

## Foreword

“Tradition!” In the opening scene of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye poses the first of many questions: “How do we keep our balance?” His answer: “Tradition!” While tradition for Tevye was the force that maintained social balance in his village, modern society has found that change, not tradition, is inevitable.

Academic tradition is closely linked to the print medium, and writing has perpetuated the academic tradition since the first text was introduced into the classroom. Academics have always written books, chapters, and papers, and the development of the printing press only strengthened that tradition through an affordable, distributable medium.

Ever since Al Gore invented the Internet (just kidding!), universities and colleges have recognized the value of the World Wide Web for teaching and learning. In many cases, the Web has become an indispensable partner in the classroom. For many, technology has provided a wealth of new instructional tools and become the foundation for an entirely new delivery system called distance education.

Change and technology are nearly synonymous terms; certainly, they are interchangeable terms. In the last two decades, we have witnessed an evolution of distance-based education from its initial roots in the form of printed correspondence-by-mail programs to the astounding current growth rate in the sales and implementation of learning management systems.

The functionality of technology-based systems over their hard copy ancestors has far exceeded the imagination of even the most late-20th-century educators. Student

assessments are delivered online, grades are recorded in digital grade books, and class standings are sent to students and their parents instantly. Students create electronic portfolios that chronicle their learning experiences. They collaborate with their teachers and peers using a set of communication tools embedded in their curriculum and provided by expert learning management systems. Instructors deliver content face-to-face or electronically with equal effectiveness. Still, even with the plethora of technology-based applications, the majority of online learning remains grounded in text. The contemporary text-rich environment of online learning is further evidence that the tradition of teaching and learning, as well as reading and writing, remains central to the academic rigor of the 21st century learner.

Surely the print or text-rich rituals of learning are at odds with the online experiences of the majority of students entering colleges and universities. Today, students who graduate high school have been raised in an environment of Nintendo, Apple computers, and digital media. They are not strangers to technology that records and plays back pictures and sounds. They capture video on cameras and phones. Further, they share videos, images, and sound bytes on sites such as Flickr, YouTube, and Apple Podcasts. They embrace a range of social activities online that is cultivated by rich digital media.

In 2007, it was estimated that as many as nine million people communicate simultaneously with Skype with over one hundred million registered users. Today high school graduates deftly use video communications, text messaging, and learning management systems without wavering. Surely, the sheer scope of online users is testimony to the need to change the way online learning is designed and offered. Media-rich applications scream out a need to move away from the confines of text-rich content and text-based interactions. Learning must increase the amount of its media-rich content and expand its opportunities for integrating media-rich communications into online learning. The nature and scope of these changes are significant and provide challenges to those who design and deliver distance education.

As online learning has matured, so have those who design these distance-based courses. Originally, it was primarily early adopters and instructional designers who picked up the gauntlet of online learning. The ongoing debate of the times was whether it was easier to train an educator in technology or to educate a technologist in instruction. Fortunately for the industry and the student, the educator seems to have won out, due, not exclusively, to the fact that learning management systems have evolved quickly and effectively into user-friendly development environments. Online learning is becoming predictable venue for all educators—traditional and innovators. Today, the challenge to design effective online learning is further amplified by the need to integrate media-rich content and interactions.

Caladine's book chronicles many of the successes of the University of Wollongong, which has won many of the most prestigious awards for excellence in preparing their graduates for life in the e-world of the 21st century, including the 2006

Commonwealth University of the Year. In 2007, they were recognized by Good Universities Guide with five stars in the seven categories: (1) positive graduate outcomes, (2) getting a job, (3) graduate starting salary, (4) educational experience: overall satisfaction, (5) educational experience: generic skills, (6) educational experience: overall experience, and (7) staff qualifications. The author has worked at the university for over 20 years, researching educational technologies, supervising postgraduate studies, managing audio visual, and mastering a host of technology-based applications as well as helping faculty to use learning technologies in effective and efficient ways.

*Enhancing E-Learning with Media-Rich Content and Interactions* provides the necessary background information, theoretical frameworks, and practical guidance to help design truly effective online learning experiences by integrating media-rich interactions and content.

For those of us committed to providing high quality instruction and effective online learning strategies, this book may become the most useful ready guide in your library of desktop reference materials. I invite you to reflect conscientiously on the content and models proposed as you create your own new traditions for teaching and learning.

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