Chapter 2
History of Distance Education

ABSTRACT
Distance education has taken on a number of different roles throughout history. As technology has changed and grown, so has the definition and possibilities of educating at a distance. This chapter examines the chronological history of distance education beginning with correspondence courses and moving into a present day examination of learning management systems and the expansive network of online courses and universities. This chapter also discusses the development of online teacher training (or lack thereof) in the same timeframe.

INTRODUCTION
Over the ages the introduction of new media has transformed culture and society, from the introduction of handwriting, through the invention of the printing press, to the widespread availability of home computers and the Internet. Technology and the connective power of the Internet have made distance education a growth industry that enables schools to reach wider, more diverse audiences and change the very nature of teaching and learning (A.P. Rovai, M.K. Ponton, and J.D. Baker (2008)).

Distance education had such humble beginnings that instructors do not even look back to anymore. Correspondence learning that shared information via telegram or Pony Express letters rarely enter our minds when we consider the developments of distance education. Rather, our new concerns are what we imagine as the up-and-coming technologies, new developments to Blackboard versions or other CMSs (course management systems), and attention to technological literacy. Presently, we think about MOOCs (massive open online courses) and how they stack up against our more traditional types of learning. Or, we
think about the technological controversies that we are invested in: open-access textbooks, digital licensing, changes to citation rules based on our new propensity for collaboration, or many other things. But in order to understand where we are in terms of technological literacy, technological pedagogy, online pedagogy, and distance education, it is necessary to understand our history.

There is extensive study and tracing of distance education in specific fields of study: nursing, theology, rhetoric and composition, business, ethics, and so many more. Although the distance educations in these fields share a significant amount of similarities in their histories, there are many nuances within each field that vary. That being said, this chapter strives for a holistic view of distance education, featuring examinations of various fields of study, hoping that by piecing together various areas of study, the reader will garner a stronger understanding of the history of distance education in order to understand the present educational and teacher training standards used today.

As the field of composition is my field of study, the background and history section in this chapter is heavy with history of technology in education and distance education per the field of composition and English studies. Likewise, composition has a long and well-documented history of the inclusion of technology, as well as improving the level of training and information technology skills for its faculty. However, this chapter is informed by various other disciplines and is not a limited history of distance education in composition. Technology has grown in different disciplines in different ways, so while this chapter strives for a holistic examination of the history of distance education, there are undoubtedly many concepts, conversations, and technological developments that this chapter will leave out. However, for the purposes of understanding acquisition, learning, and online teacher training, those will be the foci of concepts discussed throughout this chapter. This chapter strives to provide a chronological understanding of the history of distance education although challenges do arise to such an organization due to many simultaneous conversations and changes occurring throughout disciplines due to the changes in technology.

**BACKGROUND**

The present day connotation of distance education involves technology—using computers to transmit ideas or perhaps using email systems to correspond back and forth. Although computer technology is the current mode of information transmission for distance education, understanding the history of learning at a distance begins long before computers, or electricity, for that matter, were an integral part of everyday life.

The field of distance education in itself began in the nineteenth century (Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Patterson, 1996; Cannell 1999; Ascough, 2002; Hochberg, 2006). Ascough explains: “The development of an extensive, relatively inexpensive postal service in the late nineteenth century led to the creation of print-based correspondence courses” (p. 17). From there, the concept was modified by discipline and eventually taken over by the field of educa-