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About INFOBITS

Infobits is an electronic service of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ITS Teaching and Learning's Center for Instructional Technology. Each month the CIT's Information Resources Consultant monitors and selects from a number of information and instructional technology sources that come to her attention and provides brief notes for electronic dissemination to educators.

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DOES INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MATTER TO HIGHER ED?

The theme for the November/December 2003 issue of *EDUCAUSE Review* (vol. 38, no. 6) is "Does IT Really Matter to Higher Education?" Articles in this issue include: "Does IT Matter to Higher Education?" by Jack McCredie, University of California, Berkeley; "IT Doesn't Matter" by Nicholas Carr, *Harvard Business Review*; and "Why IT Has Not Paid Off As We Hoped (Yet)," by Edward L. Ayers and Charles M. Grisham, University of Virginia. All articles are available online at <http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm03/erm036.asp> with the exception of the Carr article. A summary of that article is online at http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=R0305B

EDUCAUSE Review [ISSN 1527-6619], a bimonthly print magazine that explores developments in information technology and education, is published by EDUCAUSE, 1150 18th Street, NW, Suite 1010, Washington, DC 20036 USA; tel: 202-872-4200; fax: 202-872-4318; email: info@educause.edu; Web: <http://www.educause.edu/>. Articles from current and back issues of *EDUCAUSE Review* are available on the Web at <http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/>.

GUIDES FOR ONLINE TEACHING

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework's Quick Guide series is a collection of documents, based on projects and selected external literature, that provide "an introduction to key issues related to flexible and online delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET)." The guides cover topics that are useful to anyone involved in online teaching. Recent guides include: "Developing E-learning Content," "Effective Online Facilitation," "Privacy Issues in Online Teaching and Learning," and "What are the Conditions for and Characteristics of Effective Online Learning Communities?" The guides are available online at <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/index.html>.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework, a five-year, national collaborative program of the Commonwealth, States, and Territories of Australia, is an initiative designed to create and share knowledge about flexible learning and to support its adoption in the area of vocational education and training. For more information, contact: Australian Flexible Learning Framework, Locked Mail Bag 527 GPO, Brisbane QLD 4001 Australia; tel: 07-3247-5511; fax: 07-3237-0419; email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au; Web: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/>.

IMPORTANT WEBSITE PROPERTIES

A recent survey of over 8,000 participants reports that there are four factors that most influence a website's popularity. In order of importance, they are: good content, usability, speed of downloads, and freshness of content. According to a summary of the study in *MIT Technology Insider* (and reprinted in "The Second Most Important Property of the Web" by Steven Pemberton, *Technology Review*, December 9, 2003), researchers found it surprising that usability rated so high with users, "not because it is unexpected that users want sites to be easy to use, but because Web site builders report that whenever a company wants to cut costs of Web site development, usability is scrapped or at least postponed. Apparently, people do not realize that usability cannot be added on later. It must be built into a site (or a product of any kind) right from the start." The article is available online at http://www.technologyreview.com/articles/wo_pemberton121003.asp.

DIGITAL READS

In "A Good Digital Read" (*wwwtools for Education*, December 1, 2003), Graeme Daniel provides a wealth of links to ebook resources. The article includes links to ebook lists, etext projects, and digital libraries. Daniel also includes resources on ebook hardware and software, tools for finding digital books, and readings on and reviews of ebooks. The article is available online at <http://magazines.fasfind.com/wwwtools/m/237.cfm?rid=237>. Subscription registration is required to access articles in this publication. New materials (within the past month) can be accessed at no cost; material older than one month is only accessible to paid subscribers.

wwwtools for Education (formerly titled *Web Tools Newsletter*) is published weekly by teachers Kevin Cox and Graeme Daniel. Current and back issues are available at <http://magazines.fasfind.com/wwwtools/>.

See also: "The Great Library of Amazonia" by Gary Wolf (*Wired*, issue 11.12, December 2003) at <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.12/amazon.html>.

"Even as the Internet has revived hope of a universal library and Google seems to promise an answer to every query, books have remained a dark region in the universe of information. We want books to be as accessible and searchable as the Web. On the other hand, we still want them to be books.

"An ingenious attempt to illuminate the dark region of books is under way at Amazon.com. Over the past spring and summer, the company created an unrivaled digital archive of more than 120,000 books. The goal is to quickly add most of Amazon's multimillion-title catalog. The entire collection, which went live Oct. 23, is searchable, and every page is viewable."

BOOK DESCRIBES BEST PRACTICES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

The U.S. Distance Learning Association (USDLA) has released *Electronic Learning Communities: Issues and Practices* (Information Age Publishing Inc, 2003; ISBN: 1931576971), "a collection of best

practices and methods for distance teaching and learning environments." Chapters, written by researchers and practitioners in the field, include: "Strategies for Teaching Thinking and Promoting Intellectual Development in Online Classes;" "Building Electronic Communities for Distance Learners: Beyond the Course Level;" "Preparing Faculty Members to Teach in the E-learning Environment;" "Your, Theirs, Mine: Just Who Owns Those Distance Courses?" More details and information on ordering the book are available at <http://www.usdla.org/html/bestPractices/index.htm>.

USDLA serves the needs of the distance learning community by providing advocacy, information, and networking. For more information, contact USDLA, 8 Winter Street, Suite 508, Boston, MA 02108 USA; tel: 800-275-5162; fax: 617-399-1771; Web: <http://www.usdla.org/>.

EDUCAUSE 2003 RESOURCES ONLINE

A variety of resources from the EDUCAUSE 2003 conference are now online. Resources available at <http://www.educause.edu/conference/annual/2003/> include video recordings of most general and featured-speaker sessions; proceedings from track, poster, and other conference sessions; audio recording purchase information; and photographs.

EDUCAUSE is a nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology. Learn more about EDUCAUSE at <http://www.educause.edu/>.

CIT CONFERENCE CALENDAR UPGRADED/MOVED

The UNC-Chapel Hill Center for Instructional Technology maintains the "Calendar of World-Wide Educational Technology-Related Conferences, Seminars, and Other Events" website. Recently, we upgraded to a new version of our calendar software (iCal from Brown Bear Software at <http://www.brownbearsw.com>) and moved to a new URL. This has resulted in a more reliable service and should eliminate the periodic outages we experienced with the older version. The calendar is now available at <http://atncalendar.depts.unc.edu:8086>.

Recommended Reading

"Recommended Reading" lists items that have been recommended to me or that *Infobits* readers have found particularly interesting and/or useful, including books, articles, and websites published by Infobits subscribers. Send your recommendations to kotlas@email.unc.edu for possible inclusion in this column.

"What Keeps Universities from Embracing e-Learning?"

By Peter Cheese

Learning & Training Innovations, November 5, 2003

<http://www.ltimagazine.com/ltimagazine/article/articleDetail.jsp?id=74867>

"E-learning can potentially transform education at every level. It can make high-quality educational experiences available to those whose location, economic, and personal constraints have prevented them from pursuing their educational goals. These learners also represent a wider student market for universities and other education establishments.

"With all of these potential benefits, and a willing and interested market, why has e-learning made so little apparent progress in the education market?"