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// ...SOME OF THE BEST WAYS

// ...AND HOW TO ENJOY THEM



# One Rare Bird

Actor, writer, musician, art collector, tweeter—**Steve Martin** has plenty to crow about.

From backyard hobbyists to global jet-setters, **birders** are spreading their wings.

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for New Orleans

OCTOBER 2011

NG



IN-DEPTH

DISTANCE LEARNING



# DISTANCE LEARNING'S MOMENT

More choices, better outcomes and new economic realities are driving the expansion of online learning. By Michael Lotti

**A**fter the industrial revolution, we went to school. In the communications age, school will increasingly come to us," says Andy DiPaolo, executive director of the Stanford Center for Professional Development at Stanford University.

DiPaolo would know. He oversees a program with more than 4,000 online learners, and he has seen firsthand how technology has not only made distance learning possible but better. "Online instruction used to be a backwater," he says. "Now it's front and center in higher education."

In the fall of 2009, the Sloan Consortium, an organization that is dedicated to integrating online education into the mainstream of higher education, found that more than 5.6 million students (or nearly 30 percent) took at least one online class. That was an increase of nearly 1 million students over the previous year. And the number has certainly grown since then.

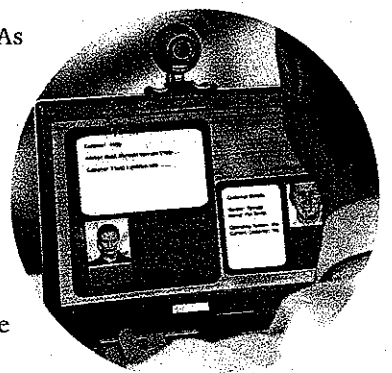
What explains this trend? The answer is simple:

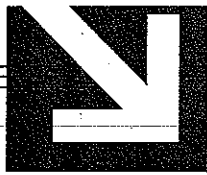
Online education works. It's better and more pervasive than it has ever been. And for both students and schools it makes economic sense.

## Lots of Choices, Less Stigma

The rapid advance of communications technology has certainly played a role. Skype-based seminars and live Q and As are normal features of today's online courses. Chat rooms and email make it easy for students and professors to participate in discussions and to pass assignments back and forth. Ray Schroeder, director of the Center for Online Learning, Research and Service at the University of Illinois at Springfield, says that when he teaches online, there is an enormous amount of interaction.

"On the average, I have about 100 exchanges per student over the course of the semester,





“We don’t distinguish between online and residential degrees on our diplomas because they are, in fact, the same.”

—Susan E. Metros



which is more than I would have in a traditional classroom,” he says.

It should come as no surprise then that the stigma that was once attached to distance learning—that it isn’t a “real” in-the-classroom education—is all but gone. “A master’s degree from the University of Southern California is a master’s degree from the University of Southern California,” says Susan E. Metros, the university’s associate vice provost of technology-enhanced learning. “We don’t distinguish between online and residential degrees on our diplomas because they are, in fact, the same.”

What’s different, of course, is that online courses can be taken from any place and at just about any time. That naturally attracts a certain type of student. “The average online student pursuing a master’s degree or professional

certification is a 35-year-old midcareer professional,” says Schroeder. “That person can’t stop working to go back to school, so an online program makes perfect sense.”

“These people are on the go all the time,” echoes DiPaolo. “But if they have mobile internet access, they can do coursework from home, from work, a coffee shop, an airline flight or an oil platform.”

Online classes for the sake of a degree or continuing professional education are still the sweet spot for distance learning, but “learning for learning’s sake” courses are becoming more common. The Knowledge Network is one example. Operated by *The New York Times* and several partner universities (including Stanford, the University of Chicago and Ball State), it offers seminars, one-day tutorials and more extensive courses for the interested adult.

“We’re trying to offer more material for the proverbial man on the street, with some of it driven by current events,” says Eileen Kohan, associate provost



**Did You Know?**

Sixty-three percent of higher education institutions consider online learning critical to their long-term strategy.

## He’s a Journalist. No, He’s a Teacher!

Online learning opens up opportunities for teaching, too.



Adam Bryant

In a virtual classroom, you can discuss the issues of the day with students from Alaska, Texas and London—and a “teacher” from *The New York Times*.

Since early 2009, journalist Adam Bryant has been interviewing CEOs for his “Corner Office” column in the Sunday business section of *The New York Times*. He recently collected insights from more

than 70 interviews into a book.

When Bryant was approached to lead an online seminar for The New York Times Knowledge Network, “it didn’t take much convincing to get me to do it,” he says. “It seemed like a great opportunity to interact with people. I always look forward to hearing people’s questions on the universal themes of leadership and management.”

It turned out to be a wise decision. “Writing is one thing, but the real magic is in the discussions I have. That’s why the webinar was such a rich experience. I’m used to getting good questions from readers, so it says something that I was pleasantly surprised by the interaction I experienced online.”

And thus a teacher was born. Bryant will lead his second webinar for the Knowledge Network in November.

Alexandra Pickett, associate director of the SUNY Learning Network, regularly uses outside experts when she teaches online. “You can blur the walls of the classroom and invite the rock stars of a profession in,” she says. It’s a chance for working professionals to share their expertise (either live or prerecorded) without having to become full-time professors or travel to a campus.

The accessibility and convenience of distance learning, in other words, is turning many potential teachers into the real thing. // —M.L.

## ENDORSEMENT: Virginia Tech's Master's Degree in Information Technology

Endorsee: Tobi McFarland, Silver Spring, Maryland



"The online master's in information technology is very similar to participating in a traditional classroom-based program. Professors routinely call on students and the coursework is demanding. However, the program offered some distinct advantages as I was able to participate in class from home or while traveling. I also gained experience collaborating in group assignments with students from all over the world. The skills I attained have better prepared me for the workplace of the future, one in which co-workers may sit next to each other or may be in different parts of the world entirely."

and executive director of continuing education at the University of Southern California. For example, USC offered, in partnership with the Knowledge Network, a week-long course devoted to the global rise of noncommunicable diseases that coincided with the United Nations Summit.

Of course, for more traditional degree programs, there will always be a place for on-campus studies. "Especially for undergraduate students," says Eric L. Richards, chair of Kelley Direct Public Programs at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. "Successful online learning takes a high level of discipline and commitment, and that's more common among adult working professionals."

### Online Learning Is the Future

Many believe that economic realities will continue to drive the expansion of distance learning at nearly all levels.

"The lack of space combined with shrinking federal and state dollars will make more colleges and universities offer full online and in-person/online hybrid courses," predicts Schroeder. "In addition, more students than ever have to work while attending undergraduate or graduate classes, and they will figure out that taking online courses on a part-time basis is much, much cheaper—and more convenient—than paying full-time tuition and residence costs."

The success of distance learning is also driving its expansion. "We've opened up a supermarket," says DiPaolo. "More and more students expect to choose when and where they want to learn. Universities have to adapt." He adds that as mobile devices become better at "learning" their users' preferences, "everyone in a 30-person class will master the material differently." And the universities that don't make materials mobile friendly will be left behind.

The easy shareability of information is also opening up new partnerships in education and new



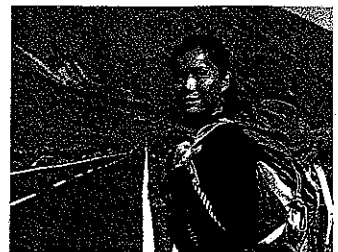
**WHERE NO ONE EXPLORED NEW POSSIBILITIES.** Traveling cross-country would be an arduous, month-long journey — one that couldn't be spent working on a laptop, watching movies or exploring magazines on an e-reader.

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ways to gain educational credentials. The Knowledge Network and USC have shared resources to create and improve dozens of online courses. Along similar lines, Open Education Resource University, formed by colleges and universities around the world, seeks to grant academic credit to those who can pass credentialed assessments.

“Most of MIT’s lectures and

“We’ve opened up a supermarket. More and more students expect to choose when and where they want to learn. Universities have to adapt.” —Andy DiPaolo



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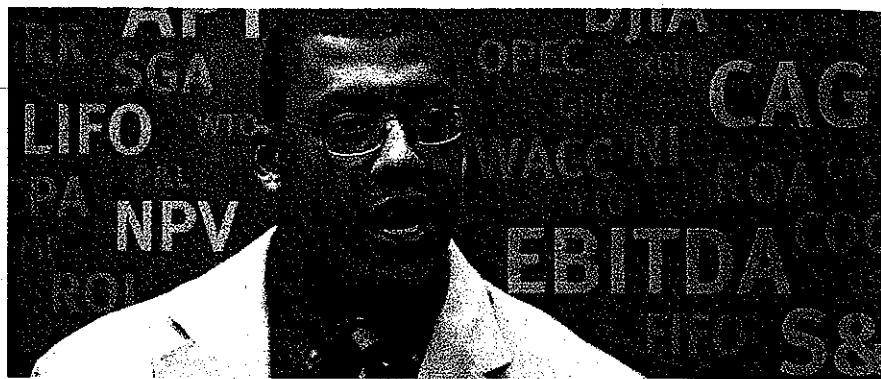
materials are available for free online,” says Schroeder. “If you can master the material for Physics 101 from that, why not get academic credit?” Schroeder quotes distance learning expert and Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen when he calls online education “a disruptive force.”

“It is forcing everyone to re-think higher education,” he says. And that, Schroeder believes, is a good thing. “At its root, online learning is about providing more people with access to high-quality education. That’s why I’m so passionate about it.” //

## Cool Online Courses //

*Fun (virtual) classes for the lifelong student.*

- ➔ **Campaign 2012**  
University of Southern California and The New York Times Knowledge Network (nytimes.com/knowledge) Oct. 25–Nov. 8  
*Veteran Republican strategist Dan Schnur looks beyond the rhetoric to the larger strategic decisions shaping the 2012 presidential race in this first of four courses.*
  
- ➔ **When Everything Changed**  
The New York Times Knowledge Network (nytimes.com/knowledge) Self-paced, rolling admission  
*Op-ed columnist Gail Collins traces the dramatic changes—and unresolved issues—that have shaped American women in the last 50 years.*
  
- ➔ **How to Listen to Classical Music**  
The New York Times Knowledge Network (nytimes.com/knowledge) Oct. 26–Nov. 15  
*Classical music reporter Daniel J. Watkin helps listeners identify and understand what they most enjoy about classical music.*
  
- ➔ **Building an ePortfolio: Using Technology to Achieve Success in Your Job Search**  
UCLA Extension (uclaextension.edu) Nov. 16–Dec. 7  
*Go beyond the typical resumé and construct an ePortfolio with links, pictures and videos highlighting your achievements.*
  
- ➔ **Screenwriting: Write Your First Draft Fast**  
University of Wisconsin (dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/online) Ongoing  
*That great movie idea you've been noodling? Give it shape with help from a professional screenwriter. // —M. L.*



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The New York Times Knowledge Network and the University of Southern California are proud to announce an innovative collaboration in the area of continuing education.

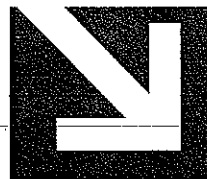
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A COLLABORATION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION



# LONG-DISTANCE LEARNERS

Three happy, successful alums of online graduate programs reflect on the rewards and challenges of distance learning. Interviewed by Michael Lotti



## JESSE CLARKE

**HOME:** Berkeley, California

**DEGREE:** Master's in Engineering,  
Purdue University

**CURRENT JOB:** Self-employed  
project management consultant

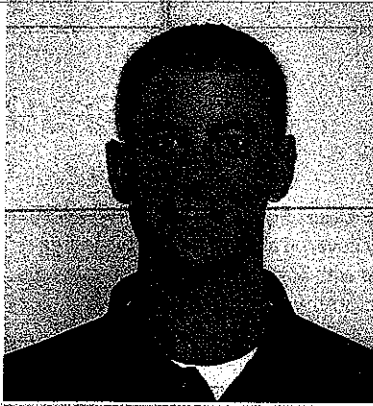
California without a hitch. Purdue also gave me credit for online classes I took at Stanford for a certificate in design.

**WHAT IT WAS LIKE:** My classmates gave me a much wider perspective on engineering. A few were studying from overseas, and the rest were from throughout the United States and involved in dozens of industries. I experienced a level of learning beyond textbooks, lectures and papers and got a sense for the new kinds of skills engineers need in order to be successful. Engineers of 2020 will be a lot different from engineers of 2000.

**WHY ONLINE:** I knew a master's degree would help me advance in my profession. I just needed a program that gave me flexibility while I worked full time.

**PICKING A PROGRAM:** Purdue was an easy choice because my employer at the time had an agreement with the university to cover some of the tuition. I also wanted a degree from a nationally recognized engineering program, and Purdue allowed me to work school into my life. There was no problem when I took a year off to travel and move. I started the program in Michigan and ended it in

**ADVICE:** Distance learning is a great option for people working full time, but you have to make sure your life can absorb the extra commitment, and you need to be self-directed and motivated. I recommend reaching out to professors, teaching assistants, advisers and fellow students right away. It was a lot easier to get help online or over the phone when a connection had already been established.



**JOE CARTER**

**HOME:** Emmetsburg, Iowa

**DEGREE:** Master's in Educational Leadership, University of Iowa

**CURRENT JOB:** Principal, West Elementary School

**WHY ONLINE:** Distance learning gave me an opportunity that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I had taught for nine years and I wanted the chance to move into administration. But my wife and I have three young children, and we wanted to raise them in Emmetsburg and stay in this school district. We're more than 100 miles from the nearest university, so a residential program wasn't an option.

**WHAT IT WAS LIKE:** The University of Iowa program allowed me to continue working and do all my clinical work in the Emmetsburg school district. I worked closely with a lot of local principals, and one of my professors actually traveled to Emmetsburg to evaluate my work. Also the program was highly interactive. In fact, I would say that the students in the program interacted with each other and with the professors even more than they would have in a traditional classroom setting. Conversations were always happening, both during and outside of class sessions.

**PAYOFF:** The program prepared me to step into a leadership role. I was a middle school teacher who had some

administrative experience, but now I know a tremendous amount about budgets, communications, early childhood education, special education and public school systems in general. The professors were great. They had a lot of administrative experience; and most of them were either current or former principals.

**ADVICE:** The program has had a hugely positive impact on my life, so of course I would recommend it. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Don't be scared of online learning or of all the technology, and don't think that you'll be doing a bunch of busy work alone. It will be a wonderful experience that will prepare you for what lies ahead.

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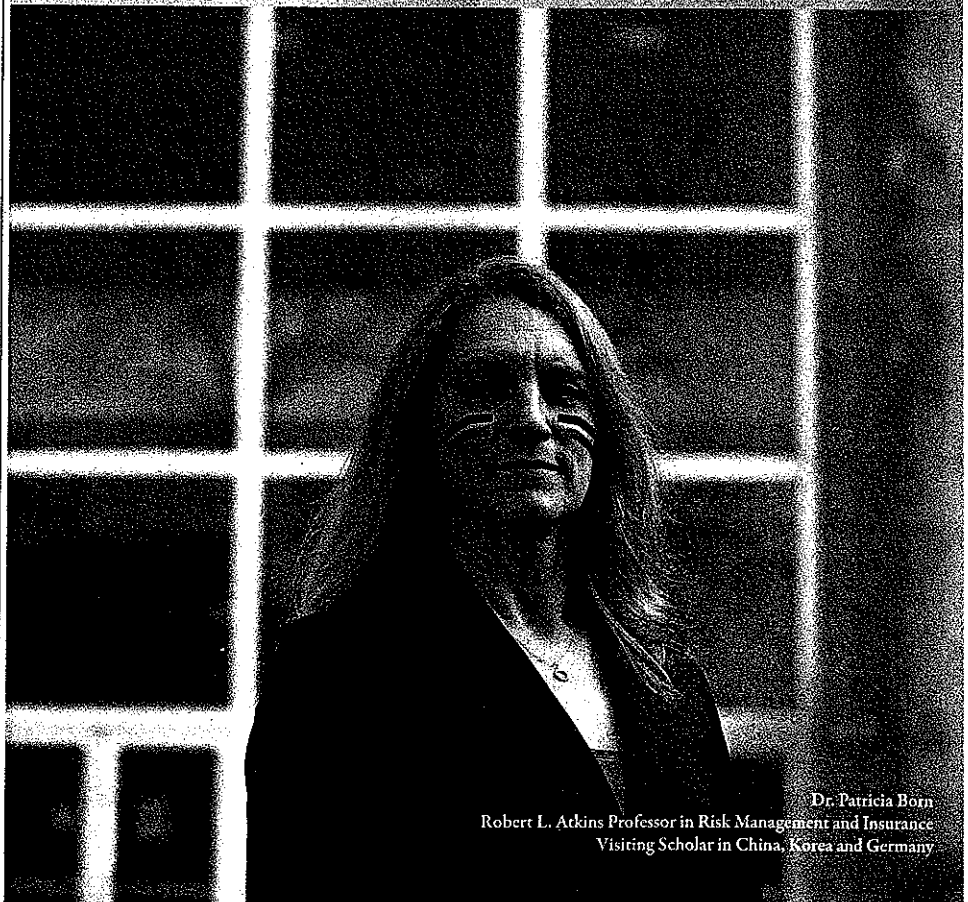
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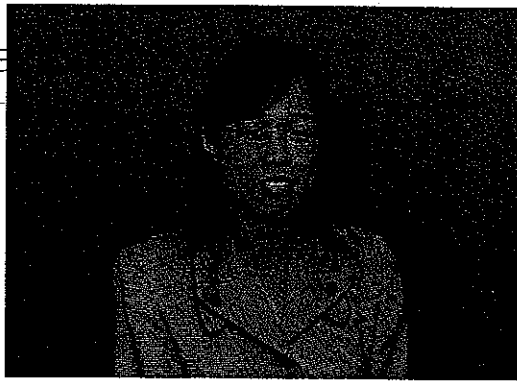
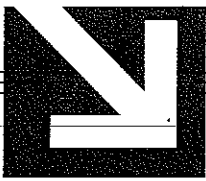


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Dr. Patricia Born  
Robert L. Atkins Professor in Risk Management and Insurance  
Visiting Scholar in China, Korea and Germany



## NANCY CHENG

**HOME:** Milpitas, California

**DEGREE:** Master's in Electrical Engineering, Stanford University

**CURRENT JOB:** Engineering Manager with Intel Corporation

**WHY ONLINE:** I always wanted a master's degree. I wanted deeper and broader knowledge of my field, and, of course, I knew that it was necessary for professional advancement. It's true that convenience was a huge factor in choosing to do distance learning. I didn't have to drive to campus except to take exams; professors held office hours on nights and weekends; and the technology was very accessible.

**WHAT IT WAS LIKE:** My company, Intel, was very supportive. They covered all the costs of my degree. They had worked with Stanford for a long time. In fact, some course lectures were simulcast at my workplace.

**LOOKING BACK:** Getting the degree was a valuable experience. I say that even though my current focus at work [as a validation engineer] wasn't the same subfield I studied at Stanford [circuit design]. I was exposed to a lot of different topics. Working full time while taking classes also taught me how to perform well under pressure.

**ADVICE:** A good distance learning experience requires two things: A great school like Stanford and also exceptional discipline and commitment on the student's part. About the school, I would ask: How convenient is the program? Does it pay attention to the needs of the student? About oneself, I would ask: Do I have the dedication to do this? Some people need to be forced to go to a classroom to get their work done and that just won't work with a distance learning program. //

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## Up-Close //

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**Becky Vasquez,**  
*chief technology  
officer of  
the Worldwide  
Campus of  
Embry-Riddle  
Aeronautical  
University, on the  
rewards of online learning.*

### How long has Embry-Riddle offered online courses?

The first time we used Web-based bulletin boards was in 1993. We have been doing asynchronous learning online fully since 1998. In 2007 we started the live virtual classroom, the synchronous learning platform.

### Describe the virtual classroom.

We call it EagleVision. Essentially it's a Web video conferencing platform we integrate with our learning management system. It has whiteboarding and emoticons, so even if students aren't speaking they can use emoticons to interact. There's app sharing and instructors can send students to breakout rooms to do a group project.

### What are the benefits?

It has helped us offer more classes. It helps with retention because students have more choices. It also helps us internally because we have more than 150 locations around the world, and with that comes a lot of opportunity, but challenges, too. We can do training sessions on the platform and use it for meetings.

### Where is technology headed next?

We can take our online courses to the next level with virtual labs, where we replicate engineering labs, safety crash labs and physics labs. //

—Madeleine Hill

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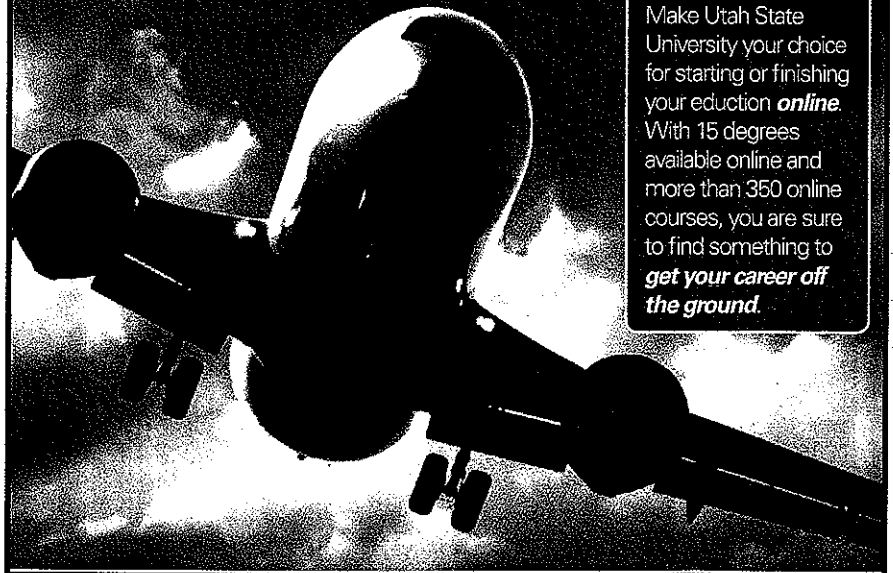


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