

DISTANCE LEARNING SHOWCASE

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The United States Distance Learning Association, the world's "leading distance learning organization" defines distance learning as "the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance." Specifically, whether the distribution technology is satellite, videoconferencing, on-line or audio, the distance learning provider must guarantee seamless quality of excellence with the chosen learning management system, the content, and the overall delivery platform. For the most part, schools today are utilizing the internet for program execution, student instruction and overall program administration.

As students, whatever program, college or university, you choose, make sure the end product represents excellence and best practices. Quality distance learning programs must include competent instructors who know their subject and understand distance learning techniques, technology implementation, instructional design and student services. Interactivity between teacher and student and among students must be consistent. Support services which include on-line libraries, student help desks, bookstores, and overall comprehensive program services are required. Earning a degree through distance learning has much value. New career opportunities, higher salaries, new fields of study coupled with convenience, anywhere, anytime, makes distance learning programs the choice for many of today's students.

With USDLA's primary mission being to serve the needs of the distance learning community by providing advocacy, information networking and opportunity, the association understands the needs of all learners when they search for quality distance learning programs and courses. USDLA in 2004, will launch the Distance Learning Accreditation Bureau, a USDLA service that will accredit and certify distance learning programs in order to ensure best practices and levels of excellence. Schools and individuals should contact USDLA for more information on this service at 1-800-275-5162. —Editorial submitted by USDLA

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE USDLA VISIT WWW.USDLA.ORG OR CALL 1-800-275-5162

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Special Program Spotlight

American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) is a name you can trust. Since 1928 we've acted as the industry resource for the field of health information management (HIM). The field of HIM and its impact continues to grow. Today, health information management professionals occupy a variety of roles from quality assurance managers to information security officers to medical record coders in a variety of settings in hospitals to consulting and law firms to government agencies. AHIMA supports the goals of applying modern technology to, and advancing best practices in, HIM. One of the avenues we offer support is developing and delivering superior education and training - all of which may be located at our virtual campus: <http://campus.ahima.org>. Our programs are developed by and in conjunction with leaders in the industry. All of our courses employ sound adult and distance learning principles to ensure that learning is achieved and skills are tested.

Troy State University has embraced distance learning as a way to offer its students unparalleled flexibility in achieving their goals. Combining emerging technologies with traditional teaching methods, including individualized attention from the professor, TSU's Distance Learning Center offers a host of graduate and undergraduate degrees and courses that can be taken online from anywhere. Founded in 1887, TSU has a history of excellence and a global presence. Long recognized for the quality of its academic programs, Money magazine recently rated TSU one of the 25 best college buys in the United States. In addition to its main campus in Troy, Alabama, TSU comprises approximately 50 sites in 14 states and five countries. TSU's regional sites focus on providing working professionals with a convenient and affordable way to further their careers through education, offering graduate degrees attainable through a combination of on-site and online learning. With night and weekend courses and a five-term format, programs are flexible and affordable, and some can be completed within 15 months. For more information on TSU's pure distance learning programs or region-based graduate programs, call 1-800-247-7185 or visit www.tsulearn.edu.



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Questions & Answers with John G. Flores, Ph.D., Executive Director of USDLA

Q: What are the most widely used and respected accreditation organizations?

A: There are numerous accrediting agencies that have the capacity to evaluate schools and programs. Those that are recognized or licensed by the United States Department of Education would be first tier organizations.

Q: Are admission requirements different for online degree programs?

A: Admission requirements for online programs should be the same as those required for face-to-face classes. Legitimate educational institutions, public and private, must guarantee the legitimacy of any educational offering. This is imperative in order to avoid diploma mills and other illegitimate programs.

Q: Are online degrees as well respected as degrees at brick & mortar institutions?

A: Online degrees, when accredited, carry the same value and worth as traditional brick and mortar universities. The key factor for students is to be sure to attend those schools that represent high standards of excellence.

Q: On average do students put in the same amount of time for online courses as traditional classes?

A: Students usually put in the same amount or sometimes even more for online courses. Students must be disciplined, have the ability to work independently and be available to participate in required electronic chats, threaded discussions and other forms of communication.

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