

Chapter 1

A History of Distance Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Known by many terms and phrases with varying definitions, distance education has been in use since the early nineteenth century. Not limited to the United States, the humble beginnings of distance education were initiated by private entrepreneurs offering independent study courses for officious sounding certificates of study throughout Europe, Canada, the United States, and other countries. Early distance education promised specialized training for the day laborer looking to advance his or her place in the factory, the ambitious housewife and househusband seeking to improve the familial condition, and the career woman or man looking to climb the ladder by seeking professional improvements. These individuals sought betterment through available resources including distance education. At that time, distance education entailed independent study, physical separation between the student and the instructor, and a stable postal service for mailing completed assignments to instructors.

Flash-forward to today's world of instant-access in a technology driven society, where distance education has grown in viability and become a business. Whether provided via a traditional, land-based university or college to earn a formal degree, to complete professional development, or to seek additional certification, or by a for-profit organization or corporation to train their employees and advance their workers' skills, people can access a well-developed range of educational services through distance education to better their lives and livelihoods regardless of the physical separation between themselves and the sponsoring institution. The main difference between distance education's beginnings and today's educational services is the medium used to conduct learning. The postal services may still be used as a secondary mode of communication and print is still a constant technologic tool, but the expanding success of distance education can be attributed to providing education that (1) spans great distances between citizens and educational institutions, both geographically and socio-economically; (2) quenches the thirst for education; and (3) utilizes the rapid advancement of technology (Casey, 2008).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-111-9.ch001

INTRODUCTION

Distance Education. A generic, all-inclusive term used to refer to the physical separation of teachers and learners. (2) [Distance Education, Distance Learning, Distributed Learning] The application of information technology (and infrastructure) to educational and student-related activities linking teachers and students in differing places. (3) The student and instructor are physically separated by any distance. All communications are mediated by some type of electronic means in real or delayed time. Location is of no significance. (4) The organizational framework and process of providing instruction at a distance. Distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are physically separated, and technology (i.e., audio, video, and computers, print) is used to bridge the instructional gap. (5) The organizational framework and process of providing instruction at a distance. Distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are physically separated, and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, or print) is used to bridge the instructional gap. (See Distance Learning.) (USDLA, 2010).

Distance Learning. A term for the physical separation of teachers and learners that has become popular in recent years, particularly in the United States. While used interchangeably with distance education, distance learning puts the emphasis on the learner and is especially appropriate when students take on greater responsibility for their learning as is frequently when doing so from a distance. (2) The desired outcome of distance education, i.e., learning at a distance. (See Distance Education.) (USDLA, 2010)

Known by many terms and phrases with varying definitions, distance education has been in use since the early nineteenth century. Not limited to the United States, the humble beginnings of distance education were initiated by private entrepreneurs offering independent study courses independent study courses to complete requirements for officious sounding certificates of study

throughout Europe, Canada, the United States, and other countries. The start of distance education provided specialized training necessary for the day laborer looking to advance his or her place in the factory setting or the quickly growing industrialization of the western world, the ambitious housewife and househusband seeking to improve the familial condition, and the career woman or man looking to climb the ladder to break through the glass ceiling and become independent seeking professional improvements. These individuals sought betterment through available resources including distance education. At that time, distance education entailed independent study, physical separation between the student and the instructor, and reliance upon a stable postal service for mailing completed assignments to instructors.

Flash-forward to today's world of instant-access in a technology driven society. Distance education is has grown in viability, albeit in an evolved existence. Distance education has matured through the years to become a business. Whether provided via a traditional, land-based university or college to earn a formal degree, to complete professional development, or to seek additional certification, or by a for-profit organization or corporation to train their employees and advance their workers' skills, people can access a well-developed range of educational services through distance education to better their lives and livelihoods regardless of the physical separation between themselves and the sponsoring institution. The main difference between distance education's beginnings and today's educational services is the medium used to conduct learning. The postal services may still be used as a secondary mode of communication and print is still a constant technologic tool, but the expanding success of distance education can be attributed to providing education that 1) spans great distances between citizens and educational institutions, both geographically and socio-economically; 2) quenches the thirst for education; and 3) utilizes the rapid advancement of technology (Casey, 2008).

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