Distance Learning in Higher Education by Alfred Rovai, Michael Ponton & Jason Baker, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2008, 212 pp.)

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This book is subtitled "A Programmatic Approach to Planning, Design, Instruction, Evaluation, and Accreditation" and its three authors from the Teachers College at Columbia University aptly highlight their individual areas of expertise. The book itself is comprised of eleven chapters and three appendices with numerous checklists and examples, a glossary, a section of references and an index. As such it has been labeled a resource for anyone seeking to design and implement a distance learning program, as per the press release that accompanied the book.

The eleven chapters deal with such topics as "Concepts of Distance Learning", "Strategic Planning", "Program and Course Design", "Program Evaluation" and 'Institution and Program Accreditation." Further chapters deal with discussions surrounding "Gender", "Culture", "Assessment of Student Learning", "Online Discussions" and "Course Evaluation". The content could, therefore, have been grouped thematically, and perhaps separated into two sections, which might have made the book more effective, since the chapters either deal in great detail with what one has to consider to create an effective online learning environment for both student and instructor, or how the institution's organizational structure and strategic plan can reinforce (not introduce!) an apparently already existing commitment to distance education. Contrary to this reader's expectation, the authors seem to predominately work with the assumption that parameters for a distance education program already exist within the framework of a traditional not-for-profit institution of higher education, thereby reducing the various ideas and checklists they present in the various chapters devoted to strategic planning to a measuring stick instead of a guide.

Overall, the authors define the focus of this publication in the opening chapter as follows, "The purpose of this book is to inform distance educators and administrators of the salient issues that affect the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of successful online learning environments." (15) Coupled with the slimness of this volume, the book, therefore, provides more of an overview, rather than an in-depth examination, of the various issues identified. The final "Summary and

Conclusion" chapter summarizes the main ideas discussed in each chapter and concludes with the statements, "Distance learning must be backed by an organizational commitment to quality and institutional effectiveness in all aspects of the learning environment. Commercial interests must not take precedence over quality assurance." (163) These statements only serve to reinforce the knowledge with which current distance education administrators currently navigate the administrative processes within their respective institutions. It should also be stated here that the authors appear to equate distance education with online learning throughout the various discussions in the book and, thus, most of the material presented is geared towards the various considerations of the creation of an online personae for both student and instructor (i.e., gender, culture, online discussions). To ensure that their suggested applications are relevant and timely, the authors preface the practical discussions with current research into the application of technology in education and strategic planning, as is also evidenced by the comprehensive references section.

In conclusion, this book would serve as a quick read and starting point for anyone commencing their reading into the subject areas of strategic planning and the evaluation of a distance education program, which consists of online education. Reading it from the perspective of a senior program manager of the distance education program in a dual-mode university in Canada, however, I found the contents of the book to be more reaffirming of our current practices instead of illuminating and motivating. While the book is written in clear and concise wording, it is nevertheless also narrowly geared to professionals working at universities and colleges in the United States and therefore any governmental policy issues discussed would have to be culturally translated by readers from other countries.

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