

Chapter 1.13

History of Distance Learning Professional Associations

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Most of the distance-learning professional associations were founded in the 1990s, at a time when most Internet backbone speeds were T1 or slower. Although scientists in universities, corporate, and military used the Internet for supercomputing capabilities, the predominant academic application was electronic mail. The public was generally unaware of the Internet's existence.

The explosive growth of information and telecommunications has combined to strengthen and diversify the options for school, skills development, technical and professional training, postsecondary credit courses, and special interests. New associations are established everyday to promote innovative educational strategies, as well as ways to leverage technology to provide new ways

of learning online. Each strategy suggested has some measure of support among the professional associations' participants, and represents a way to improve opportunities for distance education, and training:

1. Developing strategic alliances to support and encourage project-oriented coalitions amongst members as the need and opportunity arise.
2. Recommending standards of quality
3. Institution promotion under a common logo within the region and beyond
4. Identifying support markets that are currently unserved.
5. Sharing technological and human resources for development and delivery
6. Conducting applied research and development of distance-education technology and instructional design.

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7. Developing and maintaining a system to provide a central source of current and relevant information on courses and programs, the credit transfer system, and student assistance programs.

MAIN FOCUS: DISTANCE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

North America

United States

In the U.S., the Director of the Office of Educational Technology in the Office of the Secretary for the U.S. Department of Education is responsible for coordinating programs and policies on virtual education and e-learning, the National Education Technology Plan, Technical Assistance Grants under Enhancing Education Through Technology, and the use of technology to further the mission of the Department and the No Child Left Behind Act (2006).

Founded in 1987, FARNET, the Federation of American Research Networks, was a primary information source for the government and industry during the preprivatization days of the Internet. FARNET's original mission was to coordinate regional and backbone high-speed networks, to promote the general advancement of science and education by assisting in the interchange of information and research using high-speed communication.

Later on, FARNET developed into a forum for state networks to share information. Beginning in the early 1990s, FARNET hosted a series of workshops discussing how the National Information Infrastructure (NII) and the Internet might impact the public sector, including healthcare, libraries, and K-12 education.

In 1995, FARNET opened a policy office in Washington, D.C. to monitor the regulatory environment and communicated developments back

to its membership via an e-mail newsletter called "FARNET'S Washington Update."

In 1996, FARNET received an NSF award to build a clearinghouse for tracking information infrastructure development on a state-by-state basis. The purpose of the States Inventory Project (located at <http://www.states.org/>) is to promote the exchange of information among state and local policymakers so that states may develop their own information infrastructures more efficiently. The State Inventory Project clearinghouse currently has over 4,000 entries in its database, divided into nearly 100 categories for each state, territory, and province.

One of the early associations, the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI, <http://www.cni.org/timeline.html>), was founded in 1990 by the library and information technology communities to enhance scholarship and intellectual productivity. At the end of its first year, CNI has 118 member institutions. In the early years, on their meeting agenda were contemporary issues such as economics of information, Rights for Electronic Access and Delivery of Information (READI) project, Elsevier TULIP Project (one of the earliest examples of instrumented large-scale experiments in electronic journal delivery), Wide Area Information Servers (WAIS), introduction of Gopher (an early tool to find and retrieve directories of information on the Internet), Electronic Theses and Dissertations, and the demonstration of NCSA's Mosaic, the first graphical Web browser.

In 1996, CNI cosponsored a conference, Networked Information in an International Context, with the UK Joint Information Systems Committee, the British Library, CAUSE and the First ACM International Conference on Research and Development in Digital Libraries. As the result of the conference, the Internet 2 Project was launched. CNI was represented on the Applications Council to launch the Internet 2 Project, and worked closely with this effort to help identify advanced networking applications. These associations together facilitated the starting plans of Internet 2,

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