INTRODUCTION
## SPECIAL ISSUE ON TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

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My interest in Distance Education began in Hawaii. Hawaii is a likely spot for thoughts about using technology to communicate across vast spaces. A series of once isolated islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Hawaii is a place where communication with the outside world has been a key issue in development. I like to think that I was one of the people who helped Hawaii to overcome its educational isolation, and that I applied what I learned in Hawaii to the task of using technology to connect and help people all over the world.

A Story About Distance Education and Technology

When I moved to Hawaii in 1975, the Hawaiian islands were isolated from the rest of the world in ways that would be hard to imagine today. For example, in Hawaii we received national television news reports at 6:00 AM the next morning. These reports were those broadcast on the mainland the previous day! Other television programming was even more delayed—by a week or longer. And library patrons ordering journal issues, could expect to receive them three to six months later than their colleagues in California and New York.

This is what it was like in 1975 when, freshly graduated from the Florence Heller Graduate School of Advanced Studies in Social Welfare at Brandeis University, I took my first faculty job at the University of Hawaii. Each summer during my graduate studies, I
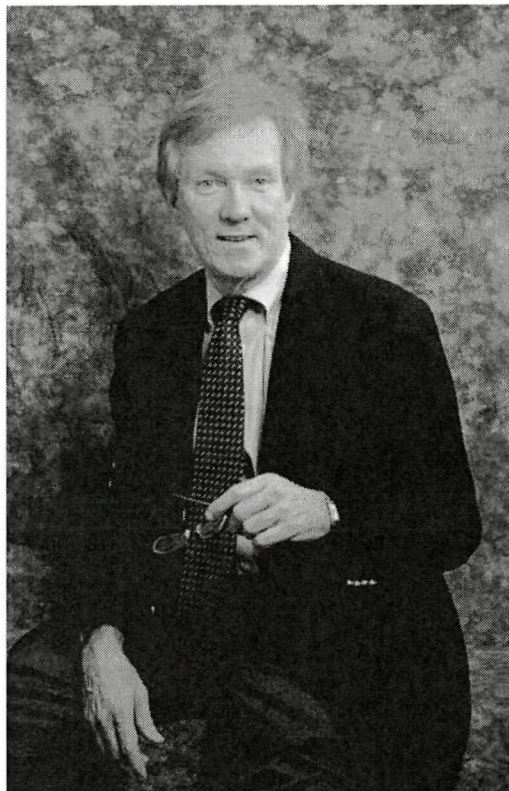
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had returned to the University of Southern California Andrus Gerontology Center in Los Angeles to take seminars in my specialty: gerontology. These were wonderful and challenging summers. As a student in this program, I was able to learn from internationally renowned leaders in the field of aging. Each time I returned to Hawaii, I wondered how I might be able to bring this sort of educational experience in aging to Hawaii.

On the Hawaiian islands, the only three experts in aging were at the University in Oahu. But most of the aging population, and the social workers who served them, lived on the outer islands. There was little contact between the University and the outer islands. Determined to overcome this barrier, I began my first foray into Distance Education. In those days, Distance Education meant that educators were sent onto the traveling circuit for face-to-face classroom instruction and interaction with students. The program was a great success. For the first time, social workers on the islands were able to benefit from training on their home turf. But the requirements for travel limited our reach. (The only way to get from island to island was by air or sea.) Enter serendipity. I learned that the University had a long-standing contract with NASA to make use of a satellite communication system that was no longer needed by the space agency. It was called PEACESAT. It enabled us, for the first time, to offer faculty lectures by broadcasting from the main island to the outlying islands in the south pacific. The broadcasts—which were audio- but not video-interactive—helped us to extend the reach of our program. For me, they planted an idea that was to bear fruit in a place far from Hawaii.

A few years later I found myself teaching gerontology in Long Beach, California. When I came to California, I believed that I would be coming to a place that was rich in social work resources and free of the isolation of an island state. What I found was a bit different. California produced relatively few graduate-trained social workers. (At that time, the city of New York produced more MSW graduates each year than did the entire state of California.) Even worse, the geographical expanse of the state meant that many small towns and rural counties had no access to professional training in social work.

Working from my position as a faculty member, and later Director, of the Department of Social Work at California State University, Long Beach, I set about to do in California what I had done successfully in Hawaii. Traditionally, social workers who wanted to earn an MSW degree, and who lived in rural areas, had to leave their home communities for the two-year educational program. For many working professionals with family and job commitments, this was impossible. So, with the help of Ginger Wilson as Coordinator of Distance Education, and Jan Black, our Director of Field Instruction, we offered our first Distance Education programs on CSU Chico and CSU Humboldt campuses in 1995. This program allowed students to complete their courses in their home communities. In 1998 we graduated our first cohort of Chico and Humboldt students.

No Distance Education program can be successful without an effective local Site Coordinator. For this role, we were lucky to have the services of Gary Bess at the Chico site and Donna Wheeler at the Arcata site. In an article in this Special Issue, Bess ably describes the many challenges of site coordination in Distance Education. Chris Kleinpeter, in another paper in this Special Issue, provides an administrator's perspective on the organizational prerequisites for our Distance Education program.

Because Distance Education programs involve innovations and challenges, many faculty and administrators have been skeptical of the educational merits of this approach. We found many of these sentiments at Cal State Long Beach, among our own faculty as well as the administrators whose support was essential to us. So we were very careful to design a comprehensive evaluation of our new program. Marilyn Potts of our research faculty measured a wide range of variables by means of student surveys, teaching and field evaluations, and administrative data that included grades. All these measures were compared to our on-campus program. To our delight, the data showed that our Distance

Education program maintained the same high standards as our traditional program. We also discovered that the cost of maintaining a quality Distance Education program was greater than that of a traditional program. We had been fortunate to have the support of a Child Welfare Training Grant from the Harry Spect California Social Work Education Center, which made possible our initial efforts. But we were also alerted to the need for adequate funding for future Distance Education programs.

Just as we had used satellite technology in the Hawaii program, we were able to use technology to expand the reach of our instructors in California. But this time, the technology had advanced. We were able, for the first time, to use television broadcasts, transmitted over telephone lines using compressed video files. This allowed for two-way or interactive communication between students and instructors—each could speak directly to the other, facilitating faculty lectures and class discussions. Although this was initially awkward for both students and teachers, we were surprised by how quickly each adapted to the system, and how natural the interactive classroom experience became. And recently we began offering several of our core courses on-line at Cal State Hayward, extending educational opportunity to students who are not able to meet a regular class schedule, but who can meet all course requirements from the comfort of their homes via Internet access.

Introduction to this Special Issue

This Special Issue on technology provides the reader with a rich collection of personal experiences. In it, the reader learns about the implementation of technology in social work education and practice. This Special Issue is an excellent resource for the techno-neophyte who wants to know about the challenges and possibilities of technology.

Having been confronted by the task of starting a new Distance Education program, Chris Kleinpeter recounts her experiences, good and bad. This paper gives the reader a flavor of the many challenges inherent in initiating such a program in rural areas. Among these are funding, collaboration among campuses, faculty workload issues, and ensuring that urban educators are sensitive to the requisites of rural practice. In the end, she reminds us that the use of technology must not distract educators from their primary goal: teaching students how to be change agents in their face-to-face work with clients and community members.

Care to learn about how a social worker used computerization to save himself from being overwhelmed? Moshe ben Asher's paper refutes the oft-repeated charge that computers "dehumanize." He describes the stress, inefficiency, and administrative chaos that resulted from a complex paper-based tracking system in use at a criminal justice diversion program. Over a period of several months, Moshe ben Asher transformed this antiquated process into a paperless data management system, using a popular relational data base software program. The result? A smoothly functioning process that freed caseworkers to do what they do best: form helping relationships with clients. A side benefit was improved relationships among staff, a development that transformed the agency, its workers, and clients.

Paul P. Freddolino describes the ups and downs of starting a Distance Education program to bring MSW training to rural areas. The challenges included faculty anxieties about videotaping class sessions, opposition by some groups at host campuses, maintaining personal contact with students, and last minute set up of communication facilities. Overcoming these challenges was justified in the face of intense interest among a large pool of rural applicants, eager for graduate education.

From computer novice to expert consultant, Janaki Santhiveeran describes how computers changed her life—most notably her communications with family members on the other side of the globe, and her strategies for teaching social work students. She describes the move to a paperless classroom, as well as the benefits and drawbacks to this approach. According to Janaki Santhiveeran, even students who are initially computer-anxious, can learn to make computers an integral part of their educational experience.

What happens when two social workers and a tech-savvy rocket scientist team up to solve one of Los Angeles County's most intractable social service problems? (the absence of an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive, and easy-to-use Information and Referral system). As Ruby Guillen, Joseph Powers, and Raymond Manning recount their experiences, the reader begins to understand the challenges: defining principles and purposes for the information system; neutralizing opposition from social service providers threatened by the novelty of a computer-based innovation; weeding out investors who are likely to exploit the system; and keeping the system up-to-date and easy to use. The end result is a web-based Information and Referral resource that is bringing coherence and accessibility to social services in Los Angeles County.

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is a daunting task. In a short period of time, and faced with a large group of students, the instructor is expected to bring her students to a level of English-language proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. In this narrative, Lucia Buttaro opens up a new world for ESL teachers, showing them that computers in ESL courses enhance student learning. The teacher is able to rely on e-mail messaging, on-line chats, bulletin boards, and other devices to help students learn. This approach allows students to learn basic concepts and to apply them by interacting with authentic and challenging audiences.

According to Jo Ann Regan's review of the literature on the diffusion of innovation, in response to the introduction of any innovation, a few will embrace and a few will oppose it. In time, a majority will participate. She aptly describes this process as it applies to the use of computer technology by faculty in an urban school of social work.

Gary Bess describes the challenges of starting and running a rural Distance Education program sponsored by a large urban university. Can rural social workers relate to professors whose experience is urban-based? Will rural students want to receive their training via interactive TV and e-mail, with personal contact limited to an on-site faculty member? How will field instructors be integrated into the Distance Education model? How can a faculty Distance Coordinator bring all these elements together in a high-quality educational program? The author's personal account provides answers that will be of interest to social work educators.

In a switch to a more light-hearted topic, the uses of humor in social work, this Special Issue includes two intriguing narratives. Although authors John Kayser and Mark Lyon may not get their own television sit-com, it is not for lack of trying. In an imaginary pilot for a series of television programs modeled on the popular program "Survivor," Freud, Skinner, Rogers, and other human behavior gurus battle to see who stays and who leaves the island. This narrative is an irreverent plea to remain humble about what we know and teach, to care about intellectual honesty, and above all, to maintain a sense of humor.

Alex Gitterman's narrative certainly is of interest to the majority of social workers who are afraid to use humor with their clients. How can the worker know that the attempt won't backfire? That is always a possibility. But Alex Gitterman advises us that social workers' humor may also provide the warmth that melts

an icy and otherwise impossible therapeutic relationship. He provides the reader with a better understanding of good and bad uses of humor, as well as clinical examples of the facilitative power of mirth.

Will a computer ever replace your psychotherapist? In a provocative paper, Paul Abels asks this and other questions about computers in social work. While many of us rush headlong into computer technologies, he asks us to consider the risks to clients and to the profession of social work. He argues that there are as yet unanswered questions of ethics, accountability, and efficacy, when new technologies are applied without careful consideration.

Looking Backward....and Forward

Today I look back at almost three decades of my involvement in using technology in Distance Education. I have to smile inwardly when I think of our humble beginnings. We began with a single traveling lecturer in Hawaii. Our first audio transmission capability was almost primitive by today's standards. Students attending class at a remote site were able to hear and speak with the instructor, but could not see her. Today of course, we have fully-interactive communication between class and lecturer, backed up by instant on-line access, by which students can be in constant touch with each other, with their instructor, and the local site coordinator.

When I began I was a novice junior faculty member, wondering if I would ever have a lasting impact on my students, I could not have predicted that, years later, I would direct Distance Education programs across the globe. Today, I am Associate Vice President of Extended and Continuing Education at California State University, Hayward. I am responsible for all international programs, including MBA programs in Hong Kong, Singapore, Moscow, Vienna, and Beijing. My responsibilities include a

technology whose reach was not yet imagined when I began: on-line education. Currently, I direct all on-line education programs at Cal State Hayward. Among our offerings is a Masters degree in On-Line Education, a program that teaches educators how to establish and direct web-based on-line programs in their institutions.

At Cal State Hayward, we still send faculty to local sites for face-to-face teaching. But we augment our programs with a range of sophisticated communication technology. In addition to live interactive audio and video, we also use an on-line course management program called Blackboard. Using any Internet connection, students can download assigned readings as well as lecture notes that are available before class sessions. They can communicate in real-time or via messages with other students and with faculty. They even receive their grades on-line.

When we think of social workers, we think of "people skills," of human interactions that cannot be duplicated by machines. When we think of computers, we envision a world run by machines, a world dominated by numbers and computer code. In reality, there is no tension between the "people skills" of social work and computerization. As administrator of one of the leading institutions of Distance Education, I have been able to use my social work skills and my knowledge of technology, to create a menu of Distance Education programs that span the world. These disparate approaches—the one personal, the other impersonal—facilitate one another. Technology brings people together from across vast distances. And it diminishes the effort required to perform routine tasks, thereby freeing the social worker, administrator, and educator to form and enhance relationships.