



Chapter XXIII

Enabling Electronic Teaching and Learning Communities with MERLOT

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Abstract

Educational institutions have made significant progress in enabling student success in distance learning by delivering academic programs utilizing course management systems, accessing electronic library resources, and through a wealth of student services that use help desks and campus portals. Enabling instructor success in researching and designing curricula for teaching in distance learning programs is an area where institutions still face significant challenges. This chapter presents a number of these challenges and describes how MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching), an international consortium, can facilitate successful teaching and learning with technology.

Introduction

Higher education has been undergoing a significant evolution that began in the 1990s, one that mirrors the transition corporations underwent almost 20 years earlier. That transition concerns changes of focus from information management to one of knowledge management (Frاند, 2000). Bonk and Cunningham (1998), who view this transition as being technology-driven, present their perspective on these changes:

“Daily advances in fiber optics, multimedia, and telecommuting technology continue to force new sectors of society to grapple with information access, transmission, and collaboration issues. In the midst of this social and technological drama, vast resources at our fingertips are restructuring the way we humans work, live, learn, and generally interact regardless of ‘geography, distance, resources, or disability’ (US Department of Labor, 1991). Technology is becoming increasingly interactive and distributed, such that individual learners have available, at rapidly declining cost, the means to participate in incredibly complex networks of information, resources, and instruction. For instance, Internet navigation and discovery tools like the World Wide Web (WWW) have brought to many of our desktops an immense array of text, video, sound, and communication resources unthinkable even 10 years ago.” (p. 26)

This chapter describes MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching), an international consortium organized for the purpose of facilitating through digital library technologies, successful online teaching and learning with technology in higher education. There is significant evidence of the dramatic effect of such technologies on higher education, particularly in online learning. In a recent survey of more than 3,000 degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States, Allan and Seaman (2003) report that:

- Over 1.6 million students took at least one online course during Fall 2002; over one-third of these students took all of their courses online; 11% took at least one online course.
- Eighty-one percent of all reporting institutions offer at least one fully online or blended course, and 34% offer an online degree program; 97% of public institutions offer at least one fully online or blended course, and 49% offer an online degree program.
- When asked about the role of online education for the future of their institution, 67% answered that it is a critical long-term strategy.
- A majority of academic leaders (57%) already believe that the learning outcomes for online education are equal to or superior to those of face-to-face instruction;

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