Distance Education at a Glance

(Website review)

Reviewer:
Noppadol Prammanee
(Doctoral Candidate)
Dept. of Educational Technology Research & Assessment
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115
USA
nprammanee@yahoo.com

Site URL
http://www.uidaho.edu/evo/distglan.html

Site title
Distance Education at a Glance

Objective of the site
The main objective of this website is to assist teachers, administrators, facilitators, and students in understanding distance education [DE].

Intended audience
The site is appropriate for a wide range of people - especially for those who are interested in DE such as: instructors, administrators, facilitators, researchers, and learners. The site provides very useful information including two guidebooks for the field of DE. Moreover, if the audiences have questions they can contact the books’ author and staff, who created the site.

Main topics covered
This site is hosted by the Engineering Outreach Program at the University of Idaho, which is designed in the form of an online guidebook. The guidebook is divided into 13 chapters that deal with various aspects of distance education. The links for the various guides are located on the left hand margin of the introductory page of the website. The material for the various chapters is taken from two books, "Distance Education - Strategies and Tools" and "Distance Education - A Practical Guide." The author of the two books is Barry Willis, associate dean for the Engineering Outreach Program at the University of Idaho. The site categorizes information on DE into 13 sections:
1. Distance education: An Overview
2. Strategies for Teaching at a Distance
3. Instructional development for DE
4. Evaluation for Distance Educators
5. Instructional Television
6. Computers in DE
7. Print in DE
8. Strategies for Learning at Distance
9. DE: Research
10. Interactive Videoconferencing in DE
11. DE and the WWW
12. Copyright and DE

When a user clicks on one of the 13 chapters on the homepage, it directs the user to the corresponding section. The site still shows all of the chapters’ navigator links but instead of showing them in the left-hand margin of the introductory page, it moves them to both the beginning and end of each chapter, for convenience. These functions or icons are easy to follow. One can choose which chapter one wants to explore. For example, if users
wants to know why the educators use the World Wide Web (WWW) for DE, they would click on the “Guide #11 Distance Education and the WWW.” Then it will show them all 13 chapters on the top of “Guide # 11.” Users can either click on the next guide or explore the “Guide # 11.”

Comment on usefulness and richness of each topic

The guidebook deals with a variety of topics pertaining to the field of DE. Some of the topics are as follows: overview of the field of distance education, teaching strategies for DE, instructional design for DE courses, the role of computers in DE, learning strategies for DE, popular research topics in the field, the role of interactive videoconferencing in DE, and several other topics. Each guide contains rich resources for educators who are interested in the field of DE.

Appropriateness and quality of external links

This site includes appropriate and useful external links for audiences to learn about DE. For example, the citations in the text are hyperlinked to the actual references. Also, in the reference section, the authors provide links to the material if it is available online. Overall, I think this site provides adequate external links for the 13 chapters.

Connectivity

This site can be loaded very quickly because it is mostly text based. It can be opened by any web browser such as Netscape, Internet Explorer, or Mozilla. No additional software such as plug-ins are required.

Interface related aspects

The chapter links are located on the left-hand margin of the homepage. All icons and links work well and are easy to follow. There is an introduction in the center of the page that gives a brief overview of the contents of each of the 13 chapters. All pages have white background which makes the pages easy to read in both soft and hard copies. The site could be enhanced with some sort of search engine facility.

Each chapter of the guide is divided into several sub-sections and the site provides links at the beginning of the chapter to jump directly to any of the sub-sections. It would be useful if the author also provides “top” link after each sub-section, hence giving user possibility to go to the list of sub-sections without having to scroll back up.

The information flow on the site is quite logical. Starting from an overview to further advancement to detailed information makes the site interesting and motivating, even when the site does not offer any audio, video, or special effects.

Overall issues

This site belongs to University of Idaho Engineering Outreach. As per the information available on the website, the site was last revised on June 18, 2002. There is no advertising except for the Engineering Outreach promoting its distance-delivered degree programs. Overall, the site contains very useful information for the audience interested in learning about the field of DE.