BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Learning, Culture and Community in Online Education: Research and Practice
Caroline Haythornthwaite and Michelle M. Kazmer (Eds.)
Peter Lang

The cover of Haythornthwaite and Kazmer's edited collection, showing a tree-lined gravel road running off to a distant horizon, evokes the pathway to knowledge that is now available to learners for whom distance education is their only connection to formal learning. The collection itself, a series of 17 articles by faculty, administrators, librarians, and others involved in the development and implementation of the Library Education Experimental Project (LEEP), serves as a model for innovative research and practice in distance learning. This soft-cover text, Volume 21 of the Digital Formations series published by Peter Lang, is not only clean in its design and beautifully edited, but also includes detailed notes and references for each chapter—aiding both the cover-to-cover reader and those individuals interested only in reading selections from the full text. Although the collection lacks an index (particularly frustrating given the breadth of topics included), detailed biographical notes for each author and an extensive bibliography of additional readings are useful additions to the text.

As Amy Bruckman notes in the Foreword to this collection, the quality of online education varies widely, and yet "the very best practitioners … are often too busy practicing to be able to distill that experience for the benefit of others" (p. x). This collection, then, presents essays by some of those "very best practitioners" as they reflect on their experiences as educators, administrators, and support personnel working with one particularly successful online degree program. LEEP, first implemented in 1996 at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, allows individuals across the United States and in other countries to complete a master's degree in library and information science via a number of Web-based technologies. The distance component of the program is supplemented by two on-campus requirements, an initial two-week "boot camp" session and one-week mid-semester sessions in every course (p. xvii). The program boasts a student retention rate of 95% and received the Sloan Consortium Award

for Most Outstanding Asynchronous Learning Network Program in 2001 (p. xiv). As the editors describe in the Introduction to the text, the LEEP program has been evaluated for its pedagogical and online practices since its inception; however, this collection represents a first attempt to gather a broad range of research and practical perspectives on the day-to-day workings of the program. The result is a varied and insightful collection of articles that are highly reflective and examine the core decisions, issues, problems, and joys involved in building effective online learning communities.

The articles included in this collection examine technical, social, administrative, pedagogical, and other issues involved in developing a vibrant culture for online learning. The first section, "Education Online," explores pedagogical issues in the virtual environment. Nicholas C. Burbules examines the advantages and disadvantages of online instruction using the metaphor of navigation to examine pathways to learning in Web-based contexts. Bertram C. Bruce's article draws on ecological psychology's concept of *affordances* to examine the pros and cons of anywhere/anytime learning. The next four articles are connected by their focus on "Exploring Community" and address the problems of time, technology, and the social connections that separate online from traditional classroom learning experiences. Betsy Hearne and Anna L. Nielsen, for example, discuss their research that gathered and analyzed students' stories from a folkloric perspective, demonstrating LEEP's value as an authentic social community.

The third section of the book presents "New Challenges and New Features in Online Settings," with four articles that examine various modes of interaction in Web-based environments. Jennifer Robins, for example, explores the educational, ritual, technological, and administrative structures of the LEEP program and connects the notions of physical and virtual space to students' social navigation through the program. Section four, entitled "Teaching and Learning Online," presents some of the in-the-trenches views on making distance education work, including Rae-Anne Montague and Linda C. Smith's account of "Faculty Perspectives" on the rewards and challenges of virtual teaching. The last section of the book examines issues related to "Management and Administration," and is perhaps that most useful section of all, as it is rare to find such a behind-the-scenes discussion of program planning and development. Susan E. Searing's article, for example, provides an illuminating glimpse of students' experiences in accessing academic library resources while studying at a distance.

Although the articles are clearly grounded in their discussions of the LEEP program, this volume is particularly useful in that the examples provided and the lessons learned are intended to speak across disciplines and across institutional environments. Educators, librarians, adminis-

trators, and others involved in the design and maintenance of online programs will find this text useful in its discussion of pedagogical practice and in its philosophical explorations of virtual communities of learning. The balance of practice and research in this text—where the reader can examine best practices alongside in-depth analyses of those practices—makes this a unique collection that provides an holistic view of the challenges and successes that have defined LEEP over the past decade. This book is highly recommended for individuals teaching in and evaluating existing online programs and for those who are just starting out on the journey to build new pathways to virtual education.

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