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## EDITORIAL

Distance learning in higher education is the focus of the two book reviews presented in this issue of DEOSNEWS. *Distance Learners in Higher Education: Institutional Responses for Quality Outcomes* highlights the distance learner, providing scholarship on topics central to creating an educational environment conducive to teaching and learning at a distance, including discussions of the demographic variables affecting learners, learners' self-concept, learning outcomes, and student support. *Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education* moves from learner-based issues to institutional issues in its discussion of quality distance education programs designed to serve an ever-growing population of learners. These reviews, published previously in issues of *The American Journal of Distance Education* (Volume 12 Number 3 and Volume 13 Number 1), provide a guide for educators who may wish to read further on these topics.

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DISTANCE LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES FOR QUALITY OUTCOMES. C. C. Gibson, ed. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing, 1997, 143 pp., \$19.95.

Reviewed by Don Olcott, Jr., Associate Dean

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*Distance Learners in Higher Education* brings together a visionary group of scholars and practitioners to examine what we know about distance learners, what institutions can do to provide comprehensive student and instructional support services, and, most importantly, how these variables intersect to elevate the quality of distance teaching and learning to a higher level. In an era characterized by higher education's preoccupation with technology, copyright issues, and the complexities of costing distance learning programs, Gibson focuses our attention where it belongs -- on creating a learning environment conducive to improving teaching and learning for distance learners.

In the Introduction, Michael Moore highlights the central theme of the book: the importance of moving distance learning toward student-centered models. He reminds us that successful distance learning is not dependent on age or social class and that there are prerequisites for successful distance learners, including high motivation, a focus on task, and the capacity to adjust to less supportive learning environments. It becomes clear from Moore's introduction why this book is an invaluable

contribution to the scholarly literature -- it focuses on students.

Melody Thompson provides an excellent summary of the demographic variables of distance learners in Chapter 1. Thompson points out that the majority of distance learners are older adult women and that the number of ethnic minority learners is increasing. She emphasizes the need to conduct better research on how to better serve these students via distance learning. Thompson makes two crucial points important for practitioners designing programs: 1) the profile of the distance learner is dynamic and in a constant state of flux; and 2) distance learning is blurring into distributed models in which on-campus students are as likely to take courses via technology as are the typical, geographically-dispersed adult distance learners. This blurring will only accentuate the dynamic nature of profiling distance learners.

Liz Burge provides some insight into gender issues in Chapter 2. Burge contends that women often bring considerable fears to higher education where they are frequently under-represented in certain programs or must confront curriculum designed with a male bias. She points out an important difference between male and female learners: males are motivated to be autonomous and competitive while females focus on interpersonal relationships and connectedness. Men see technology as power; women view it as a tool for competence and connectedness.

In Chapter 3, "Understanding and Supporting the Culturally Diverse Distance Learner," Irene Sanchez and Charlotte Gunawardena emphasize the changing demographics of higher education and the increasing numbers of minorities projected in higher education in the next ten years. They argue that distance educators should design for diversity in distance learning. The chapter provides an excellent case study of the learning style preference of Hispanic learners, strengthening the authors' contention that distance learning instruction should be designed according to individual learning styles. While the authors are correct pedagogically, considering the diversity of students and the time constraints involved in design, logistically and economically this will remain an important challenge for all educators in the future.

Gibson moves from editor to author in Chapter 4 to discuss learners' self-concept. She explains that distance learners' academic self-concept correlates with course and program persistence and that students' perceptions of potential success impacts subsequent performance and completion. Gibson acknowledges the need for further empirical research relative to this construct. She emphasizes that academic self-concept is related to other attributes such as motivation, previous academic performance, student expectations, and task orientation, suggesting that further research must provide aggregate data on academic self-concept and student learning. Gibson conveys an important theme that emerges throughout the book: adults need a broad range of support services to be successful. The most important point that comes out of this chapter is simply that "success breeds further success."

In Chapter 5, "Improving Learning Outcomes: The Effects of Learning Strategies and Motivation," Chris Olgren provides an excellent summary of cognitive learning theories and suggests strategies for designing instruction for distance learners. The author fails to mention, however, that the majority of higher education faculty has not been trained in the theoretical and practical applications of human learning theory, particularly in how they relate to teaching and learning environments. Olgren emphasizes the importance of competent instructional design that integrates flexible strategies from human learning theory into distance learning. Additionally, she notes that if we presume students have preferential learning styles, then varied and flexible assessment measures must also be provided.

Terry Anderson and Randy Garrison (Chapter 6, "Learning in a Networked World: New Roles and Responsibilities") introduce the reader to the transformational changes effected by new (and old) communications technologies in the way we teach, deliver content, and assess teaching and learning. The authors suggest that not only is the role of the faculty member changing, but also the roles of the student and the learning environment. Anderson and Garrison revisit Moore's original work distinguishing three types of interaction (teacher-learner, learner-content, and learner-learner) and expand this to include content-content and teacher-teacher interaction. These additions vividly portray the unprecedented communications capacity of the new online and digital technologies and their potential for the future. The authors assert that "academic control" is obsolete in the traditional sense and that we will not realize the potential of the new technologies without designing new learning paradigms to accompany the technology transformations.

Gibson returns as author in Chapter 7, "The Distance Learner in Context," in which she summarizes ecological system theory and delineates how this approach provides a broader empirical base for understanding the distance learner's environmental predisposition. Most importantly, Gibson emphasizes that the diverse roles of adults cumulatively impact what learners bring to the classroom. She provides a succinct summary of intervention strategies useful in developing single courses, degree programs, and the policy environment.

Chapter 8 presents an excellent practical guide for supporting distance learners. Dan Granger and Meg Benke provide a thorough analysis of the importance of teachers' knowing about learners and their prior experience, cultural backgrounds, skills, and goals. The authors suggest a range of administrative, faculty, and general strategies useful in creating a continuum of learner-centered distance learning support services. However, Granger and Benke do not discuss in any detail the emerging models of online student support services being developed at many colleges and universities and public and private institutions.

In the summary section of the book, Gibson reinforces some of the key concepts and strategies

discussed throughout the book, including knowing the learner, providing orientations, designing with variety, active engagement and choice, evaluating authentically, and providing an integrated support system for learners. Gibson weaves a range of issues into a tapestry grounded in research and practice. This is a book that should be on the shelf of every distance education administrator and faculty member. It focuses on the learner and on the strategies necessary to create an educational environment conducive to teaching and learning at a distance. Further, it serves as a ready resource offering a variety of strategies that can be assimilated and/or modified to meet the specific needs of students. It reinforces what many distance educators have known for quite some time: the field of distance education has an abundant supply of professional expertise on teaching and learning that can be shared with the broader academic community, regardless of where, when, or how education is delivered.

A second edition of the book should include a chapter that discusses the range of research approaches designed to gather data on distance learners. This would provide the reader with a framework from which to expand the body of research by focusing on questions that require further empirical investigation. Moreover, a summary of future research questions listed at the end of each chapter or in an appendix would be an invaluable addition to the book. Overall, this book should be one of the top five in the resource library of any educator truly interested in the future of learning at a distance.

MEGA-UNIVERSITIES AND KNOWLEDGE MEDIA: TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. J. S. Daniel. London: Kogan Page. Distributed in the U.S. by Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA, 1998, 224 pp., \$24.95.

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John S. Daniel's *Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media* is many things: a visionary treatise, a case study, a strategic plan, and a practical guide. Just as important, it is a lesson in humility. From its global perspective on the challenges facing higher education today to the grand scale of the mega-universities it reviews, Daniel's book confirms the fact that educators worldwide have much to do. Hobbled by tremendous disparities in available educational resources and information infrastructure as well as the sheer scope of projected learner needs, the international urgency for

serious "university renewal," as Daniel puts it, demands new willingness among education providers to redefine models for delivering knowledge to all those who want it. Even the most forward thinking of universities will find in Daniel's book a fresh vision for making the necessary progress.

This vision is not an attempt at conversion to the mega-university model, although it is certainly effective in garnering support for large-scale distance education projects. In the United States, the Western Governors University seeks to parallel the development of the mega-universities Daniel studies. It is no surprise that a partnership was recently announced between his Open University, in the United Kingdom, and Western Governors. The audience for this book, however, extends far beyond the faculty and administrators of virtual institutions. As evidenced by Daniel's appearance on the programs of major higher education meetings throughout the year, this book has been well-received by all those involved in the process of providing postsecondary education and lifelong learning worldwide. Its moral imperative to provide for these needs is in tune with national trends here in the United States, both among governors who encourage lifelong learning in postsecondary education and who support the use of distance-based learning, and among higher education advocacy groups like NASULGC and the Kellogg Commission, which have demonstrated their commitment to information technology as a means of attaining an engaged university.

In fact, it is this attention to engaging the social context of academic learning that sets Daniel's book apart from more instrumental and limited discussions of distance education. The book begins with a call for renewal and an analysis of the challenges facing higher education today. From his global perspective, Daniel argues that education is necessary for world security. One new university per week is needed to meet the growing demand. At the same time, however, changes in political attitudes toward higher education put pressure on government and regulatory groups to promote policies for lifelong learning while cutting costs as they increase availability. Although many of his readers are intimately aware of these realities within their own local and institutional contexts, by painting the international landscape of a potential educational crisis Daniel inspires a greater sense of innovation and collaboration among universities in planning their lifelong learning strategies.

The opening chapters' global focus gives way to a U.K.-U.S.-Canada slant as Daniel moves to the technology plans and administrative actions behind the solutions. The author justifies this shift in perspective with the belief that developing nations will skip over previous generations of technologies and catch up in the next decade at the level of the mainstream in countries that have a longer technology history. He argues that education providers must be ready to meet them there, usefully identifying three factors for success in both developed and developing nations: the value of academic thought; the economic system that guides, pressures, and enables the work of the higher education institutions; and the technology infrastructure that supports this work both administratively and pedagogically. Working within this framework places sufficient emphasis on all the goals of university renewal while limiting the intellectual scope of the challenges, making them manageable and definable.

In this light, introducing the concept of mega-universities to smaller and newer distance education programs highlights the lessons learned on a large scale in institutions with a greater burden to prove themselves academically, economically, and logistically. The book devotes a full chapter and an appendix to the history, theory, practice, and profiles of the eleven largest distance-based universities. It is unrealistic, even undesirable, to believe that many institutions would want to "renew" themselves as mega-universities. Nor does Daniel advocate this; but the large programs' progress in establishing public reputation and academic credibility in distance education efforts is beneficial to readers from the growing number of universities who would enter this field with smaller programs. Previous higher education administrators saw limits to the size of the institution, but the mega-university example proves that standards of high quality need not be compromised to reach large quantities of students. In addition, these international institutions indicate that distance education is widely acknowledged and accepted as an effective delivery tool in most countries. Historically, the U.S. model of a physical campus differs from that of many other countries, but with increased demand for lifelong learning, traditional models of providing access must change. Standing at the verge of a distance education boom, the issue of reputation and credibility will be crucial to both new institutions and the older institutions whose efforts could be undermined by careless administration of experimental, expensive, and low quality programs.

In attempting to create a cost-effective means of delivering knowledge, Daniel proposes the use of economies of scale and other industrial models for producing education. In discussing an economic model and an extensive exploration of competitive advantage for universities, Daniel suggests that it is foolish to resist viewing university teaching and research as a "production process" when that perspective could offer new opportunities for growth and improvement. He argues that universities need to rethink models of limited access and calm the fear of "diluting the brand-name" in order to attain competitive advantage through leadership in cost control and differentiation. While this rhetoric might be shocking to some members of the academic community, Daniel uses that sense of surprise to illustrate that the real change is not in our current approach to quality and content in academic institutions, but rather in the innovative ways in which we can provide access to new audiences. By defining the problem of education in economic terms, Daniel hopes to break through the obstacles of tradition that could impede success in providing education in the contemporary context.

Following Daniel's lead, it is clear that universities and their faculty must not confuse the institution with its product. Traditional values of teaching and learning can be promoted while effecting a shift in academic institutions to more industrial models complete with partnerships, marketing, and productivity. Those who would delay the development of new models of access and delivery seem to forget that the power of tradition is not likely to fade in resident institutions. While holding on to their historical foundations, universities must embrace the possibility that altering what Daniel calls the "craft tradition of university instruction" in favor of the collaborative teaching that distance education demands might, in fact, improve the quality of learning overall.

It is clear that we are moving toward the learner-driven environment Daniel describes, with individualized instruction in time, content, and location becoming increasingly possible. Today's students are far less captive, and their own demand for flexibility and choice will only grow in the coming decades. Lifelong learners are no longer willing to endure instruction that does not meet their needs; today's students can and will shop. That is why Daniel's principles of product leadership, customer intimacy, and operational excellence, as well as learner support, are so important in the development of these new distance education endeavors. Quality, cost, convenience, and service will determine the winners and losers of the market. If all providers learn to do this more effectively, ultimately pedagogy will benefit as best practices in distance education in turn enhance resident instruction.

I find this flexibility, innovation, and sheer scale to be the greatest strengths of the mega-university model, and they represent principles readily adaptable to the U.S. context. There are, however, serious limits on the degree to which we can apply the concept of the mega-university to the U.S. higher education climate. Most current mega-universities are highly subsidized, national institutions. They are "mega" partly because they exist in a controlled, relatively noncompetitive environment in which the national government has funneled funds into a single, large institution rather than into many institutions. This model differs from the regionalization and diversification that currently define reputation and determine university resources in the U.S. I expect that a small group of leading U.S. universities will become very large as a result of their distance education initiatives, but not in the same way that the mega-universities have. Instead, distinctive programming, self-sufficiency, and a student-centered philosophy will distinguish these universities and attract growing numbers of students to their new lifelong learning programs.

Readers of Daniel's book will soon see that if these new programs are to succeed, mega-universities cannot simply be coordinators and clearinghouses for existing bodies and agencies, and smaller programs cannot be merely single course providers in the way they have been in the past. The new generation of distance learning must build on traditions of remote-classroom and correspondence study while generating something new. Technology and knowledge media will be necessary to exchange intellectual assets, but universities must be aware of their learner's access to technology. Distance education programs must be careful in adopting technology for teaching to meet the needs of their students. Technology planners must not aim for the cutting edge and thereby leave learners behind, nor should they lag behind the mainstream of progress. Providers must implement careful technology strategies, taking into account the complex variables of public reception to technology that Daniel's book outlines.

In heralding a model of an information technology-based academy, Daniel's approach is at once practical, innovative, and risky. Should these developments be perceived as a threat? Only if institutions think that the future will be the same as the past. Many do understand the benefits of

reaching new students and gaining from large continuing and distance education programs. Some institutions, however, rushing into the distance education market, do not have an adequate technology infrastructure, learner support, or commitment to quality. Online distance education must be more than scanning class notes into a computer. It must use instructional technology to provide wide access to resources, highly interactive communication and simulations, effective evaluation of student knowledge, and innovative learning support services. This will require a significant investment in resources before it can be mainstreamed into the higher education tradition. Daniel's work acknowledges this need and offers a guide to make this model a reality. This book is a "must read" for those interested in distance education on a large or a small scale.

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