DISTANCE LEARNING AND ABSEL – REVISITED FOR THE NTH PLUS 1 TIME

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews issues dealing with distance learning as discussed in past ABSEL Conferences, from a variety of perspectives. The first author, an ABSEL Fellow and old as dust, hated his distance learning experiences 30+ years ago and is adamant in his negative perspective of the pedagogy. The second author teaches and consults in the area of making distance learning at the university level more effective. The third author is also an ABSEL Fellow, who is somewhat skeptical about distance learning but not to the extent of the first author. The fourth author discusses his on-going experience with a MOOC. The last author is also an ABSEL Fellow and is now a Vice Provost; he will provide administrative perspective to the issues covered. Thus, the strength of the paper is primarily one of bringing together people with very different views of distance learning with the intent of dealing with topics affecting the future of business academe. Also, we end with some ideas as to how ABSELers should modify current online classes to make them more experiential.

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The first author (hereafter referred to as "he" or as "the cynic") has had a long-term hatred of distance learning (DL). It began 35 years ago when he made his first academic move and found that he would be teaching five days a week, including Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons on talk back TV to students in-the studio and at two regional sites. Even worse, the course was marketing research, a course that he believed (and still believes) required a high personal touch. He taught it using what Al Burns at the Denver ABSEL Conference referred to as the "suffering bastard approach," as it required a series of cases as well as individual or very small group survey research projects for a business client. The cynic found the talk back TV experiences to be very unsatisfactory, and he played a significant role in the college terminating its talk back TV efforts (but only for a very brief period). He later won a university-wide graduate teaching award for his MBA market research course (traditional face-to-face (f2f) classroom format only) and continued to teach the course in a similar manner at two other universities. Then, about 20 years ago, a decision was made to teach the MBA market research class online, while he refused to be a part of and, thus, he no longer teaches the course. As a result, he has systematically avoided any and all literature on DL, including that at ABSEL.

But times change, even for a cynical curmudgeon. His department is concerned about the future of academe, and specifically the growing phenomenon of MOOCs (massive open online courses). A second change faced by the cynic was his niece earning her doctorate in education online, and then becoming a consultant who facilitates the improvement of university online efforts. Liking the niece greatly and seeing a need for yet another ABSEL paper topic, the cynic suggested a schizophrenic co-authored paper on the role of experiential learning in online DL. As a first step, he offered to conduct a literature search on DL

in ABSEL (using the BKL, of course).

The cynic was amazed by the amount of DL literature at ABSEL, and by all the ABSEL Fellows who had contributed to it (Burns, Butler, Cannon, Feinstein, Fritzsche, Gold, Gosen, Morgan, Smith, and Teach) as well as the large number of more enlightened contributors. The Burns (1998) piece covered his first (and only) attempt to offer an online course, in this case using a stand-alone computer game. His summary (p. *138*) of the costs and benefits of DL ["Those who covet it (distance learning) realize the huge pools of tuition that can be garnered by universities with effective learning programs, while those who damn it point to a lack of personalization and individuality that accompanies large distance-learning programs"] resonated with the cynic. However, the cynic would have preferred to see Burns use the word "efficient" rather than "effective" in the first phrase in order to make the statement more consistent with his Western preference for thinking of issues in terms of dichotomies. He sees DL as efficient delivery of content, but not effective delivery.

More thought-provoking to the cynic was Morgan's (Baugher et al. 2004) summary of the DL situation: The Internet is not going away, nor is distance education, nor are non-traditional learners. In essence, this is the education reality, so live with it. Thus, given that one must accept its existence and rapid growth, the issue becomes a concern with what can be done to make DL acceptable.

THE STATUS OF ACADEME

Let's step back a minute and examine academe's status quo, which is still primarily f2f learning on college campuses. Many "ancients" in academe remember our college days fondly, though it is getting harder and harder to recall exactly what made them so much fun. Among others, Hall (2004) notes that the three pillars of traditional instruction are fixed location, fixed time, and fixed learning pace. Viewing students as consumers of the educational offerings, one has to admit that DL can provide much more convenience for the student, allowing them to change any or all three of Hall's fixed paces. On the other hand, Burns (1998) noted that, even though students were offered grade incentives for completing assignments early, most undergraduates started and completed assignments on the due date (though the few MBAs in the class took advantage of the bonus point system), which subsequently negates the student convenience.

Though we are seemingly in the "fixed" mud puddle, the system still works, right? Well, not all feedback is positive. The cost of a college education is skyrocketing; Jenkins (2013) notes that administrators and politicians are leading the charge to reduce costs, such as classrooms, parking, restrooms, faculty offices, and faculty. As such, many universities are turning to online DL as a low cost alternative for high education. DL looks great from the administrative role of lowering costs, but does it really?

Many universities are learning that their current infrastructure will not support the increased demands of the online environment. Additionally, many professors do not have the skills (nor are they rewarded for acquiring the relevant skills) necessary to successfully instruct in an online environment. For students, many online college courses are available for free, some from prestigious universities like Harvard, MIT and Stanford. Unfortunately, the classes may be freely available online, the students currently must still pay full tuition if they wish to receive college credit for the traditional "fixed" course (and the opportunity to do so is rarely available at this point in time).

There are also those who question the level of value gained from the experience. An online paper penned by the staff of National Public Radio (NPR Staff 2011), largely based on the book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* by Richard Arum and Joseph Roska, concluded that an astounding proportion of students progress through higher education today without measurable gains in general skills (critical thinking, complex reason, and written communication). Contrasting the performance of students in 2007 with the same students' performance in 2005, only a 7% improvement was found.

In part, the failure to grow intellectually according to societal expectations is due to the students' unwillingness to put sufficient effort into learning. In 1961, students spent 24 hours a week studying; today it is estimated to be 11 hours/week (*Economist* 2010), with 35% of students studying less than five hours per week (NPR Staff 2011). Before we conclude that student laziness is the issue, we need to consider what is being asked of students today. Half of all students say that they did not have one course that required 20 pages of writing (NPR Staff 2011). The *Economist* (2010, p. 74) concluded that "the most plausible explanation is that the profession is not particularly interested in student's welfare." Promotion and tenure depend on published research, not good teaching. Professors strike an implicit bargain with their students: we will give you light workloads and inflated grades as long as you leave us alone to do our research." Most ABSELers are dedicated to the goal of student learning and may find this conclusion to be quite cynical, but the cynic sees quite a bit of truth in it.

So, where is academe headed? DL has been a growth industry, though growth appeared to plateau in 2010 (Jenkins 2013). Ledman and Roby (2004) stated that there were 33% of universities and 25,730 courses online in 1994 -5, while the numbers grew to 44% and 52,230 in 1997-8. Gosen (2003) wrote that there were over 1.5 million Internet courses available through 3000 institutions (out of approximately 4300) in 1999. Duck and Parente (2008) stated that there were 2.35 million students online in fall 2004. Jenkins (2013) noted that 31% of postsecondary students have taken a course online and that a survey of faculty at public and land-grant universities found that 36%

of faculty have taught online. The numbers surely have increased greatly in this century. As noted earlier, world class universities like Stanford and Columbia are offering MOOCs free (and other universities are starting to give credit for them; Koh (2013) notes that San Jose State is starting to do that). Heckinger (2013) discusses the case of Southern New Hampshire University, which has 2750 undergraduates on campus, but over 25,000 online. Online degrees there cost $38,000, compared to the on-campus cost of $112,000. The more efficient online delivery saves costs, and the increasing use of MOOCs is likely to do that further by reducing the number of faculty needed on campus (Koh 2013). Further, Clayton Christensen at the Harvard Business School, who coined the phrase "disruptive innovation," predicts that, in 15 years, half of all universities will be out of business (Heckinger 2013). Sebastion Thrun, a professor at Stanford University and co-founder of the online MOOC Udacity, told Wired that he expects there to be only 10 universities in 50 years (Leckart 2013). Koh (2013) predicts that the cuts will be seen by non-elite colleges, leaving f2f venues to the elite only. This does not bode well for ABSELers, most of whom are employed by good (but not elite) schools.

By the way, it is not just those of us in academe who may be threatened by increasing technology. America's teacher unions also fear a hidden agenda of replacing properly trained humans with some combination of technology and less qualified manpower, or possibly just technology. Unions have filed lawsuits to close online charter schools, including what looks like a deliberately obtuse proposal to limit enrollments at such schools to those who live in their districts (*Economist* 2013, p. 26).

On the flip-side, some are touting the benefits that online courses can provide to employers (McKendrick 2013). One of the increasing concerns is that the 'new' world requires new skills and a continual upgrade of existing skill sets. For many mid-career employees, the cost and time of going to school to gain new skills is a major hindrance. Businesses are now using MOOCs and other online DL courses to bridge the gap and keep workers up to date without putting out the increasingly rising costs of college courses. The personal evaluation of MOOCs in the next section adds insight as to the potential for MOOCs in the future of business academe.

PERSONAL EVALUATION OF THE MOOC EXPERIENCE

Another author who is also old, but not quite as curmudgeonly, decided to take a MOOC, to see what this type of class is about. This author has been teaching large classes (200 students) several years and understood the challenges in large f2f classes. This author also has taught asynchronous online classes and taken several online classes in the last few years. The author decided to take a MOOC in Statistics from Sebastian Thrun (the CEO of Udacity), one of the leaders in the development of MOOC's. He chose statistics because he had completed two online classes in statistics and wanted to have a baseline for comparison.

The MOOC was made of short presentations by Thrun followed by problem solving or quizzes that were multiple choice type questions. Initially the author found this to be engaging, but over several weeks it became somewhat repetitious with the brief presentations becoming annoying, because it took several of the brief presentations to understand the concept that was being introduced. Some takeaways from the MOOC (most of which are not original to this author) are that to be successful in a MOOC, the student must be highly motivated and driven. It is a tedious process to be constantly viewing brief presentations and repeatedly answer multiple choice questions. It also is very easy when you are working on your own, to stop the class and focus on something more convenient or entertaining. The MOOC demanded a single-minded focus to pull together concepts built on short videos. Most of the learning was at an application level of learning from Bloom's taxonomy. This might have something to do with the subject matter. To date, most of the MOOC class offerings have been procedural and quantitative in nature, a structure that is probably more feasible for MOOCs. Classes of a more subjective nature, which have more focus on the evaluation and synthesis level of learning, may be more difficult to fit into the one size fits all model of MOOCs.

Learning in a MOOC is a lonely adventure and you are an anonymous participant. The author missed the give and take of the f2f class or even the discussion board of a standard online class in a fixed time period. It is too easy to disengage from the class and that is the reason there are such high dropout rates in MOOCs. More than 90% of students who start a MOOC do not complete it (Wall Street Journal 2013). Besides the loneliness, the cost of dropping out is minimal compared to a regular f2f class or traditional online class. Initially this author spent time and energy on the class, and he keeps thinking he will finish the class, but like most individuals has not yet. It was extremely repetitious and for this author the learning was in such small chunks that it was not as challenging like a traditional class can be. This might be due to the subject matter, but as you adopt this model for a one size fits all model, it limits the individuality you would find in an f2f class. On the positive side, the class was extremely convenient. This author could do it at his convenience. The class was entirely self-paced, the participant could spend as little as 5 minutes a day or devote a full 24 hours to it. You could do the class in any order you wanted jumping from topic to topic, although this author found it difficult not to just jump to the end at times. The instructor was very knowledgeable and engaging in the short videos (although the opportunity to ask questions of the instructor was desired but not available) and he seemed to be passionate about the subject. The production qualities were excellent. There was

an online community of those who are taking or had taken the class to answer questions. Community members provided outside help and cheat sheets to help you understand the topics.

As compared to the online statistics class this author took for credit, he learned more about the procedural aspects of statistics, but less about the application of statistics in the portion of the MOOC I completed (the traditional online class consisted of video lectures from a f2f in the late 90s, combined with assigned problems and proctored exams). The student is completely responsible for their learning in the MOOC world. This is great if you are a highly-motivated learner, but is a negative for many of the traditional 18-24 year old students in today's colleges and universities. MOOCs give the student the freedom to succeed or fail and also the freedom to learn what the student wants, but this author does not think that is the environment that will be successful for today's traditional student.

In today's marketplace, especially for business colleges, the success or failure of MOOCs, online classes, traditional f2f classes, etc. will not be determined by colleges and universities but by employers. If employers accept MOOCs as replacements for more traditional college offerings and credentials, then there will be a greater acceptance of them by students.

From this author's perspective, there seems to be a movement to find a one size fits all to solve the issue of the rising cost of education in America. That is a simplistic view that may not be realistic. For the traditional undergraduate in the 18-24 age group, college is not just about learning from an academic perspective, but also about maturing and networking for future opportunities. It is about becoming socially acculturated into professional careers and a shared experience with their future managers and co-workers. From our perspective many students in the current generation of traditional students would not have the self-discipline to be successful in the current versions of MOOCs. For most of these students, the on campus experience is still very meaningful (and it is hard to imagine that it will become less so in the future).

For the highly motivated individuals who are more focused on learning (especially ones in parts of the world where access to education is rare), MOOCs and their brethren make sense. For non-traditional students, MOOCs and other digital means of learning could be very important if some type of credentialing is offered. This author's crystal ball is fuzzy, but he expects that education will come in many flavors and the future may bring us an a la carte menu rather than one size fits all. The MOOCs of today will certainly be evolving to something else as technology evolves. From this author's perspective, MOOCs have a role to play and it will be interesting to see how they evolve as they move from free to a pay to use model. The real role of this type of instruction will become more apparent as students and employers evaluate the cost of a MOOC both financially and the level of effort as well

as learning outcomes against f2f classes and synchronous online classes.

DL'S PROS AND CONS

Numerous ABSELers have discussed DL in terms of its pros and cons. Some of this discussion has been somewhat tangential to the discussion of a new game or exercise being presented. Bernard (2006) characterized games, essentially discussing a continuum of game type from traditional games modified to run on the Internet to new games being designed specifically for the web. Bernard (2006) noted that the first discussion of an Internet games was by Teach (1997). Subsequent game description papers include Bernard and Pacheco de Sousa (2009), Cassady, Powers, and Brizek (2013), Cuadrado, Garcia, and Fernandez (2011), Gold (2008), Letnick (2005), Pilluta (2003), Shami, Box, Fort, and Gordon (2004), and D. Smith (2010). Both Shami et al. (2004) and D. Smith (2010) had strong ethical components as part of their learning goals. Perotti (2006) discussed the possibility of using MMOGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Games, such as War of the World) in business courses by taking advantage of the trading processes already built into such games.

Other ABSEL work has focused more specifically on the pros and cons of DL. J. Smith (2005, p. 340) noted that DL has been around for years, as it once took the form of correspondence courses, which "were very often relegated to the lower echelon of education." However, such courses did circumvent the fixed place, time, and pace restrictions of f2f classes. The flexibility associated with DL as viewed from the student's perspective is one of its most commonly cited advantages. However, D. Smith (2010) notes that giving control to students for their time and course pace may contribute to the high attrition rates in online courses due to student procrastination. Earlier we discussed Burns' (1998) piece and his experience that undergraduates, despite incentives for work turned in early, did not start assignments long before they were due, whereas the MBA students in the class completed the assignments done early. Hall and Dudley (2005) discuss the need to hire people to monitor the progress of the participants.

Another potential advantage of the online nature of course delivery is the ability to provide automated feedback to students during a game. Hall (2004) notes that online testing (with objective tests) offers immediate feedback, tutorials on relevant content apparently misunderstood, and web links to other related material. Gold (2008) discussed the possibility of automated coaching during game play, pointing students to those results indicative of a need for strategy change. Obviously, such feedback might allow the student to dig himself/herself out of a hole before the all too common learned helplessness sets in, leading students to quit trying.

A commonly discussed (Burns 1998; Chandler 2012; Hall and Dudley 2005) disadvantage of DL is the reduced opportunity for interaction among students and between students and the instructor. Academics have pretty well developed egos, and most of us believe that our words of wisdom shared with students have great potential in terms of aiding their growth. Whether this is true or not is debatable, but the inability to have such interactions would seem to be one of the major reasons for the disdain that some academics hold for the DL process. [Jenkins (2013) noted that he talked to literally scores of people who teach online, with hardly any of them preferring online teaching to f2f. The survey he discussed found that even those who have taught online hold unfavorable opinions of it. As aside, one reviewer was a big fan of online teaching and argued that it was fun and very effective. On the downside, he noted that his belief in providing feedback resulted in the need to be available by phone 24/7, at least in his wife's perceptions.] Burns (1998) noted that he only met a handful of his students face-to-face, and that his varied efforts to encourage interactions among the students themselves were "miserable failures." Hall and Dudley discussed their observance of "collective loafing," the failure of students to interact unless forced. Suggestions to overcome this lack of interaction include the use of collaborative learning via chat rooms (Hall and Dudley 2005) and the creation of feedback on student interactions in the form of "weekly meeting minutes" (Chandler 2012).

Personal experience of one of the authors illustrates another problem with online DL. In short, it is not always clear who is actually taking the class. Without proctored, closed book, in-person exams, it is difficult if not impossible to verify who actually completed the class. Personal electronic devices provide convenient methods facilitating the differing forms of cheating (ask a friend, plagiarization, etc.) while also making it increasingly difficult to detect. There is already an underground market for essays, assignments, and exams. Now, most online courses' exams are open book without proper oversight. Recently, one university put out the word to remind professors that students can now purchase teacher's editions of books and test banks online. One experience that one of the authors discovered (after-the-fact) was a wife who finished her MBA and then went back and took online courses for her husband's MBA as well. When you're online, no-one knows that you are a dog.

Perhaps the overriding concern as to the use of DL is whether students learn at least as well via DL as through f2f formats. This question would seem to open Pandora's Box yet once again. For example, ABSEL has a long history of research comparing different pedagogies in terms of their effectiveness and of papers trying to clarify what "learning" is and how it might be measured. Nearly 25 years ago Gentry, Burns, and Wolfe (1990) wrote a chapter in the *ABSEL Guide* deriding pedagogical research in general and discussing the issues (many of them largely uncontrollable by the instructor) harming internal and external validity. Within ABSEL, we found only one paper (Ledman 2008) that attempted to contrast learning across DL and a standard f2f format. Gosen (2003) and Ledman (2008) review literature finding no difference in learning between DL and f2f formats for the most part, and even one study (Arbaugh and Hiltz 2004) finding DL to be superior. Student self-selection was examined by Yatrakis and Simon (2002) and found that even allowing students to choose the class format that they preferred led to no significant difference in grades. On the other hand, William Bowen, once the President of Princeton University and the author of a recent book on technology in higher education, stated, "It is appalling how little is actually known about the outcomes produced by various forms of online learning" (*Economist* 2013, P. 25). Given limitations in experimental control and in defining learning operationally, one should be skeptical of the value of the findings discussed above. The cynic is, as are Feinstein (2004) and Gosen (2003). Feinstein (2004) goes on to describe the type of experimental design that might yield meaningful comparisons. In true ABSEL tradition, our review of the ABSEL literature found no subsequent citation of the Feinstein paper and certainly no attempt to actually incorporate the design guidance in a research effort. We would suggest that there is no meaningful research investigating the performance of various pedagogies in business courses. The cynic believes that the most convincing argument for using a particular pedagogy was Jim Schreier's observation at ABSEL in the 1970s, "If it feels good, do it." Those instructors enthusiastic about the pedagogy they have created, modified, or taking 'ownership of' through successful implementations, are likely to have success in terms of student acceptance. Whether it is the instructor's enthusiasm or the pedagogy itself that is key is debatable (Gentry and McGinnis 2007).

ABSEL AND DL

Since its earliest consideration at ABSEL (Fritzsche and Cotter 1992), the Internet has been seen as playing a major role in the future of the organization (Fritzsche and Cotter 1992; Gold 2001; Gosen 2003; Hall and Dudley 2005; J. Smith 2005), as well as in higher education in general. Our interpretation is that the subsequent literature on DL has been somewhat pedestrian in nature, mainly force fitting existing pedagogies into a different delivery system. Maybe we should view the new technology as providing us with a discontinuity, as suggested by J. Smith (2005, p. 341): "It is not too difficult to view the Internet as an anomaly that is not explained by current research, and the anomaly may lead to teaching in a new model of instruction. And yet much of the focus of research directed toward online education is lacking on this regard." This was quite a leap for someone who on the page before was positioning DL as an extension of correspondence courses. Regardless, we need to think outside the box in order to

make the best use of our experience and expertise in non-traditional pedagogies.

First, let us deal with the issue of MOOCs. We see this as akin to the small town retailer competing with the big box stores in a neighboring city. You have to live with this presence, and you certainly cannot compete with them head on in terms of price or variety. So, what to do? One option is to fold up one's tent, but we do not see many academics resorting to that. Some small towns still have viable business centers despite the proximate presence of mega markets. The key is to embed the market, largely through personalization and service. Make special orders for customers or let preferred customers (most of the locals) know when items of possible interest are received. Have a united effort by local retailers to create a friendly, helpful aura for shoppers. Sponsor kid sports teams and support local unique events such as the tractor parade. Make it embarrassing for the local customer to be seen out shopping at the big box store.

ABSELers need to avoid direct competition with MOOCs and, instead, personalize our offerings online. High touch is very possible, and not something that will be possible for the MOOC providers, at least in the short run. They rely on world class lecturers and their brand equity to reach huge markets globally. [In fact, we should laud their attempt to bring education to those for whom it had been an impossible dream heretofore.] Let the MOOCs do their thing, and maybe even persuade your university to give credit for taking the courses (for a modest surcharge). As Sternberg (2013; he was formerly the president of the University of Wyoming) notes, AACSB has found that, across many areas tested, employers strongly endorse educational practices that involve students in active, effortful work – practices including problem solving, internships, senior projects, and community engagements. The desired skills of critical thinking, complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applying knowledge in real-world settings are not going to develop through passive learning in MOOC settings. Thus, it is incumbent upon ABSELers to make our online business offerings more high touch, so that those critical thinking skills are more likely to develop.

So, how does one do this in what is possibly a 'new' learning environment. Let's consider simulation gaming first. Rather than modifying existing games, it would make sense for ABSEL to encourage young scholars who are computer jocks to develop new games that can take better advantage of current technology. Teens today do not need to be sold on gaming, but they need educational games that look something like the games they know. Decision sheets and financial statements need to be supplemented with graphics that generate an aura of "dynamism." We obviously should not do away with financial statements, as game output is a truly successful means of familiarizing marketing and management students with the insight to be gained from Balance Sheets and Income Statements. But, at a minimum, graphs, charts, and movement reflecting trends

need to be there as well.

Gold's Automated Coaching system needs to be incorporated as well. The cynic agrees with Ralph Day's conclusion at the end of the first ABSEL Conference that one unique benefit of simulation gaming is that one has to live with one's errors, and does not have the opportunity to start over as with cases or exams. Further, the learning that occurs as one works one's way out of the self-created hole is likely to be greater than that experienced by the student who cruises to victory after a great start. The automated coaching system can consider more than just the last period's performance, and note a weak performance overall but with a positive trend, reflecting that learning is occurring, and thus reducing the level of guidance provided. On the other hand, students with poor performance and downward trends might receive much higher levels of guidance.

One additional element which we think should be incorporated in the evaluation of one's learning from the game (all games, whether online or not) is the requirement that students write papers after game play is over evaluating the realism of the game and making suggestions as to changes that might make the game world resemble (the student's perception of) the real world more. The assignment measures one's understanding of the game structure, as well as the critical thinking needed to contrast its structure with the business environment being simulated. If the game being used is one which the instructor created or which the instructor has the ability to modify, creative student responses may easily lead to the development of a richer learning experience for future students.

The immediacy of feedback offered online as noted by Gold (2008) and Hall (2004) also offers strong advantages to DL, especially given the easy access to explanatory material dealing with errors made. However, the context discussed by Hall (2004) would seem to fit best with multiple choice testing, which might not be appropriate for the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy that experiential learning is better at providing (Gentry, McCain, and Burns 1979).

Let's consider the context of an experiential exercise designed to cover ethical concerns. A passive version might present a detailed scenario up to the point of one party being at a decision point. One alternative would be to have the online student determine the decision and also provide its rationale. Requirements might also include evaluations of the perspectives of all parties involved. A second alternative would be to provide the student with several possible alternative decisions and have him/her select one along with providing supporting rationale. Automatic feedback could be provided in terms of evaluating that choice. Previous trial runs in f2f environments would probably be needed to determine those possible alternatives, as student creativity should never be underestimated. All game designers have no doubt encountered glitches due to student inputs being out of

expected range and, on occasion, the inputs can actually be rationalized. An extension of this setting would be to list possible alternative decisions, but fail to include the one thought to be the best. Allowing the student the option to argue about the issue (announced in advance) might stimulate more critical thinking. Similarly, feedback on an alternative chosen could be wrong intentionally in order to inspire the student to argue.

While such formats might successfully make the ethical issues more relevant to the student, the structure is questionably experiential. Another format would be to assign students to pair up and then role play the scenario themselves. The players are given detailed instructions concerning the buyer's or the seller's roles, and then interact via Skype or some other interactive medium. Both students would be asked to write a short paper discussing their perspective of the dilemma, their understanding of the other party's situation, and what they believe to be the correct decision, again with support rationale.

CONCLUSION

Distance learning, as per Baugher et al. (2004), is a fact of life and will only grow in usage as technology continues to advance. There should be concern for the future of academe and academics themselves as many of us seem to be entrenched in the version of the game that we have grown up with. Young ABSELers need to play strong roles in adding personal touches to DL such that more MOOC-like options can be relegated to an appropriate niche. The cynic, on the other hand, cannot forget the joy of talk back TV and will retire in the not too distant future without having to take any of his courses online.

Distance learning is a reality and it no doubt has its advantages. ABSELers need to think outside the fixed (place, pace, and time) box and generate more involving approaches for the online student. The cynic wishes the organization the best.

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