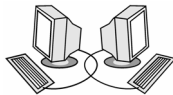


## Chapter I

# An Introduction to Designing and Delivering Courses and Programs at a Distance

with

James Buford, Jr., Ellis-Harper Management,  
Troy State University and Auburn University, USA



## Making Connections

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*Meeting the needs of today's learners requires instructors and administrators to rethink delivery strategies and instructional methods. Many organizations are turning to distance education, because of its effectiveness, to help learners develop and improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The fact that you are reading this book leads us to assume that you have several questions about designing and delivering distance courses and programs. Our own experiences, research, and education have guided us in writing this book. We continue to question "What are the best practices for distance education?" "How do I assess meaningful learning?" and "How do I actively engage learners?"*

## Introduction

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Distance education occurs when the instructor and learners are separated by location and/or time (Lindner & Murphy, 2001). This separation requires communication channels to bridge the “distance” between and among learners and instructors. This type of education is particularly appealing to learners whose responsibilities do not allow them to take advantage of traditional classroom or face-to-face training methods. Designing and delivering programs at a distance *is* different from face-to-face instruction, and those differences will serve as the focus of this book.

Distance education is not a new phenomenon. It was introduced in the United States in the late 1800s by correspondence study through the postal service, yet the theoretical foundations of distance education did not appear in scholarly writing until 1987 (Saba, 2003). The focus of this book is on distance education since the mid-1990s, when the integration of the World Wide Web and interactive video began to increase the visibility and usability of telecommunications through fiber optics, Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, and cable modems.

Many people use the terms “Internet” and “World Wide Web” interchangeably, but they are different. The Internet is a massive network of networks that connects computers together. The Internet is used for e-mail, newsgroups, and instant messaging. The Web is a way of accessing information over the Internet. The Web uses browsers to access documents using hyperlinks. Web documents contain graphics, sound, text, and video (Webopedia, 2002). Distance education, the Internet, and the World Wide Web have been defined operationally, but who are the distance learners involved, in what settings are they found, and where are growth areas expected?

## Distance Learners and Distance Learning Settings

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Who are distance learners? Typically, distance learners have been people who are adults with families, full- and part-time employees, living in rural areas, unable to afford full-time study, or military personnel. However, the fastest growing groups of distance learners are resident, on-campus students who

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