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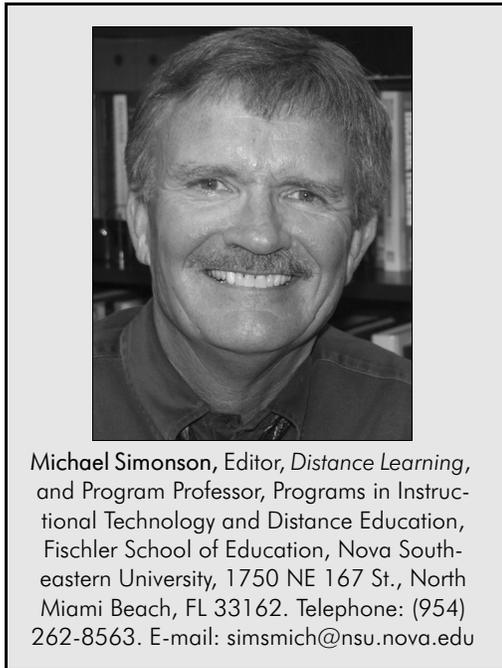
Inevitable? Do You Really Think So?

Michael Simonson

A recent column in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 29, 2009) by Margaret Brooks, a professor at Bridgewater State College, had the wonderfully intriguing title, "The Excellent Inevitability of Online Courses." Brooks presented an interesting review of why colleges should offer online courses. The eight reasons included in the article make great companions to the column in the

Quarterly Review of Distance Education titled, "Eight Steps for Transforming Your Organization" (Simonson, 2005). The two articles provide important reading for educational leaders who are contemplating the move into distance education. The first article gives eight reasons why, and the second gives eight steps how.

Brooks categorizes three types of persons when it comes to opinions about online courses. First are the traditionalists who see online education as something less than optimum, to be tolerated and, with any luck, done by others. Supporters, on the other hand, are those who advocate and state that online instruction benefits students and is equivalent to traditional instruction. Finally, there is the third group; those who see the overall integration of technology into society that is driving the popularity of online instruction. Certainly these categories of individuals, university-types, are easily recognized on any campus, and warrant study to find out why some gravitate to one category rather than another. Rogers' work on the diffusion of innovations (2005) would be a great place to start, especially the sections dealing with categories of innovation adopters. But, Brooks goes on to list the eight reasons



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that colleges “should proudly—and without apology—offer online courses:

1. We want our students to be actively engaged in learning.
2. We want to reach students with diverse learning styles.
3. We want our students to have a variety of experiences outside the classroom.
4. We want to teach our students how to do independent research.
5. We want to make college more accessible to students.
6. We want to make attending college more affordable.
7. We want to teach our students values and ethics.
8. We want our students’ degrees to be valued by employers.

Once an educational institution is convinced that online education is effective, worthwhile, and mission-oriented, then the eight steps for transforming the organization come into play. These eight steps are:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Form a powerful planning group.
3. Create a vision.
4. Communicate the vision.
5. Give power to those who act on the vision.
6. Plan for and create short-term wins.
7. Collect successes.

8. Incorporate successes (Simonson, 2005).

Certainly if an educational organization is to adopt—even value—distance education, then much more than procedural steps and processes are needed. However, it is interesting to observe that recently the discussions about distance education, virtual schools, and online learning have moved from publications of the distance education field to the more widely read and more generally influential periodicals of education and training, another indication that distance education is now mainstream.

And finally, the literature now contains eight reasons for offering online courses, and an eight step process for transforming an organization. Perhaps someone will propose an eight step process demonstrating the effectiveness and return on investment of distance education.

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