



IN-DEPTH //
DISTANCE LEARNING



DISTANCE LEARNING'S MOMENT

More choices, better outcomes and new economic realities are driving the expansion of online learning. By Michael Lotti

“**A**fter the industrial revolution, we went to school. In the communications age, school will increasingly come to us,” says Andy DiPaolo, executive director of the Stanford Center for Professional Development at Stanford University.

DiPaolo would know. He oversees a program with more than 4,000 online learners, and he has seen firsthand how technology has not only made distance learning possible but better. “On-line instruction used to be a backwater,” he says. “Now it’s front and center in higher education.”

In the fall of 2009, the Sloan Consortium, an organization that is dedicated to integrating online education into the mainstream of higher education, found that more than 5.6 million students (or nearly 30 percent) took at least one online class. That was an increase of nearly 1 million students over the previous year. And the number has certainly grown since then.

What explains this trend? The answer is simple:

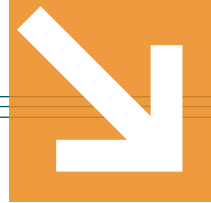
Online education works. It’s better and more pervasive than it has ever been. And for both students and schools it makes economic sense.

Lots of Choices, Less Stigma

The rapid advance of communications technology has certainly played a role. Skype-based seminars and live Q and As are normal features of today’s online courses. Chat rooms and email make it easy for students and professors to participate in discussions and to pass assignments back and forth. Ray Schroeder, director of the Center for Online Learning, Research and Service at the University of Illinois at Springfield, says that when he teaches online, there is an enormous amount of interaction.

“On the average, I have about 100 exchanges per student over the course of the semester,





“We don’t distinguish between online and residential degrees on our diplomas because they are, in fact, the same.”

—Susan E. Metros



which is more than I would have in a traditional classroom,” he says.

It should come as no surprise then that the stigma that was once attached to distance learning—that it isn’t a “real” in-the-classroom education—is all but gone. “A master’s degree from the University of Southern California is a master’s degree from the University of Southern California,” says Susan E. Metros, the university’s associate vice provost of technology-enhanced learning. “We don’t distinguish between online and residential degrees on our diplomas because they are, in fact, the same.”

What’s different, of course, is that online courses can be taken from any place and at just about any time. That naturally attracts a certain type of student. “The average online student pursuing a master’s degree or professional

certification is a 35-year-old midcareer professional,” says Schroeder. “That person can’t stop working to go back to school, so an online program makes perfect sense.”

“These people are on the go all the time,” echoes DiPaolo. “But if they have mobile internet access, they can do coursework from home, from work, a coffee shop, an airline flight or an oil platform.”

Online classes for the sake of a degree or continuing professional education are still the sweet spot for distance learning, but “learning for learning’s sake” courses are becoming more common. The Knowledge Network is one example. Operated by *The New York Times* and several partner universities (including Stanford, the University of Chicago and Ball State), it offers seminars, one-day tutorials and more extensive courses for the interested adult.

“We’re trying to offer more material for the proverbial man on the street, with some of it driven by current events,” says Eileen Kohan, associate provost

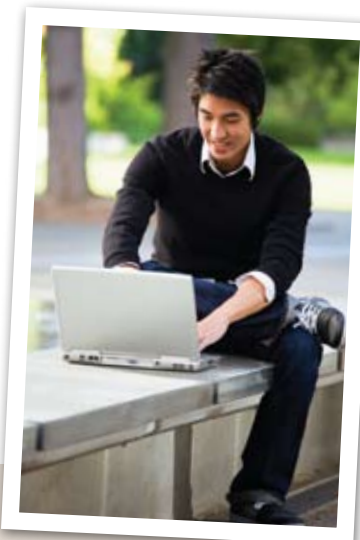


PHOTO: EARL WILSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (BRYANT)

and executive director of continuing education at the University of Southern California. For example, USC offered, in partnership with the Knowledge Network, a week-long course devoted to the global rise of noncommunicable diseases that coincided with the United Nations Summit.

Of course, for more traditional degree programs, there will always be a place for on-campus studies. “Especially for undergraduate students,” says Eric L. Richards, chair of Kelley Direct Public Programs at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. “Successful online learning takes a high level of discipline and commitment, and that’s more common among adult working professionals.”

Online Learning Is the Future

Many believe that economic realities will continue to drive the expansion of distance learning at nearly all levels.

“The lack of space combined with shrinking federal and state dollars will make more colleges and universities offer full on-line and in-person/online hybrid courses,” predicts Schroeder. “In addition, more students than ever have to work while attending undergraduate or graduate classes, and they will figure out that taking online courses on a part-time basis is much, much cheaper—and more convenient—than paying full-time tuition and residence costs.”

The success of distance learning is also driving its expansion. “We’ve opened up a supermarket,” says DiPaolo. “More and more students expect to choose when and where they want to learn. Universities have to adapt.” He adds that as mobile devices become better at “learning” their users’ preferences, “everyone in a 30-person class will master the material differently.” And the universities that don’t make materials mobile friendly will be left behind.

The easy shareability of information is also opening up new partnerships in education and new

ENDORSEMENT: Virginia Tech’s Master’s Degree in Information Technology

Endorsee: Tobi McFarland, Silver Spring, Maryland



“The online master’s in information technology is very similar to participating in a traditional classroom-based program. Professors routinely call on students and the coursework is demanding. However, the program offered some distinct advantages as I was able to participate in class from home or while traveling. I also gained experience collaborating in group assignments with students from all over the world. The skills I attained have better prepared me for the workplace of the future, one in which co-workers may sit next to each other or may be in different parts of the world entirely.”



Did You Know?

Sixty-three percent of higher education institutions consider online learning critical to their long-term strategy.

He’s a Journalist. No, He’s a Teacher!

Online learning opens up opportunities for teaching, too.



Adam Bryant

In a virtual classroom, you can discuss the issues of the day with students from Alaska, Texas and London—and a “teacher” from *The New York Times*.

Since early 2009, journalist Adam Bryant has been interviewing CEOs for his “Corner Office” column in the Sunday business section of *The New York Times*. He recently collected insights from more

than 70 interviews into a book.

When Bryant was approached to lead an online seminar for The New York Times Knowledge Network, “it didn’t take much convincing to get me to do it,” he says. “It seemed like a great opportunity to interact with people. I always look forward to hearing people’s questions on the universal themes of leadership and management.”

It turned out to be a wise decision. “Writing is one thing, but the real magic is in the discussions I have. That’s why the webinar was such a rich experience. I’m used to getting good questions from readers, so it says something that I was pleasantly surprised by the interaction I experienced online.”

And thus a teacher was born. Bryant will lead his second webinar for the Knowledge Network in November.

Alexandra Pickett, associate director of the SUNY Learning Network, regularly uses outside experts when she teaches online. “You can blur the walls of the classroom and invite the rock stars of a profession in,” she says. It’s a chance for working professionals to share their expertise (either live or prerecorded) without having to become full-time professors or travel to a campus.

The accessibility and convenience of distance learning, in other words, is turning many potential teachers into the real thing. // —M. L.

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ways to gain educational credentials. The Knowledge Network and USC have shared resources to create and improve dozens of online courses. Along similar lines, Open Education Resource University, formed by colleges and universities around the world, seeks to grant academic credit to those who can pass credentialed assessments.

“Most of MIT’s lectures and

“We’ve opened up a supermarket. More and more students expect to choose when and where they want to learn. Universities have to adapt.” —Andy DiPaolo




materials are available for free online,” says Schroeder. “If you can master the material for Physics 101 from that, why not get academic credit?” Schroeder quotes distance learning expert and Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen when he calls online education “a disruptive force.”

“It is forcing everyone to re-think higher education,” he says. And that, Schroeder believes, is a good thing. “At its root, online learning is about providing more people with access to high-quality education. That’s why I’m so passionate about it.” //

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- ➔ **When Everything Changed**
The New York Times Knowledge Network (nytimes.com/knowledge) Self-paced, rolling admission
Op-ed columnist Gail Collins traces the dramatic changes—and unresolved issues—that have shaped American women in the last 50 years.
- ➔ **How to Listen to Classical Music**
The New York Times Knowledge Network (nytimes.com/knowledge) Oct. 26–Nov. 15
Classical music reporter Daniel J. Watkin helps listeners identify and understand what they most enjoy about classical music.
- ➔ **Building an ePortfolio: Using Technology to Achieve Success in Your Job Search**
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LONG-DISTANCE LEARNERS

Three happy, successful alums of online graduate programs reflect on the rewards and challenges of distance learning. Interviewed by Michael Lotti



JESSE CLARKE

HOME: Berkeley, California
DEGREE: Master's in Engineering, Purdue University
CURRENT JOB: Self-employed project management consultant

California without a hitch. Purdue also gave me credit for online classes I took at Stanford for a certificate in design.

WHAT IT WAS LIKE: My classmates gave me a much wider perspective on engineering. A few were studying from overseas, and the rest were from throughout the United States and involved in dozens of industries. I experienced a level of learning beyond textbooks, lectures and papers and got a sense for the new kinds of skills engineers need in order to be successful. Engineers of 2020 will be a lot different from engineers of 2000.

ADVICE: Distance learning is a great option for people working full time, but you have to make sure your life can absorb the extra commitment, and you need to be self-directed and motivated. I recommend reaching out to professors, teaching assistants, advisers and fellow students right away. It was a lot easier to get help online or over the phone when a connection had already been established.

WHY ONLINE: I knew a master's degree would help me advance in my profession. I just needed a program that gave me flexibility while I worked full time.

PICKING A PROGRAM: Purdue was an easy choice because my employer at the time had an agreement with the university to cover some of the tuition. I also wanted a degree from a nationally recognized engineering program, and Purdue allowed me to work school into my life. There was no problem when I took a year off to travel and move. I started the program in Michigan and ended it in



JOE CARTER

HOME: Emmetsburg, Iowa
DEGREE: Master's in Educational Leadership, University of Iowa
CURRENT JOB: Principal, West Elementary School

WHY ONLINE: Distance learning gave me an opportunity that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I had taught for nine years and I wanted the chance to move into administration. But my wife and I have three young children, and we wanted to raise them in Emmetsburg and stay in this school district. We're more than 100 miles from the nearest university, so a residential program wasn't an option.

WHAT IT WAS LIKE: The University of Iowa program allowed me to continue working and do all my clinical work in the Emmetsburg school district. I worked closely with a lot of local principals, and one of my professors actually traveled to Emmetsburg to evaluate my work. Also the program was highly interactive. In fact, I would say that the students in the program interacted with each other and with the professors even more than they would have in a traditional classroom setting. Conversations were always happening, both during and outside of class sessions.

PAYOFF: The program prepared me to step into a leadership role. I was a middle school teacher who had some

administrative experience, but now I know a tremendous amount about budgets, communications, early childhood education, special education and public school systems in general. The professors were great. They had a lot of administrative experience, and most of them were either current or former principals.

ADVICE: The program has had a hugely positive impact on my life, so of course I would recommend it. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Don't be scared of online learning or of all the technology, and don't think that you'll be doing a bunch of busy work alone. It will be a wonderful experience that will prepare you for what lies ahead.

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NANCY CHENG

HOME: Milpitas, California

DEGREE: Master's in Electrical Engineering, Stanford University

CURRENT JOB: Engineering Manager with Intel Corporation

WHY ONLINE: I always wanted a master's degree. I wanted deeper and broader knowledge of my field, and, of course, I knew that it was necessary for professional advancement. It's true that convenience was a huge factor in choosing to do distance learning. I didn't have to drive to campus except to take exams; professors held office hours on nights and weekends; and the technology was very accessible.

WHAT IT WAS LIKE: My company, Intel, was very supportive. They covered all the costs of my degree. They had worked with Stanford for a long time. In fact, some course lectures were simulcast at my workplace.

LOOKING BACK: Getting the degree was a valuable experience. I say that even though my current focus at work [as a validation engineer] wasn't the same subfield I studied at Stanford [circuit design]. I was exposed to a lot of different topics. Working full time while taking classes also taught me how to perform well under pressure.

ADVICE: A good distance learning experience requires two things: A great school like Stanford and also exceptional discipline and commitment on the student's part. About the school, I would ask: How convenient is the program? Does it pay attention to the needs of the student? About oneself, I would ask: Do I have the dedication to do this? Some people need to be forced to go to a classroom to get their work done and that just won't work with a distance learning program. //

Up-Close // Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University



Becky Vasquez, chief technology officer of the Worldwide Campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, on the rewards of online learning.

How long has Embry-Riddle offered online courses?

The first time we used Web-based bulletin boards was in 1993. We have been doing asynchronous learning online fully since 1998. In 2007 we started the live virtual classroom, the synchronous learning platform.

Describe the virtual classroom.

We call it EagleVision. Essentially it's a Web video conferencing platform we integrate with our learning management system. It has whiteboarding and emoticons, so even if students aren't speaking they can use emoticons to interact. There's app sharing and instructors can send students to breakout rooms to do a group project.

What are the benefits?

It has helped us offer more classes. It helps with retention because students have more choices. It also helps us internally because we have more than 150 locations around the world, and with that comes a lot of opportunity, but challenges, too. We can do training sessions on the platform and use it for meetings.

Where is technology headed next?

We can take our online courses to the next level with virtual labs, where we replicate engineering labs, safety crash labs and physics labs. //

—Madeleine Hill

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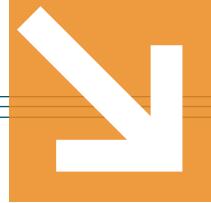
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To foster learning on the job, companies are going with the technological flow. By Dan Heilman

It wasn't long ago that training was a dreary, regimented, all-day affair conducted in cramped conference rooms and highlighted by a box of doughnuts and a pitcher of ice water. Over the past few years, all that has changed—and will continue to change—as the breakneck pace of technological innovation continues to

make inroads in the workplace. Taking its cue from increasingly popular “on-demand” technology, training is morphing into something consumed when, where and how workers want it. Companies are employing social media, on-demand video, gaming and omnipresent mobile devices, and this trend toward ease of use and accessibility shows no signs of slowing.

What's Changed

There are a number of reasons for the sudden shift in training styles, but an important one involves simply bringing the technological moun-

tain to Mohammed: Workers use social media and play games during office downtime, so why not enlist those tools to teach? “A lot of these tools have long been in organizations,” says Jason Corsello, vice president of corporate development and strategy for Santa Monica-based Cornerstone OnDemand. “Their use just hasn't been endorsed by HR and IT departments for business purposes until now.”

Another motive: It tells younger workers especially: We are on your side. “It sends the signal: ‘We're not always going to fall back on the old ways. We're on the lookout for new and better ways of doing things,’” says Brad Karsh, president of JB Training Solutions, which has worked with clients such as Target and Dick's Sporting Goods. “It's a signal that they are not content with the status quo.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Workers are tapped into Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Yammer during the day, whether employers like it or not. As a result, some companies take the if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them route by incorporating these applications, or variations on them, into training.

Canadian telecom giant Telus created Telus Buzz, its own internal version of Twitter, to allow its 35,000 worldwide employees to teach each other in small bites over the course of the workday. “People use Telus Buzz to share links, ideas, whatever little nuggets they come across that they think might educate their colleagues,” says Dan Pontefract, senior director-head of learning and collaboration.

GAMING

“Gaming is so mainstream now,” says e-learning consultant Clark Quinn. “A meaningful game—one that gives people context, motivation and real challenges—can have real impact on your training.”

Regis Learning Systems helped one major company load market data, global conditions and company reports into a computerized simulation engine that would

Fast Facts // Corporate Training

Nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of the spending on learning outsourcing goes to the development and delivery of instructor-led programs.

Large companies spent nearly **\$250,000** on learning tools and technology in 2010.

Business services and consulting companies spend the highest percentage of their training dollars (**14%**) on learning technology. The insurance industry spends the lowest (**5%**).

Training Spending: Where Is Your Money Going? Bersin & Associates/Karen O'Leonard, April 21, 2011

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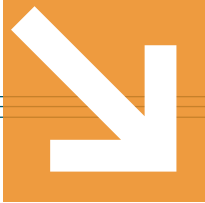
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change based on business decisions, market dynamics and other factors, creating scenarios in which groups of district managers “competed” against one another to see who could most efficiently run their district.

MOBILE DEVICES

Hilton Worldwide furnishes managers with iPads loaded with training materials—everything from webinars to interactive service-training video tutorials that demonstrate how to properly greet guests. Via internal networks, numerous other companies are making training materials available for employees to view on their smartphones. “It’s not always about building a whole training course that can be consumed via a mobile device,” Quinn says. “It’s about building a community full of knowledge and letting people tap into it.”

ON-DEMAND VIDEO

The restaurant chain The Cheesecake Factory posts video on its intranet, providing instant, bite-sized training for store managers. Multinational food service provider Sodexo partners with “virtual events” company On24 to create online curriculums accessible on demand to its thousands of decentralized workers. “Participation has grown each year we’ve used this platform,” says Michele Suprunowicz, senior director of training and development with Sodexo Education. “It has let us bring training to the people who need it in an efficient manner.”



Sodexo workers access training through a simulated lobby designed to replicate a large meeting hall or convention center.

INTERNAL APPLICATIONS

Some companies create their own in-house training tools, such as Telus Tube, Telus’ internal YouTube. “If someone has an idea or wants to share a customer experience they want feedback on, they can use their webcam or Flip cam to make a quick clip,” says Pontefract. “People can rate it, comment on it and link to it.” Pontefract has witnessed a sea change in how corporations view training. “When I joined the company, they had the classic philosophy that training is an event that occurs in a classroom,” he says. “I’ve tried to bring in the idea that learning is a continual, connected and collaborative process. Learning happens when you make contacts before and after a class. In fact, it happens whether there’s any class or not.”

What’s Next

All signs point to training becoming increasingly portable. “Mobile applications are an area where we’ll see lots of growth,” says Pat Galagan, executive editor for the American Society for Training and Development. “People have the technology and are comfortable with it. The idea of developing apps for training is a no-brainer.”

Also look for more gaming. “Academic papers and industry studies already show that massively multiplayer games are great for innovation and for learning leadership and collaboration skills,” Galagan says.

The challenge, says Corsello, is pushing change-averse corporate bosses into this brave new world. “They will need to balance their concerns about security and information flow with the fact that these tools really can make employees more productive.” //

PHOTO: COURTESY ON24



How receptive are companies to using mobile devices for training?

CONSIDERING IT:

40.7%

IN DEVELOPMENT:

10.1%

USING IT:

15%

NO PLANS TO USE IT:

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Up-Close //

TechSmith



Matt Pierce
is customer engagement manager for TechSmith, which creates software used in workplace training.

We asked for his take on how training has changed.

What trends are shaping training?

Training used to be very expensive, tens of thousands of dollars. Now you can create a training program yourself relatively inexpensively. Also, you're not going to learn everything in the classroom or everything online. It's going to be blended.

Where is technology headed?

Mobile access is huge. More people are accessing more things while not at their desk. We recently released an app called ScreenChomp. Think of it as a digital whiteboard where you can record audio as you're writing or drawing and include a background image. In my last job at a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant, we often talked about the flow of a water purification system. I can imagine diagramming that with my subject-matter expertise and having that diagram as the background picture as he draws through the process.

How else is TechSmith software used in training?

A lot of it helps create content. Snagit, for example, is used to create screen captures. Camtasia Studio is used in many ways and one is to record videos. So if you're doing a PowerPoint presentation, you can capture it and show it again if someone wants to review the content. // —Andre Eggert