



Chapter XII

**Commuting the ‘Distance’
of Distance Learning:
The Pepperdine Story**

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INTRODUCTION

A primary determinant of the success of an online distance learning program is its ability to develop a sense of community among its online participants. As a participant in the Pepperdine University Educational Technology Doctoral Program, we have firsthand knowledge and experience of the impact deliberate creation of community has on learning outcomes. A vehicle for the cultivation of this community can be found in principles of knowledge management.

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

This is the fourth cadre of students since Pepperdine University began offering a fully accredited doctoral program in educational technology in July 1995 (<http://moon.pepperdine.edu/gsep/programs/ET/>). The program features 60 percent face-to-face and 40 percent online instruction, although participants are the first to inform you that the 40 percent online in actuality translates to 80 percent when considering the number of hours actually logged on. Online instruction includes the use of Multi User Dimensions, online conferencing, newsgroups, and e-mail. Doctoral students in groups of

no more than 25 participate in this lock step program on the Culver City, CA campus. They meet for one week and two weekends each trimester for two years of coursework. This is followed by competency exams, after which the dissertation process is formally begun.

One intention of the Pepperdine Program is to develop a sense of community in our cadre. Joel and Michelle Levey in *From Chaos to Community at Work* describe the development of communities in three stages: De-facto Community, Intentional Community, and Generative Learning Community (1995). The de-facto community was achieved upon our acceptance into the EdTech program; we had not met and did not know each other, yet we still constituted an, albeit unconscious, community. The intentional community began to develop during our first experience with the program, Pepperdine University's "TechCamp." During TechCamp, an intentional effort was made by members of the previous three cadres to make our membership in the community explicit through initiation. Now and ever increasingly, we, as a cadre, are becoming a generative learning community; where we transform the EdTech program as much as it transforms us through the integration of new media and the creation and transfer of artifacts.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The deliberate attempt to cultivate a community of practice is grounded in the belief that knowledge generation can become self-perpetuating, and that members of the community can have legitimate access to this knowledge. Communities of practice are characterized by people engaged in common activity, dynamic roles of learner and leader, and legitimate peripheral participation; a constant movement from the periphery of the workgroup to active participation and subsequent emergent status as a knowledge member. The use of artifacts, such as knowledge and technology, and an understanding of how they significantly interact as a single learning process facilitate this movement. Our instructors apprentice us into the technological practice. The technological practice functions not as an end, but as a means toward economic, educational, and civic ends. This makes the shared goal of our EdTech community technological use, which is then interpreted and applied individually by students in the broad fields of practice of their current employment.

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