

Issues in Distance Education (New Directions for Higher Education, Number 173)

Andrade, Maureen Snow, ed.
Wiley, 2016

Book Review

Tags: distance education | hybrid education | online education

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Distance education is a growing component of higher education. Whether students combine distance courses with traditional classroom hours or focus entirely on distance learning, the presence of distance education in major colleges and universities in America continues to expand. Hybrid courses, which combine face-to-face learning with a digital component, are becoming very popular options for students. Most college graduates in the class of 2020, for example, will have received some of their credit hours online.

The essays collected by Maureen Snow Andrade for *Issues in Distance Education* address each of these phenomena and more. The initial essay, “Issues in Distance Education: A Primer for Higher Education Decision Makers” by Michael Beaudoin, provides an overview of the development of distance learning in higher education. This is a very useful chapter, particularly for administrators and prospective instructors who are looking for a short introduction to how distance education became such a prominent feature of American higher education and some of the resistance it has encountered. Beaudoin refers to distance learning as a disruptive technology, which is an apt description of the kind of impact it has had on administrators, faculty, and students.

Disruptive technology requires transformative leadership in order to make the best use of what is logistically possible. Farhad Saba’s discussion, “Theories of Distance Education: Why They Matter,” analyzes various theories of distance learning and links the theories to future institutional policies and practices. Saba advocates a community of inquiry model that combines a social, cognitive, and teaching presence that makes the best use of new technologies and flexible learning schedules.

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Andrade's essay, "Effective Organizational Structures and Processes: Addressing Issues of Change," explores both macro and micro level structural models for distance education. She proposes four interconnected leadership frameworks for both creating and managing change. The strengths and weaknesses of each model, such as environmental and stakeholder issues, are also discussed along with a set of guiding questions for institutional change.

These first three essays provide a core of information and key questions that will serve readers well. Each of the six chapters which follow focuses on a related issue that the initial essays prompt. For instance, how can a development plan contribute to course consistency and quality? Is a team approach to course development desirable? What sort of faculty support is essential for high level learning outcomes? How can distance learning be successfully offered on a global scale? What sort of strategic planning will facilitate all of this?

This compact volume does not attempt to settle all of the issues that it raises. It does provide an excellent starting point for discussions about innovative methods for teaching theology and religion as well as the attendant policies, costs, infrastructure, and support necessary to sustain them.

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