

## Preface

Distance education has become a major force in higher education in the United States. Institutions of higher education have increasingly embraced distance education, and the number of students enrolled in distance education is rapidly rising in colleges and universities throughout the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, distance education is a steadily growing phenomenon. About 56 percent of all two-year colleges and universities now offer distance learning courses. 34 percent of these institutions offer students the opportunity to complete their degree program solely through distance education. In response to these changes in enrollment demands, many states, institutions, and organizations have been working on strategic plans to implement distance education. At the same time, there are misconceptions and myths related to the difficulty of distance teaching and learning, technologies available to support distance instruction, and the support and compensation needed for high-quality instructors. This confusion swells as higher education explores dozens of distance learning technologies with new ones seeming to emerge each week. Such technologies confront instructors and administrators at a time of continued budget retrenchments and rethinking. Adding to this dilemma, bored students are dropping out of online classes while pleading for richer and more engaging distance learning experiences. Opinions are mixed about the benefits of distance teaching and learning in higher education. Given the demand for distance learning, the plethora of technologies to incorporate into teaching, the budgetary problems, and the opportunities for innovation, distance learning environments are facing challenges, linking pedagogy, technology, and learner needs. Given its popularity and increased usage, it is imperative that administrators and instructors monitor the current state and future direction relating to distance education in order to meet the needs and challenges of tomorrow.

There is substantial effort and research within various disciplines that tackles current state and future direction in distance education dealing the improvement of computer and technology assisted learning settings and environments. Recently there have been several initiatives within the US that focus on strategies and current research approaches to improve the distance learning process with the introduction of advanced web technologies to help learning and fostering innovative learning paradigms. Because of its popularity and increased usage, there is a need to introduce an interdisciplinary approach into the current state and future direction of innovative distance learning approaches. It is imperative that institutions of higher education provide quality distance programs.

The aim of this book is to explore current state and future direction of distance education from different research fields, reports and discussions from students, faculty members, researchers, and practitioners in the field of distance education, training development, and performance improvement. The chapters collected for this book will have influence on future developments in technology-enhanced distance learning both in education and in industry. The book will stimulate administrators and instructors in

higher education to focus on current trends as well as future emerging directions in the field of distance education. In addition, this book will offer a critical discussion about distance education, with a focus on the theoretical and practical challenges of distance education in education and current trends, practices, issues, and future directions on the specific distance education areas.

The projected audience for this book includes faculty, K-12 educators, researchers, designers, practitioners and administrators, those developing distance education and training in higher education from the international communities. The goal of this book is to appeal to individuals with a professional interest in current state and future direction in the area of distance education. This book would serve as a resource to instructors, administrators, and students in higher education such as asynchronous learning, authoring tools, building distance learning architectures, collaborative learning, courseware development, developing an organizational distance learning strategy, developing and integrating distance learning solutions, pedagogical issues, societal issues, and quality management and assessment in distance education. The main stakeholders include instructors, K-12 educators, administrators, students, instructional designers, and those who are concerned with ensuring and improving the distance education. We have seen an explosion of strategic improvements and innovations of distance education technologies used in education, business, and industry for the purpose of teaching and learning, training and performance improvement. Researchers and institutions are beginning to see a powerful impact of these technologies in the area of distance learning and teaching. The value of this text will not only add to the body of knowledge of the field of distance education in higher education institutions, but also link theoretical based practices to business and industry.

After an extensive research of major book warehouses, bookstore, and university presses, there remains no work in the area of current states and future directions in distance education. The last book on current states and future directions in distance education was written in 2003. There are several articles relating to current issues and trends in distance directions, but not in the area of future directions of distance education. The texts that focus on current state and future direction do not incorporate a literature on distance education either from the education point of view or from the business/industry point of view of training and performance improvement. This opens a huge market to college faculty, instructional designers, consultants, students, K-12 educators, trainers, etc to learn of the new directions and strategies to promote quality distance teaching and learning. This text will serve the business community, the university — faculty and students, K-12 educators, designers, technology enthusiasts, administrators, and the general public.

The chapters authored were selected based on their expertise within the field as well as their unique perspective on the subject matter. With the combination of non-profit organizations, primary and secondary schools, higher education institution, and the medical industry, a wide range of perspectives were covered in this handbook. Further, this book highlights distance learning technology as a growing field of study which uses technological innovation as a means to solving educational, learning, and development challenges.

The chapters are divided into three major themes. These themes include foundations of distance learning technology, applications and practices of distance learning technology, and learning strategy and challenges for distance learning. This way, distance learning technology book will present different approaches to promoting quality distance learning and development strategies through distance learning technology. Moreover, this distance learning technology book will provide a sure foundation on different types of distance learning technology, tips and strategies on how to use distance learning technology to facilitate active learning, and a discussion on the aspect of distance learning technology and trends. To

add, this book will provide a platform and discussion to help faculty, trainers, instructional designers, and teachers to develop online instructional and teaching materials. This book also shows instructors how to create authentic and active learning environments with distance learning technology complete with an assessment and evaluation guide. Lastly, the book provides a platform to assist college and university faculty, trainers, and research to manage and develop eLearning applications with updated strategies that facilitate distance learning and development.

For all practical purposes, this book discusses various methods and tools for assessment, testing and evaluating of effective distance learning technology and strategies for the educational opportunities and learning development challenges. For the future development of distance learning technology, this book gives a discussion on the trends and issues facing the field as well as progression as to where the field may be headed. In the end, this book contains a wide range of ideas, examples, guidelines, stories, models, and solution for anyone interested in the field distance learning technology.

With a diverse and comprehensive coverage of multiple perspectives presented in this authoritative guide, *Distance Learning Technology, Current Instruction, and the Future of Education: Applications of Today, Practices of Tomorrow*, will contribute to a better understanding all topics, research, and discoveries in this evolving, significant field of study. Further, the contributions included in this book will be instrumental in expanding of the body of knowledge to a wider audience. The coverage will provide a strong reference source for researchers and also decision makers seeking to obtain a greater understanding of the concepts, issues, trends, challenges and opportunities within distance learning technology.

It is my sincere hope that the distance learning technology book will assist colleagues, faculty, students, teachers, and business decision makers in enhancing their understanding of this discipline and to effectively integrate distance learning technology to meet the needs of all learning populations. Perhaps this publication will inspire its readers to contribute to the current body of research in this immense field, tapping into possibilities to create, facilitate, and sustain change in educational institutions by making learning and development opportunities open and engaging to participants.

*Holim Song*  
*Editor*  
*Texas Southern University*