INTERNET RESOURCES

Distance education

Delivering instruction in cyberspace

by Michael Lorenzen

Perhaps more than any other field, distance education has been remade with the advent of the Internet and the Web. Once entirely in the domain of correspondence courses, distance education is now the trend in education, with institutions at all levels providing instruction to remote and local users through the use of computers and the Web. The Internet has made it possible for teachers to provide their instruction to mass audiences at the same time an institution makes university information and resources available to paying students online.

Institutions of education worldwide are rushing to become "virtual" universities. Dozens of new institutions are coming online with distance education programs every month. The new Western Governors University is an institution created to be online entirely. With this rush to cyberspace, an old bane of higher education has reemerged with new strength. Diploma mills are cleverly copying these legitimate virtual universities and using the tools of distance education to sell students worthless degrees. Online resources to fight these new diploma mills are also going up at a fast pace.

While most of the distance education push is coming from colleges and universities, private companies and K–12 schools are also getting involved. Further, many institutes and organizations are being created to further the aims of distance education. Many electronic journals and discussion groups are being made available to educators using distance education. While the constant exponential increase in distance education resources makes it impossible to cover all sites, the resources listed here should help anyone seeking information on distance education find several good starting points.

Best starting points

The following sites are good places to begin finding information on distance education.

- **Distance Education: A Primer.** This excellent site from the University of Texas has an overview of what distance education is and what some of the issues dealing with distance education are. There is a list of model programs, as well as a good glossary of distance education terminology. *Access:* http://www.utexas.edu/cc/cit/de/deprimer/index.html.

- **Distance Learning on the Net.** In addition to a listing of links to distance education sites, a list of upcoming events and conferences in distance education is at this site. The very well done Distance Education Resources Database is here, as well. *Access:* http://homepage.interaccess.com/~ghoyle/.

- **Distance Education Links.** This page at the University of Minnesota has a list of distance education sites. This is not a comprehensive list, but it does include the better and more stable sites that are on the Web. *Access:* http://www.cee.umn.edu/disted/AI/delinks.html.

- **Al Lepine's Higher Education and Distance Learning Site.** In addition to the list of distance education links, this site has information that students would find useful, such as financial aid forms and a scholarship

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search engine. A discussion board for distance learning is also at this site. *Access:* http://members.tripod.com/~lepine/index.html.

• **Adult Distance Education Internet Surf Shack.** This resource has a link to virtual universities, virtual high schools, and individual courses online. The courses are arranged by subject. Other clearinghouses and newsgroups are listed. *Access:* http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jmtaylor/edsurf.htm.

Discussion groups

There are many discussion lists for those interested in distance education. This is a selective list of available sites.

• **DEOS-L.** Listserv of the American Center for the Study of Distance Education at Penn State University, this is by far the busiest and most important discussion group on distance education on the Internet. *Subscribe:* listserv@psu.edu.

• **AEDNET.** This is a forum for the discussion of issues dealing with adult education, including distance education issues. *Subscribe:* listserv@alpha.acast.nova.edu.

• **ASDEN.** While the Australian Schools of Distance Education (K–12) listserv focuses on Australia, discussions frequently include participants from around the world. *Subscribe:* majordomo@cleo.murdoch.edu.au.

• **DISTED.** Distance Education listserv is similar to DEOS-L with more emphasis on nonhigher education issues in distance education. *Subscribe:* listserv@uwavm.bitnet.

• **EDISTA.** This is another general discussion group on distance education. However, the language used is Spanish. *Subscribe:* listserv@usachvm1.bitnet.

• **EDU-ONLINE.** For professionals delivering education and training through the Internet. *Subscribe:* join-edu-online@sparklist.com.

• **OCC-L.** Online-College Classroom discussion group for those planning to teach college courses online. *Subscribe:* listproc@hawaii.edu.

Newsgroups/usenets

There are several good newsgroups that deal with distance education.

• **alt.education.distance.** This is the best and oldest newsgroup dedicated exclusively to distance education. *Access:* news:alt.education.distance.

• **alt.education.alternative.** While not devoted exclusively to distance education, much of what is discussed here on alternative education is directly about or applicable to distance education. *Access:* news:alt.education.alternative.

• **misc.education.adult.** *Access:* news:misc.education.adult.

Electronic periodicals

The following sites contain electronic publications that deal with distance education. All of them are free or have portions of their offerings for free.

• **DEOSNEWS.** This is the American Center for the Study of Distance Education's electronic journal. Subscribe: listserv@psu.edu.

• **Distance Education Research Bulletin.** Another electronically disseminated e-mail periodical. *Subscribe:* colicde-request@unixg.ubc.ca.

• **NTN Online.** NetTeach Online is a site dedicated to articles on teaching elementary-level students using the Web and other electronic resources. An archive of past issues is kept here, as well. An online chatroom is available for those wishing to discuss distance education issues dealing with elementary education. *Access:* http://www.chaos.com/netteach/index.html.

• **BULLA GYMNASIA VIRTUALES.** This online site has articles on distance education and teaching. The site is sparse on graphics but heavy on philosophical articles challenging traditional methods of education. It can be accessed online or by e-mail subscription. *Access:* http://www.cybercorp.net/gymv/bulla/. Subscribe: majordomo@cybercorp.net.

• **Online Educator.** This site concentrates on K–12 education. It contains articles and ready-made lesson plans for teachers. The site regularly evaluates other educational sites and keeps an archived list of previous issues available. *Access:* http://www.ole.net/ole/.

Organizations

There are a growing number of organizations that deal with distance learning. Here are a few of the better known.

• **American Distance Education Consortium.** This is a national consortium of state universities and land-grant institutions providing distance education via different

information technologies. This site has resources for those running the distance programs, but there is enough general background information included to give a novice educator or student an idea of what distance education is about. *Access:* http://www.adec.edu/.

• **EDUCOM.** This is a higher education consortium that seeks to facilitate the introduction, use, and access to information resources in teaching, learning, and scholarship. This is a good site for higher education distance educators to visit. It has a great deal of information on Educom seminars and conferences, as well as information on online initiatives. *Access:* http://www.educom.com.

• **Distance Learning Resource Network.** Here's another organization that acts as a clearinghouse of information on distance education. However, the Distance Learning Resource Network is intended primarily for K–12 educators. *Access:* http://www.fwl.org/edtech/dlrn.html.

• **United States Distance Learning Association.** Both the U.S. government and military are starting to use distance education. Although this is not a government-run association, the presence of the federal government in this association is heavy. This is probably the best site to gather information on federal and state government distance education programs. *Access:* http://www.usdla.org/.

Hotlinks to "Internet Resources"

Articles published in the "Internet Resources" column can also be found on the Web as part of *C&RL News Net*—an abridged electronic edition of *C&RL News.* A hotlink is provided for each resource listed. Check out *C&RL NewsNet* at http://www.ala.org/acrl/c&rlnew2.html.

Among future topics to be covered are: tourism and travel, East Asia, and information literacy.

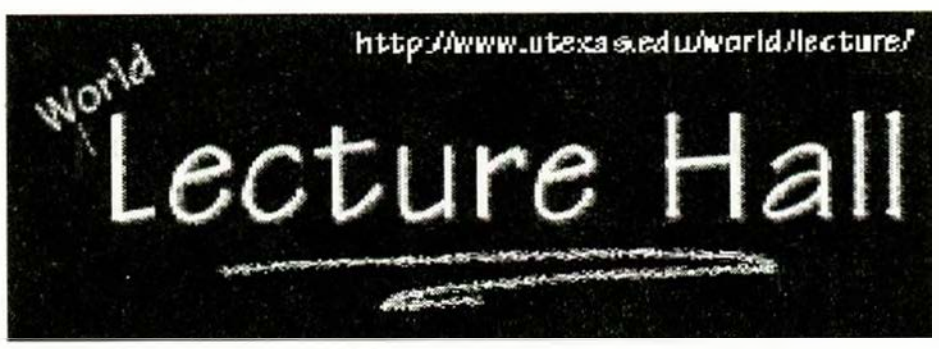
• **TEAMS Distance Learning.** This site is another K–12 distance education resource. There are a large number of lesson plans online. Another nice feature is the parent resource section. Online reference material in large variety of disciplines is here, as well. Because this site was produced by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, it probably was not intended for home schoolers, although this site would certainly be user-friendly for parents teaching at home. *Access:* http://teams.lacoe.edu/.

• **The Commonwealth of Learning.** Based in Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning is dedicated to international distance education. This site allows visitors to click select regions of the world and see what is being offered in the way of distance education. For example, clicking on Africa allows you to see that a distance learning center has been set up in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to help upgrade teacher qualifications in the area. *Access:* http://www.col.org/.

Higher education sites

The higher education community is in many ways driving the growth of distance education on the Internet. Not surprisingly, a large number of universities and colleges are going "virtual" to reach a larger student base. There are far too many to list here. One thing that is certain is that an even larger number of higher education institutions will be getting into the distance learning business in the near future.

• **World Lecture Hall.** This site contains links to pages created by faculty worldwide



who are using the Web to deliver class materials. There are hundreds of courses listed by category. It is possible to find course syllabi, assignments, lecture notes, exams, class calendars, and multimedia textbooks. This is a

good place to learn how to design your own Web-based course or to unofficially "audit" the course of your choice. *Access:* http://www.utexas.edu/world/lecture/.

• **Western Governors University.** This is the first university created to be entirely online. The creation of the governors of American western states and territories, this university was envisioned as a means of making higher education available to more people without building new campuses. The story and present progress of the Western Governors University is online and available through a PowerPoint presentation. *Access:* http://www.westgov.org/smart/vu/vu.html.

• **Distance Education Clearinghouse.** This clearinghouse is dedicated to news and information relevant to the higher education community. This is the best place to get current news on distance education as the site has a daily distance education headlines selection. The rest of the site concentrates on distance learning programs and opportunities available through the University of Wisconsin-Extension, which sponsors this site. *Access:* http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html.

• **Penn State Distance Education.** While it is not possible to list all of the institutions of higher education offering distance education in this article, it still is appropriate to include Penn State University, which was one of the first online providers of distance education and still one of the best known. This site has all the information one needs to take courses from Penn State virtually. This includes a listing of regulations, programs, courses, faculty resources, etc. The current catalog of both credit and non-credit courses is also located here. *Access:* http://www.cde.psu.edu/DE/.

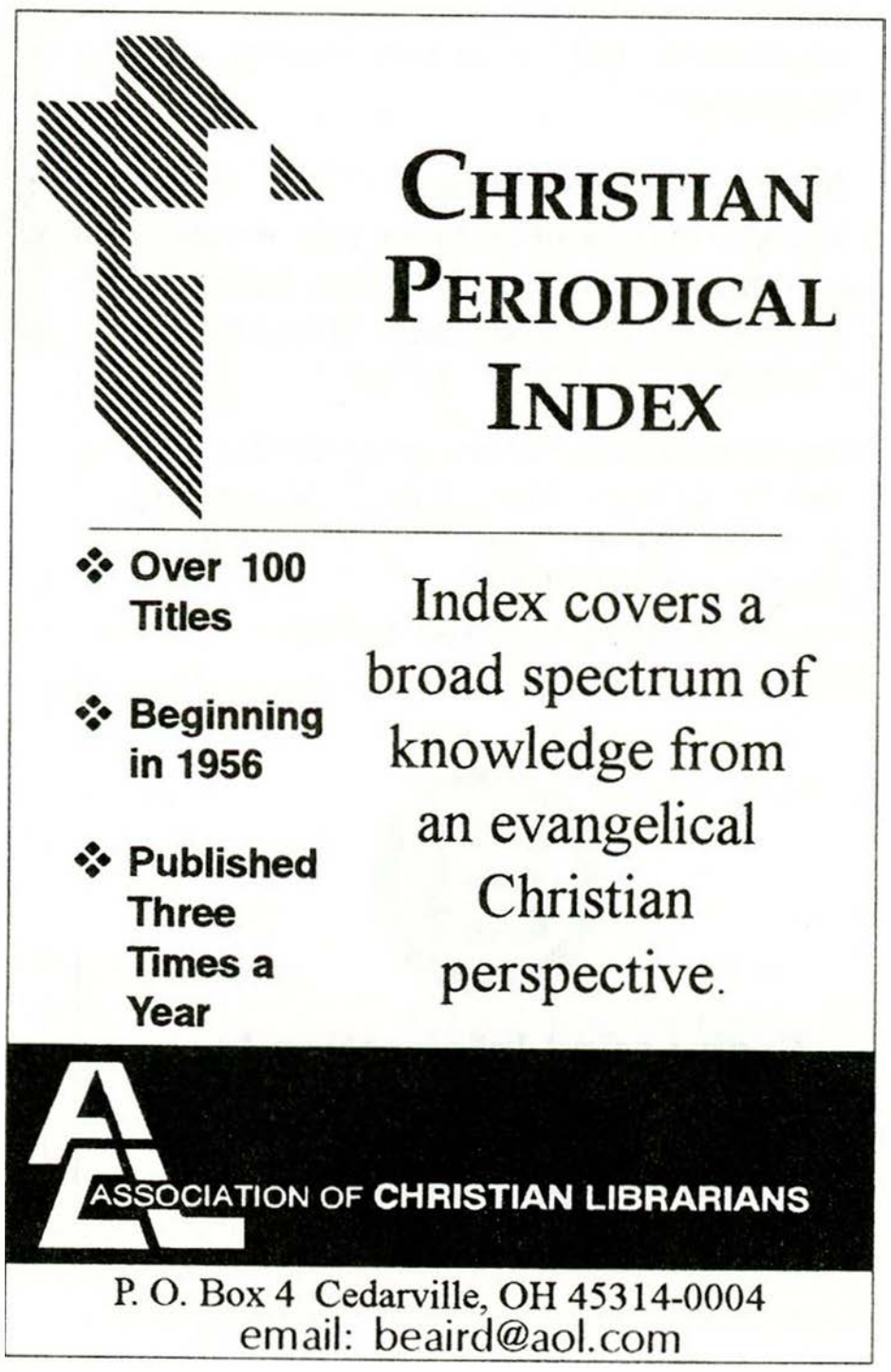
Diploma mill warning sites

"Fake" universities are springing up online to take advantage of the willingness of students to be educated virtually. Universities that consist of nothing more than Web pages designed to mimic universities that are using distance education and nontraditional methods of student assessment are fooling students into buying worthless degrees. The language and accreditation (they also often "own" their own accreditation agencies) of these diploma mills make them a dangerous by-product of the information age. Several good sites have arisen to deal with them.

• **Dr. Bear's Distance Learning College Degree Site.** John Bear has been writing about nontraditional ways of earning degrees for several decades now. As such, he monitored diploma mills before they appeared online. His site has a diploma mill alert online, as well as a list of dubious institutions of higher education students should avoid. *Access:* http://www.degree.net/core.html.

• **Dipscam.** This site also lists prominent diploma mills. It also has a section devoted to the horror stories of students who have inadvertently bought their degrees from these institutions. The site has a good checklist for signs that an institution is not a legitimate provider of distance education. *Access:* http://cust3.iamerica.net/easywave/.

• **General Delivery University.** This humorous site is a parody of online diploma mills. Clearly intended not to be confused with a "real" distance education provider, this site shows how easy it is to get into the diploma mill business. Be sure to check out the Institute of Advanced Drinking. *Access:* http://www.bandersnatch.com/gduedu.htm. ■



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