Three Principles of Distance Education

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In one of my academic homes at the University of Hawai'i, the *Globalization Research Center*, we are trying to gain a better understanding of the ways in which new technologies and ways of organizing learning across the globe have been transformed in the last five to eight years and, more importantly, we are seeking to get a sense of how they will be transforming in the next five to eight years. We are deeply concerned about the implications of the digital divide that creates social and economic inequities between those who have access to these technologies and those who do not. These issues and concerns provide a context for thinking about distance education and its role within the University of Hawai'i as I have come to think about it. Clearly we have much to gain by using distance education as a way of maximizing the potential of the University of Hawai'i. To say the obvious, we are a university system of three different levels, ten different campuses spread across an archipelago. We are separated by distance in ways that other universities are not, and it is absolutely crucial that we work together through distance education.

We want distance education to assist us in responding to changes in technology, to changes in the marketplace and, more importantly, to assist us in creating opportunities and fulfilling the increasing demands of our students for different kinds of services from the university.

I would like to suggest three principles that have arisen during our conversations about distance education at the University of Hawai'i. The first is the principle of multiple modalities. By modalities I mean not only the techniques but also the aesthetics and qualifying practices of distance education. We need to make use of the university in terms of its many distance education capacities in both synchronous learning and asynchronous learning, and promote the whole range of opportunities in wired and wireless communications.

Secondly, we want to ensure that distance education is neither independent nor in competition with traditional, campus-based classroom pedagogical techniques and orientations. Rather, new technologies offer new ways to be active in the world, to be in communication with each other, and to be engaged in instructional activities. They complement and enhance those kinds of classroom activities that we have engaged in rather than replacing them.

Thirdly, we want to seek ways to create virtual communities of distance learners and tie them to those non-virtual communities that constitute the core of the University. We want to use technology to make education more convenient and to enhance the quality of the educational experience. The essential component in achieving convenience and quality education for students and for the rest of us will be to integrate it and link it to a newly designed and implemented student information system. This system will link students and support services in a cooperative and convenient way throughout the system.

Although the definition of distance learning is "technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance," we must remember that the distances we are referring to could be across the globe or across the street; distances that can be spanned in real-time or asynchronously. It might even be a combination of real-time and asynchronous instruction. Once again, I want to emphasize the fact that in a highly complex university such as ours, we need to make use of all of the modalities of distance education and seek to use them cooperatively.

I think it is clearly the case that the new technologies that are under development will continue to bring us new opportunities. It is the University of Hawai'i's opportunity and obligation to utilize these technologies to leap across boundaries and borders–to find ourselves in new pedagogical relationships with prospective students and other educational partners. The University of Hawai'i, as we all know, is an institution with a core commitment to developing its role as an international university, and particularly to expanding its links to Asia and the Pacific. It is obviously the case that new technologies will help grow new relationships with our partners already in the Pacific and partners yet to be identified. As with all complex endeavors, it is inevitable that there will be differences in ideas about where we need to go and how to get there. It is important, therefore, that our

efforts be cooperative. By working together, our goals will be achieved with greater efficiency and our differences will produce a stronger and more effective set of solutions. Our aim should be to seek a more complete articulation of what our common vision is in distance education.

At the *Globalization Research Center*, we often speak of distance education as a rapidly moving target, and I think that is the same for us institutionally. I hope that our continued efforts will lead us to a vision for distance education that works for the University of Hawai'i as a whole.

Since July of 2001 to May 2002, I have had the opportunity to move around the University in a dual capacity as Interim Chancellor and Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs. I have been absolutely astonished at the range of capabilities of my colleagues at the University in a variety of disciplines and modes. Distance education, as it is currently evolving, has a certain quality of entrepreneurialism and individual initiative attached to it that is exciting. It also offers exciting opportunities for collaboration that will foster a greater appreciation of the work of our colleagues, both in terms of the range and quality of their expertise. Occasions for collaboration will become a locus for new synergies to develop. Part of our challenge, then, will be to find ways to inform and instruct each other about the sorts of projects that we are developing and to seek ways to collaborate.

I hope that we can develop a greater clarity about the processes that can be used to bring the multiple modalities and technologies and people together to focus on the task of furthering distance education. We do not always work together successfully as a group of administrative units, nor as a bureaucracy. We should therefore seek to create efficient administrative routines for engaging in these efforts that are transparent to our students and allow us to work together cooperatively and collectively.

I hope that through these efforts we can gain a greater appreciation of the difficulty and complexity of the work that lies ahead; not to stand as barriers to the achievements that we seek, but to allow us to be realistic about the level of our endeavors and the commitments that we will have to make to fulfill them.

Clearly we need to work with the entire faculty to support funding initiatives and to help coordinate efforts at Mānoa and system wide. We also need to

work together to redefine the qualifications and incentives that support individuals and programs that seek to use these technologies to enhance teaching and learning. We hope to be able to provide support in identifying the students who need these technologies to complete their coursework in a timely and effective manner at the University of Hawai'i.

Remember that this is a collective endeavor that will require everyone's cooperation and participation over the next several years. I pledge my commitment to create opportunities for productive conversations that will allow us to see the full potential of distance education and to gain those realizations among ourselves. This issue of *Educational Perspectives* offers one such forum for what we hope will become an evolving conversation on the subject of distance education.

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