# Final Reflections

As I sit and think about the past semester in the Foundations of Distance Education course, I feel like it went by too fast.  I must say that I have learned a lot, but still feel like I only scratched the surface.  We covered a lot of material relating to distance education (DE) − from its origins to its administration.  However, I am not going to regurgitate the entire course but reflect on the things that stand out to me.

The three areas of the course that have stuck with me are: the Student Perspective, Management, and Copyrights.  According to the literature, distance learners must be self-disciplined, self-motivated and able to work independently (Illinois Online Network, n.d.; Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2007).  This perspective is very much the reality.  However, what happens to the distance learner who is not self-disciplined, self-motivated, and not able to work independently?  Is there online tutoring or an online mechanism to help them?  In a traditional class, students can go "someplace" for help.  Where does a distance learner go for help?  I think that this can be quite challenging for some distance learners, especially if they feel no sense of community with the class or instructor.  From a personal perspective, I like the advantages of being a distance learner (such as the flexibility of not going to a physical location or being in a virtual learning environment anytime, anywhere and anyplace).  However, human interaction can be a challenge to emulate in an asynchronous environment.  There was a section in the chapter on *The Student and Distance Education* which discussed "Classroom Culture at a Distance" (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2011, p. 222).  It talked about creating "learning communities".  From my personal point of view as a student, learning communities probably will not work if the student does not feel a sense of community.   I believe that in order

for discussion posts, for example, to have an effect on learning they must be meaningful and productive.

From a Management perspective, with the push to offer more online classes and advances in technology (e.g. mobile technologies, web and video conferencing etc.), distance education will explode in the near future and there will a surge of job opportunities, not only for instructional designers, but for people with leadership skills, technical skills, teaching skills, and business skills. If institutions are making DE a priority and part of their strategic planning to reach a larger share of the market (i.e. countries outside of the United States), then educational technology skills will be in high demand. It is definitely something to think about. I have seen many jobs online for persons with an instructional technology (IT) background and higher education administration experience. I would structure my research and coursework towards the management side of DE in the future, knowing that there is room to grow in this field of study.

With regards to copyright laws, you almost have to be a lawyer to understand some of the laws. However, this area is where I learned the most this semester. I almost wish it were a separate online class because there was so much material to cover. Copyright is a tricky area to maneuver around in DE. I now look at the public domain differently. I used to think that anything in the public domain was free to be used by anyone without the need for citations. Lolly Gasaway, University of North Carolina says "a public domain work is a creative work that is not protected by copyright and that *may* be freely used by everyone" (as cited in Simonson et al., 2011, p. 300). However, the definition comes with a "but" or in this case a "may". It is dependent on the date of work and term. There are too many grey areas that are left up to individual interpretation. Going forward, I would be a little more cautious, and consider all four

factors to determine fair use and the applicability of the TEACH act, when preparing to use copyrighted material.

Finally, my challenges in the class were really keeping up with the workload, and trying to synthesize a lot of information each week. However, it was meaningful to be able to put theory into practice (i.e. by creating a DE course syllabus, outline, and activities). Overall, I enjoyed creating my website, and I look forward to taking the DE research class.

## References

Illinois Online Network. (n.d.). *What Makes a Successful Online Student?* Retrieved October 26, 2013 from http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/StudentProfile.asp

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. (2011). *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute. (2007). *Characteristics of Distance Learning Students*. Retrieved October 26, 2013 from http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/ATC/Collaboratory/Teaching/students.html