Chapter 15
Keeping the Promise of Distance Education: Ethical Challenges for Higher Education Administrators

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ABSTRACT
Distance education programs in the form of online instruction continue to grow in terms of enrollments as well as courses available. However, consideration of the values promoted by ideal distance and open learning systems may not be guiding the design and development of such programs. The values of access, availability, affordability, continuity, connection, independence equity can form the basis for a conversation on how a program is realizing the promise of distance education given the constraints of institutional mission, culture, and business/academic model.

INTRODUCTION
Keeping the Promise of Distance Education: Ethical Challenges for Higher Education

“I am still in Ternate, Maluku, its adventure experience to see distance learners in the one of the thousand small islands of Indonesia. They have high motivation to improve their education. They travel with small boat with the high tide just to learn from their tutors. It takes three hours from Jakarta by plane to reach north Maluku. I have to one night travel with small ferry to reach the island. I feel so lucky to be the distance learning lecturer .....” Benny P UT faculty member.

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DISTANCE EDUCATION AS AN ETHICAL PROMISE

Benny, sitting in a coffee shop in Jakarta, Indonesia told me the story of how distance learners participating in UT Open University of Indonesia (Universitas Terbuka) persevered against time and tide to secure an education which would better their own lives as teachers and contribute to better instruction in their local communities. Benny travelled to Maluku to encourage learners working on their lessons at a distance and to guide local preceptors on teaching adult learners. As Director of Distance Learning for the Open University of Indonesia, Benny was responsible for developing instructional materials and conducting professional development for local staff on topics related to using technology for distance learners. While there is a growing use of online technologies at Universitas Terbuksa the primary format was individual study in a correspondence mode supplemented with tutorials in various localities. In line with the philosophy of an open university UT provided a flexible approach to learning including printed learning materials accompanied by audio and video cassettes/CD, CD-ROM, radio and TV broadcast, as well as Computer-Assisted Instructions (CAI) and Internet-based learning materials.

One might consider this older form of distance education as a blended experience: a tutorial combined with individual instruction. The quote from Benny at the beginning of this chapter shows the extent to which adults will travel to participate in educational experiences and reap the promise of an education at a distance.

Distance education as an alternative to on campus study held the promise of availability meaning that learning opportunities might be offered any time outside of a standard semester system and outside scheduled campus classroom time. Distance education promised parity that regardless of how content was delivered, content would be of high quality, services would be available to support the learner and that there would be no difference in the standards for teaching and learning. Distance Education offered continuity for those adult learners who needed to continue their education but could not afford to due to life circumstances. Overall Distance Education promised an alternative to the dominant form of education provided to those who could access on campus classes. Living the intellectual life could be blended with living an adult working life. Distance education promised learning opportunities to all people. Distance education was built on the promise of opening opportunities for adults freed from geographical, time, and sometimes admission criteria to partake in higher and continuing education opportunities. Distance Education held the promise of increasing access by providing content and other instructional resources through home study or distributing educational resources in geographic centers more convenient to the adult learner’s physical location.

This chapter will examine the extent to which higher education has kept the promise of providing learning opportunities beyond the physical walls of place, beyond fixed classroom time, and beyond elitist notions of who should and should not participate in higher education. Seven ethical stances are proposed to guide those who administer, plan, promote, and provide distance education programs and services. Distance education advocates make decisions on programs, people, and processes considering personal values, institutional priorities and the ability to act on an ethical stance. The ideas of accessibility, availability, affordability, accountability, autonomy, continuity, and parity can serve as a model for considering the extent to which higher educational programs are continuing and growing the promise of distance education.
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