While some other independent-style directors such as Mike Leigh, Woody Allen, and others have more improvisation styles, they generally are giving up control to the actors, not the audience. It seems to me that this director control of film and television is not unlike the control faculty members have in the traditional classroom. The most dominant form of educational delivery in higher education is still the lecture, and generally effective teachers are identified by their ability to present and control the classroom. While certainly one can be an active listener in a lecture, or actively view a film, that sort of activity is nothing like the potential control learners can gain in interactive new media.

I still remember vividly the hush that went over the audience of film and television directors when an executive from an interactive television company told of plans to give viewers the ability to choose camera angles and lens length during televised football games. Of course, on the surface they were concerned about their jobs, but even more importantly, when viewers have this kind of control, it is a different medium. The horror these directors experienced at the thought of giving up control to viewers is not unlike that expressed today by some faculty members at the notion of students controlling their own educational experience.

I come to the subject of this book from a very different path than most of those thinking about the use of computers in educational environments. My formal education focused originally on literature and film studies, and film production at the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and the University of California at Los Angeles. I became professionally involved in educational administration through the backdoor of continuing education focused first on the entertainment industry, and then more broadly. It was after this combined experience of studying film and television and working in adult education that I began research in education and earned a doctorate in the field of higher education from Claremont Graduate University, with a special emphasis on distance learning. I hope that the different point of view I have developed from my eclectic background gives me the ability to make something of a unique contribution to this evolving new field.