Succeeding

with the distance
learning system

A Guide For Learners by
D.C. PANT

Contents

DISCLAIMER

This book carries a variety of information of different kinds. Some is related to data about distance learning Institutions and some about people who have used them. While all effort was made to assure the correctness of all information given here, it is quite possible that errors and inaccuracies may have crept in.

If any member of any Institution finds them and brings them to my notice, I will be happy to correct them in future editions.

The author has been an integral part of the distance learning system for a long time and has prepared these materials on the basis of his direct personal experience and knowledge, which has been gathered from so many sources and individuals that it is impossible to identify and acknowledge each one of them. Again, if some inaccuracies have been reported I wish to be excused for the same and will be willing to make such amends as meet the requirements.

In spite of any such inadvertent errors and omissions, I do hope the book will be useful to its readers and persuade a whole new generation of life-long learners to pursue distance learning.

D.C. Pant
Former PVC, IGNOU

Foreword

This is really a book with a difference. Its author, Sri D. C. Pant has directly interacted with perhaps a greater number of distance learners than any other person. He has a vast experience in the field and from that has brought within the constraints of a small readable booklet, a large canvas of the offerings that distance learning brings to a prospective student.

One major difficulty of all distant learners is the relative isolation not only from teachers but also with fellow learners and *a* peer group. There is also often a degree of low esteem and II confidence as a result of this. This is in sharp contrast to a student in an IIT for example. One of the Directors of I IT, Kanpur used to say "The day a student joins IIT, Kanpur his soul migrates to the USA. Four years later, his body Follows".

A distant learner, after going through the examples given in this book, will feel a little more confident about himself and his decision to have enrolled for distance education and started n|" mo journey on the path to life-long learning.

Wishing the readers all success in their pursuit.

07 May 2007   **Prof. M.M. Pant**
                                                                Former PVC, IGNOU

From Me To You

An Army Officer from Meerut Cantonment accompanied by his 'batman' dropped in my office cabin during early hours of the forenoon enroute his posting to a field area in North Eastern sector. He wanted the "Migration Certificate" for his daughter who had just graduated from the University. I advised him to fill up the form, pay requisite fee through a demand draft obtainable from nearby Bank located in the University premises and submit the request to the officer seated next door. The Army Officer came back after an hour to suggest if his 'batman' could visit the office after about a fortnight or so to collect the required Certificate. Before he could complete his sentence, the officer next door handed over the "Migration Certificate" to him with a smile. The Army Officer got a shock of greater intensity that he may have had while commanding a battalion somewhere on a border post/ reason—he could not believe getting a "Migration Certificate" from a University in literally less than an hour.

After a few days, a young women — wife of the only son of his mother —-posted in a Central Government organization in Chennai dropped in, on way to attend to her ailing mother-in-law at Lucknow and narrated her problem with eyes wet and voice choked. She was pursuing an MBA program for which the examinations were to commence a day after. Skipping the examination to fulfill the social obligation was weighing very heavily on her mind. I handed over a revised Admit Card' — the passport to take her examination at our Lucknow Centre located very close to her residence. The lady could not control her tears albeit this time in acknowledgment of the University's gesture. Not only the young but the elderly find the ODL very also useful. At 90, Jeeva Bhai Gohil is the oldest student pursuing an MA from IGNOU.

Prompted by a number of such incidences where hundreds of the million plus strong learners do not have any access to vital information concerning their Learning Process and University's Support System providing for such service as a matter of right and not a gesture or an obligation, inspired by a sizeable number of smiling Faces that left my Cabin with reinforced confidence in the system and on the advice of my "friend, philosopher and guide" Prof. M. M. Pant, I undertook this exercise of "processing the words" that may GUIDE the learners under ODL system by facts, not opinion enabling them to create opportunities For rational planning of their career.

D.C. Pant

07 May 2007   **Former PVC, IGNOU**

Learning System In Distance Mode
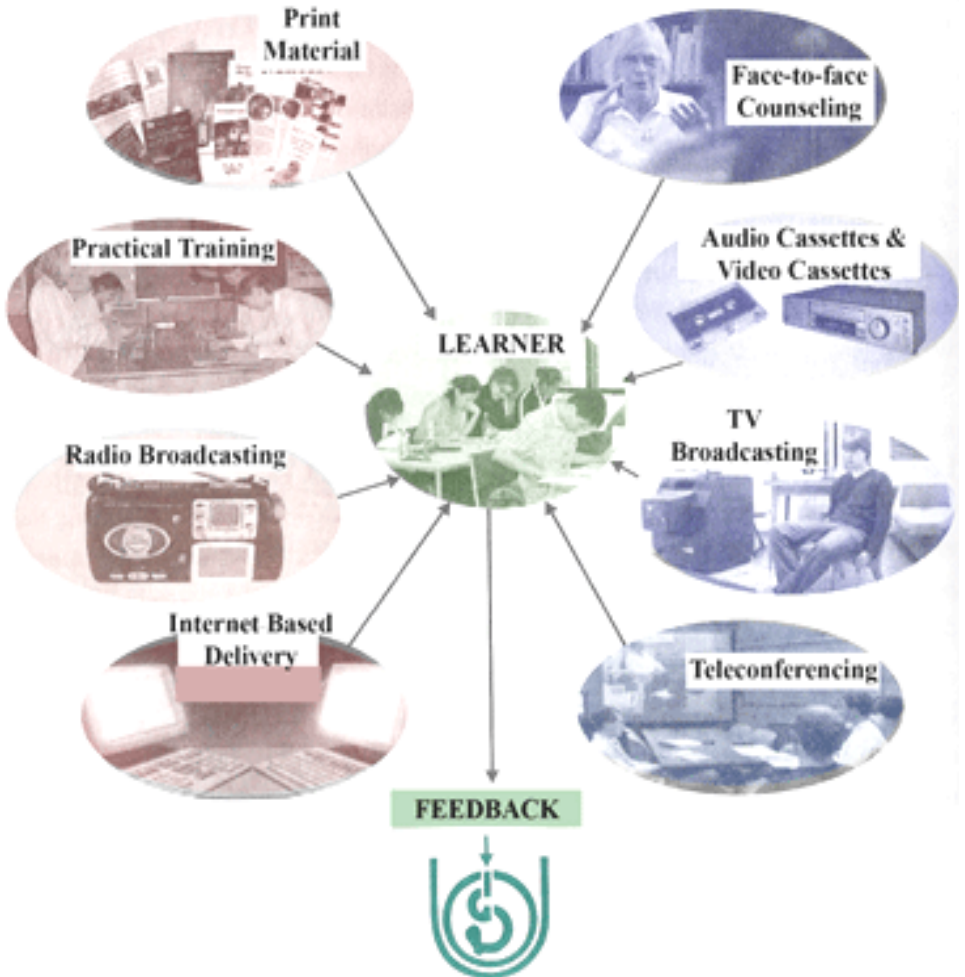
Source : IGNOU Profile 2007

The Road Less Traveled

Dear Learner,

Let us begin by defining "learning". It is the full-time School called "Life" where you are enrolled. You will continue to learn lessons each day in this school even if you feel that these lessons are unrelated or unintelligent. The School of Life will present something or the other for learning until it is learned. The only difference is that the lessons will be presented in various forms. Learning lessons does not end.

What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. The choice of using these tools lies exclusively with you only. The answers to life's questions lay inside you. All you need to do is Listen, Look and Trust. Distance learning is one such tool, which puts you in command of yourself.

The most important trait as a distance learner is the capacity to read and absorb at your own pace and in your own style. You are your own monitor & mentor. You are the class teacher; neither anyone is there to shout at you nor to punish you on your failure to meet the targets. It is "Learner-centric" system. You join the system because you wanted to join in order to learn, add knowledge in the respective field of learning, aspire for better opportunities and satisfy your urge for learning.

The illiterate of the 21 st Century will not be the one who cannot read and write but one who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.

There are certain characteristics and traits that will help you succeed. If you possess the characteristics best suited for learning through distance education sources, you are a bit ahead. If you don't, do not despair. Try to develop these characteristics and apply them during your voyage to learning through distance mode.

Let the reading of this booklet be a modest beginning of your effort in converting the traits, presently recessive - to a dominant state. You have already put the first foot forward by joining the Distance Education Program; rest will soon culminate in a memorable travelogue. Follow the road less traveled.

BON VOYAGE

The Need

Issues of human health and survival are as deep a concern as the achievement of economic viability, particularly in developing countries. Access to relevant education and training is a critical factor in breaking the self-perpetuating cycle of poverty, misery and violence exacerbated by factors like debilitating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the limiting effects of gender discrimination and the adverse impact of globalization on jobs for youth.

Yet, an estimated 125 million children worldwide have no access to primary education. Poorly trained teachers in ill-equipped schools - with no learning materials, libraries or laboratories, teach many of those who do have some access. Many of them are likely to be unable to complete even primary school education. Over one billion adults, most of them illiterate, have never received or benefited from early education. Many others require new skills to function productively in a shifting global economic environment. Access to post-secondary education is no more than three percent of the relevant age group in many developing countries.

Are we made to suffer only? Certainly not! We were not made to suffer and bear whatever bad things come our way. We are made to take part in the joys of the world. We must not be afraid of success. The school called "life" offers each of us with opportunities to be successful. Let us not refuse those opportunities and let us follow them for the change. There is nothing to feel threatened? The next time you see an opportunity, take time to look at it from all the angles and change your point of view till you see the positive side. We started by defining Learning. And how do you learn? You learn in various ways such as by doing, by listening, by reading and by seeing etc. Not all are lucky enough to get these resources in a collective manner. It is here that the multimedia approach of Distance Education comes into picture. It is distance education, which provides you the extensions of the above acts.

A comprehensive educational strategy incorporating ODL and ICT applications it is felt, can play a central role in delivering education at alt levels to all peoples, providing them with the opportunity for a more meaningful, productive way of life.

Genesis and Thereafter

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th Century, advances in Technology have provided people with distance education in one form or the other. Communication Technology has, however, given Distance Education an altogether new status. It is a rapidly growing field with respect to both practice and promise. In practice, it has permitted all sectors of education ranging from primary to higher education and from arts to business and industry. In promise, Distance Education is a field that may redefine 21st century education completely.

Distance Education may be defined as "a method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or conducted by correspondence, without the student needing to attend a school or college." (The New Oxford Dictionary). Markel (1999) broadly describes "Distance Education as instruction that is not bound by time or place, bringing about fundamental changes in higher education."

According to McMohan, "Distance Education is the requisition of knowledge and or skills where time and or space separates the learners and the provider."

Its genesis can be traced to 1840 when Sir Issac Pitman delivered instructions on shorthand via correspondence courses through mail. The first department of Correspondence teaching was established at the University of Chicago in early Twentieth Century. The University of Queensland, Australia established a Department in 1911 bur establishment of an Open University in 1969 at Milton Keynes, UK gave a new direction to the Distance Education System.

In India, a National Open University (IGNOU) was established through parliamentary enactment in the year 1985 when the system gained momentum using a combination of satellite delivered video & two-way audio interaction between the teacher and the learner. It is taking oFf to greater heights with the assistance of Internet and Video Conferencing Technology. Now with a dedicated satellite for education EDUSAT, it is getting seamless in its span.

As technologies evolve, electronically delivered instruction will appear less like 'teaching by telling' and more like 'learning through doing'. The system started with the dictum 'you learn what we teach' and has evolved into an assurance 'we teach what you want to learn'.

Distance Education is evolving and changing so rapidly that no one can accurately predict the future, but it is becoming clear that the space For distance education will continue to expand during this Century.

Distance education is a burgeoning cornucopia - a magna-carta of multified academic potentials. It provides a leaner-friendly alternative system of education to the masses.

A Learners' Paradise

Let us begin with the narration of an ancient story about a teacher and his pupil.

In ancient India, A wise Guru wished to pass the responsibility of authority of his Gurukul to his most promising shishya.

The Guru prepared a final test.

He asked his Shishya to move a large tree plank from one location to another before sunset. He told the Shishya to use all of his power to complete the feat. The Shishya tried and tried but could not succeed.

Just as he was about to give up the Guru said, "Use all your power. Have you considered using a lever?"

Surprised, the Shishya responded, "I didn't know I could use a lever."

The Shishya took a strong rod and began moving the plank. He soon realized that he couldn't accomplish the deed.

In near despair he sat down.

The Guru quietly asked, "Have you used all of your power?"

The Shishya cried, "Yes, I'm physically tired, mentally bewildered, and spiritually empty. I have no more power.

"Oh no," said the Guru, "you have more power than that."

The Shishya looked up at the smiling Guru and sighed, "Where?"

At which the Guru's smile broadened.

Then the Guru said, "Right here, as he pointed to himself."

"Did you ask for my help? You have the power to ask for my help. Use all of your power."

"Will you help me", asked the humbled Shishya.

"Yes", said the Guru. Then he called all of his other Shishyas to join him.

They quickly moved the plank to the appointed place.

Moral of this story — one has to realize the tools that are available and seek the support that lies in them to accomplish the task in which he is entangled. Distance Education is one such tool that passes the responsibility of authority to promising shishyas (Learners). It is therefore rightly called the Learners' Paradise.

In formal learning most of the conditions for learning were determined by some-one else. Learner has little or no choice about where or when to learn. Also, learners have little choice about what to learn, the pace of learning or the method of learning,- these are all set by the curriculum and the style of the tutor; the only choice is what and when to learn during private study periods in a library. For many people in today's world the restrictions of the conventional, closed system may be a real barrier to progress. The teacher may allow some interruptions for questions, but is constrained by what has to be covered in the time allocated. There may be many people attending the lecture who would quite like to ask questions but who may feel their question will be seen as too elementary or irrelevant by the rest and thus keep quiet. As a result, these people may lose much of the thread of what has been said. Others, perhaps through familiar-ity with the content would prefer the lecturer to go much faster, else they get bored. The teacher thus has no option but to aim for the middle way, which will of necessity fully satisfy only a few. The *pace*, content and style of learning cannot possibly suit everyone,- the only conventional technique, which can come near to satisfying the needs of the individual learner, will be the individual tutorial.

In the Open Learning system a learner can take almost all or any of the deci-sions about the learning process such as:

- Where to learn.
- When to learn.
- What to learn.
- How fast to learn.
- When to consult other learners
- When to consult any one else who may be useful.
- When to test what has been learnt.
- How to have their own learning tested.

The **formal learning** system does, however, have some advantages:

- The teacher will set targets to be achieved.
- The time-table will ensure that you study regularly.
- The progress will be monitored.
- Learner will be prompted and encouraged if he is getting behind and more importantly.
- Learner will have the support and encouragement derived from working with others.

An essential difference between the two systems is the concept of the active teacher and passive learner in the **formal system** as opposed to the active learner with a high measure of Self-direction in the **Open Learning** System. Another important feature of the Open Learning system is that it makes learning available to all without the restrictions imposed by distance from the tutor. The system employs distance as a positive element in the development of independence in learning. All teachers are aware that successful learning requires positive effort on the part of the learner which is emphasized highly by the Open and Distance Learning system.

An important characteristic of Distance Education is the openness to the methodology adopted for imparting education. Although Distance Education is possible without being "open", there can be several degrees of openness as prevalent in various forms of Distance Education worldwide. The difference between Formal education and Distance education lies in their aims, methods and orientation. Distance education is concerned with more varied goals which include personal growth, training for better job prospects and job enhancement, a change in attitude etc., in addition to imparting knowledge. It employs a multimedia approach including human contact at identified learning centers within easy reach of learners and is wedded towards pedagogy by building the teacher in the text. Open and Distance Learning is a system which does not operate through the traditional conventions that are essentially restrictive in nature - admission restrictions, attendance restrictions, restrictions on the candidature for examinations, restrictions on the number of examinations given and taken in a year, restrictions on subject combinations for a particular degree, restrictions on the mode of didactic communication and the didactic tasks etc. The difference is characterized by the advanced strategies and technologies of communication; the shift is essentially effected by the advances in Communication Technology. In other words, Distance Education is *an* innovative type of education that uses all possible means of communication, the postal system being only one of them. The "openness" angle enables it to wean away from the conventional constraints that characterize the traditional education. This change is of the kind that was experienced a few hundred years ago when sectarian education yielded to liberal education but now it is the liberal education, which is yielding to Distance education.

Distance education imparts skills - Though Distance education depends on the written word also, there is the ingredient of spoken word too. Being a multimedia system of education, the Open/Distance mode of teaching/learning imparts instruction through electronic media as well. A basic learning of skills is thus inherent in Distance Education, which provides amply for the learners to communicate (listening, reading, writing and oral skills).

Intellectual skills (reasoning abilities) are presupposed in the course design. Sufficient demands are made upon the students who may at the same time be permitted to pace learning programme. Distance education is supplemented by the Lab/Practical component, which takes care of specialized skills such as the scientific and technological abilities and management skills.

Building a cultivated Society - Distance education is helping significantly in building a cultivated society. The possibility of taking a course and of updating one's information level at any time in one's life is more than likely to promote a professional attitude towards one's social life. It leads to general improvement and transformation of learners and through them to the society as a whole. By initiating them in subjects and areas that are valuable themselves, the system turns out more cultivated persons whose power of reasoning is likely to be more sophisticated than these were before. Since Open/Distance education acts without restraining the numbers, the system can reach out to a very large group and thus bring about desired changes in a very short period of time.

Advancing Knowledge - Distance Education leads to Research and adds to the growth of knowledge through research. Designing and selection of courses is one area which Distance education entail. An Open/Distance education provider develops new ways of planning and achieving the educational aims in different courses opted by the learners. The provider continuously assesses the weakness and strength of different educational media as well as uses the feedback from various sources for betterment of the tools. Continuous research has thus taken the system to fifth generation in such a short time.

Instilling the secular view of the learner - Distance education system leads to a furtherance of those interests that are peculiar to an Open Society. By providing education to all, it brings about de-elitisation of the educational process, eliminates the academic isolation of those who were deprived of getting higher education as it is placed in such a position that it can take on the precious responsibility of offering diverse courses throughout an individual's life.

Education today is conditioned by constraints and compromises of the past and thus does not respond to new demands and changes in the Society. Open and Distance Education on the other hand has achieved a high degree of autonomy and is responding to the socio-economic-political demands of the society. Communication is the icon of new age and new millennium. 21st century will be as different from 20th as 20th was from 18th. Imagine a classroom where instead of raising your hand you shoot an e-mail to your Guru Imagine learning from world class authorities in the subject while sitting in your own home or office. Imagine being able to take what you have learnt on line in the morning to be put to use in the afternoon. A villager in rural India being able to get a Masters degree from MIT on-line, start business in Cyberspace - all without leaving his village - is no more a myth but a reality. A virtual classroom, a virtual Professor in a virtual campus is indeed a **Learners' Paradise**. Education is not received, it is achieved while knowledge is best acquired by doing and best communicated by examples, profess the modern gurus.

Number Theory for a Distance Learner

ONE For Individuality

One is the basic number. It is the number of God. Number one also reflects a human's individuality. Also number one can reveal underestimation and insufficiency. In dreams number one reveals loneliness and helplessness that a person has experienced. So think high of yourself and try to work hard to remove insufficiency,

TWO For Trustworthiness

The world is full of different kinds of double-systems. There's visible and invisible that put together the universe as one. There is good and bad, light and darkness, day and night, life and death, beautiful and ugly, right and wrong, etc. Two is also the number of reliability, consistency and trustworthiness. Learn to follow the right path and establish your trustworthiness.

THREE For Strength

Three is taken as a symbol of imperishableness and perfection. In this meaning, it has become the number of fortune and strength. Identify your strengths and weaknesses. Try to build on your strengths and try to remove your weaknesses.

FOUR Splendid Gifts to Humans

Undoubtedly, "To see", "To hear", "To touch", "To feel" are the God's splendid gifts to the humans. The multimedia approach of Distance Education enables you to make full use of these gifts.

Books are an extension of BRAIN	
Video is **an extension of** EYE	
Audio is an extension of EAR	
Audio Conference is the extension of MIND & VOCAL CHORD	
Computer is an extension of Fusion of MIND, HANDS & EYES	
Satellite Technology is an extension of HUMAN REACH	
Computer Network is an extension of HUMAN CO-OPERATION	

FIVE Ways to Enhance Memory

- **Get interested** - You naturally remember information and events you are interested in. Interest adds enthusiasm to the learning process.

- **Visualize** - Visualize every bit of information in the form of funny pictures, which you'll never forget. Our memory is like a blank wall and the fun element is the peg we need to hang pictures on that wall.

- **Set goals** - Fix your goal and then think of nothing but achieving it. This will help you focus your energies in the right direction.

- **Breathe easy** - Get Pranayam into your daily routine. If we become aware of our breathing, with the help of Pranayam, well be conscious of the present and of everything around us. Anything learnt with awareness has fast recall.

- **Meditate** - Meditation also aids concentration, *a* must for memory enhancement.

SIX Traits

1 Self-disciplined

Supposing you have difficulty working independently without a counsellor/tutor, in front of you keeping you on task, brainstorm yourself to come out with the structure/environment that you need. Set up your own class time, on fixed days, sit at the compute from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. and stick to this schedule- **no excuses.**

2 Self-directed and Self-motivated

As a distance learner, you have to be self-directed and self- motivated in your approach to learning. You have to assume a greater share of responsibility for learning that takes place in an online environment.

3 Visual Learner

Unlike the traditional classroom where one receives auditory, visual and non-verbal input, a Virtual classroom is text-based. Communication occurs solely in written form. Distance Learning provides fewer opportunities for verbal interaction. If you are dependent on auditory input, you could be at a disadvantage but you will still succeed.

4 Assertive

Since there are lesser chances to be noticed, you have to make yourself known by introducing yourself, participating in discussions and 'talking' to your teacher through email but DO NOT drive your teacher crazy because of your mails.

5 Good Writing Skills

Since a lot of communication in DE system is written, to be able to express yourself effectively in writing is a PLUS factor. You and those whom you are writing to must be able to understand your ideas and the point you are trying to carry through. 'Good' grammar, however, is not a must. You can afford to misspell words or construct sentence fragments provided it conveys your views appropriately.

6 Persistent

You must realise and accept that Distance Education mode provides a distance learning environment and thus everything will not go as per your expectation. Multiple attempts may be common before a task is successfully completed. At times you will be confused and uncertain as to what to do, may have computer and/or network problems, or may face difficulties in adhering to the schedule. You must persist and refuse to give up when things go wrong and attempt to resolve the problem rather than wait for assistance. Contact your course mates, tutor and propose alternate solutions that will drive you towards fulfilling the course requirements.

You may be required to structure your schedule by prioritizing the activities and setting deadlines for accomplishing tasks. Develop the ability to redraw the schedules and stick to it since you are the MONITOR and you are the TEACHER yourself.

SEVEN Sacrifices

1. A willingness to interact with your counselor/course mate through Computer and an interest in developing a virtual partnership with faculty members and course mates at a distance.

2. A willingness to dedicate the same amount of time and effort to a distance education course that you would to a conventional class-room-based course.

3. A willingness in Creating/Imposing Self-discipline to learn without f-2-f interaction with the tutor and course mates.

4. A willingness to acquire Time-management skills that would enable you to balance distance education course work with your professional responsibilities and personal responsibilities.

5. A willingness to meet deadlines and keeping track of your communications when using the postal service or online transmission.

6. A willingness to learn to use the technology necessary for accomplishing the course work.

7. A willingness to be **Creative, Curious, Clever, Calm** and **Centred** in attitude.

EIGHT Etiquettes

1 Investigate

Investigate the course delivery systems before the course begins. Navigate and get familiar with website if any. Remember you are not expected to learn suddenly. When you joined a College/university, you had at least 12 years of education and training on how to be in a classroom and use printed material such as text books. Here you are on your own. You should not be embarrassed in soliciting help from your teachers or coursemates in adjusting with the new environment.

2 Procuring study material

You will be provided with the Self-Instructional material and a program guide to enable you to proceed with the learning process. But you may be required to procure additional reading material towards supplementary readings. Find out the source and try to obtain it on time.

3 Participate

Do all that you can to avoid a feeling of isolation. Participate through e-mail, SMS, on-line conferences, tele-conferencing sessions using the available electronic facilities. Contribute your ideas and comments on courseware and go through those of your course mates,

4 Share tips, help and questions

Best way to get help is to give help. Get over the fear of asking questions since the **'virtual classroom** provides the advantages of anonymity. If you ask a dumb question, no one will give you a dirty look, may be a number of persons do not know the answer to that question.

5 Explain ideas carefully

The clearer your explanation, fewer clarifications/amplifications will be required. But do not get upset because of correctness or otherwise of your communication.

6 Speak tip

Take the initiative when your are in difficulty. Ask specific questions. Do not wait. Pay attention to detail. Carefully read all information and material provided.

7 Study in a good workspace

Select an area that will be free from distractions and interruptions. For instance, the distraction of kitchen or other living spaces are not conducive to good study. Select a time when family obligations and interruption will be minimum. In fact earmark the study corner where you can leave your material undisturbed.

8 Managing time

Prioritize the demands on your time. Build time in your schedule for course work since you do not have a set time for your class. As you do not have the obligation to go to the class physically, there will be a tendency to put off the completion of assignments until later. This is a deadly sin for Distance Education learners. It is crucial to stay current with readings and projects as trailing behind will result in troubles compounding exponentially. DO NOT wait till the last moment but at the same time DO NOT respond in haste or in a moment of anger or frustration as you may regret having done so. Refrain from expressing inappropriate comments. Keep all comments positive and be careful while making personal comments.

Remember, academic honesty and integrity applies equally to courses through Distance Education as for the courses under Conventional System - always respect the ethical standards.

NINE Dos

1. Academic Counsellor Is a friend, philosopher and guide. Do approach him/her anywhere, anytime for making decisions at various stages such as:
   - How much time should I devote for family work and study
   - What career possibility to aim for
   - What to do regarding non receipt of study material
   - How do I study with so much of pressure From office
   - Can I postpone submission of assignments
   - Where can I study in the absence of a quiet corner in the house
   - Should I withdraw or keep going?

2. Do develop a habit to attend the counselling lessons.
   - It is as important for your learning as a 20-minute walk for your health.
   - What happens at counselling sessions?
   - An introduction to the learning unit/block
   - Improvement of skills
   - Discussion of the courses
   - How to respond to the assignments
   - Audio & Video programmes display
   - Explanation of difficult concepts
   - Clarification of tutor comments

3. Receive, Retain & Retrieve are the 3Rs of a Good Distance Learner. Do Cultivate them to the extent you possibly can.

4. A regular review of what you have learnt will enable you to transfer learning from short-term memory to long-term memory. Do keep revising your learning.

5. Do try to develop the mental imagery while reading so as to relate the new concepts to visual images

6. Do always make use of 'mnemonics' to remember new words joining your vocabulary.

7. Do remember complex concepts by developing mind maps thru diagrams.

8. Do start with boundless hope and the presumption that nothing is impossible for you. If you work with earnestness and persist in your efforts, you can accomplish anything.

9. DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THE EXAMINER. They are either human or an electronic machine.

TEN Commandments

Learners perform poorly in Examinations if:

a. They ignore the specifics in the question

b. Provide too much and often irrelevant details

c. Produce standard answers instead of adjusting with the questions

d. Pace the responses improperly

e. Miss the keywords

f. Furnish outdated concepts of Technology.

To perform well, you are advised to Follow the following Ten Commandments:

1. Read all questions and select the most Familiar and comfortable ones.

2. Write down all key words that come to your mind while reading. Start with easiest ones.

3. Read again, capture all points; think again and structure the answer.

4. Answer only required no. of questions.

5. A locate time to think and plan your answer, do not start writing immediately.

6. Ambiguous Questions: make assumptions.

7. Start with a brief introduction.

8. Answer in point form and then elaborate each point.

9. A good example helps in illustrating a point.

10. Write clearly and legibly. Good handwriting is the indicator of clarity of thought.

And finally the 24 superlatives representing the 24 hours of the day in your life.

Most useless thing to do .... Worry

The greatest Joy. .... Giving

The greatest loss .... Loss of self-respect

The most satisfying work .... Helping others

The ugliest personality trait .... Selfishness

The most endangered species .... Dedicated leaders

Our greatest natural resource .... Our youth

The greatest "shot in the arm" .... Encouragement

The greatest problem to overcome .... Fear

Most effective sleeping pill..! .... Peace of mind

The most crippling failure disease .... Excuses

The most powerful force in life .... Love

The most dangerous pariah .... A gossiper

The world's most incredible computer .... The brain!

The worst thing to be without .... Hope

The deadliest weapon .... The tongue

The two most power-filled words .... "I Can"

The greatest asset .... Faith

The most worthless emotion .... Self-pity

The most prized possession .... Integrity

The most beautiful attire .... SMILE!

The most powerful channel of communication .... Prayer

The most contagious spirit .... Enthusiasm

The most important thing in life .... remember GOD

Open Universities In India

The emergence of Open & Distance Education in India commenced in the year 1 982 with the establishment of the first Open University at Hyderabad followed by the Indira Gandhi National Open University the World's largest Open University, in 1985. The chronological setting up of Open Universities in India is depicted as under:

Name	Location	Year of Estt.	Website
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University	Hyderabad	1982	open@braou.ac.in
Indira Gandhi National Open University	NewDelhi	1985	www.ignou.ac.in
Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University	KOTA	1987	www.vmoukota.org
Nalanda Open University	Patna	1987	www.nalpouni.info
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University	Nashik	1989	www.ycmou.com
Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University	Bhopal	1991	www.bhojvirtualuniversity.com
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University	Ahmedabad	1994	www.baou.org
Karnataka State Open University	Mysore	1996	www.ksoumysore.com
Netaji Subhash Open University	Kolkata	1997	www.wbnsou.com
UP Rajrshi Tartdon Open University	Allahabad	1998	www.uprtou.com
Tamilnadu Open University	Chennai	2002	www.tnou.ac.in
Pt. Sunder Lai Sharma (Open) University	Bilaspur	2005	—
Uttaranchal Open University	Haldwani	2005	—

You may like to go through the salient features of these institutions which offer a multitude of courses with wide ranging options and strong learner support system covering countrywide jurisdiction through an uninterrupted network of Learner Centres.

In case of difficulty, just log on to http://www.ignou.ac.in and follow the links provided therein.

I G N O U - The Trailblazer"

"IGNOU is a trailblazer in India's quest for establishing a knowledge based society in trie **21st** Century. It is more than an institution; it is a movement for cause of education and knowledge."

— **Dr. K. Kasturirangan**

Former Chairman ISRO, Member Rajya Sabha

"IGNOU is leading the 21st Century revolution in higher education. That is why I am so proud to become an honorary member of the Indira Gandhi National Open University".

— **Sir John Daniel**

President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

"IGNOU is one of the largest Universities in the World today having meaningfully absorbed the ICT for the betterment of the system to make it more cost effective & accessible so as to bring in the desired equity in education."

— **Prof HP. Dikshit**

Former V.C, IGNOU & Chairman DEC

Vision

"Indira Gandhi National Open University, the national resource center for Open **and** Distance Learning with International recognition and presence shall provide seamless access to sustainable and learner centred quality education, skill upgradation & training to all by using innovative technologies and methodologies and ensuring convergence **of** existence system for massive human resource required for promoting integrated national development & global understanding"

Address	:	Maidan Garhi,
		New Delhi - 11 0 068
		Tel.: 91-11-29535924-32
		Fax: 91-11-29532312
		E-mail: ssc@ignou.ac.in
		Website: http://www.ignou.ac.in
Year of Establishment	:	1985
Type	:	A Central University with global jurisdiction established by an Act of Parliament.
Academic Session	:	January and July
Medium	:	English/Hindi
Programmes on offer	:	Ph.D
		Masters
		Bachelors
		Advance Diploma
		Diploma
		Certification Total 129
Courses on offer	:	1100
Student Services Network	:	Regional Centres : 59
		Sub-Regional Centres : 5
		Study Centres : 1621
		Acad. Counselors : 25000
		Overseas Centres : 37
Students on roll	:	1485769
Students awarded Degrees/ Diplomas till 2007	:	726280

Source : IGNOU Profile 2007

The University with a difference

IGNOU, the largest Mega University of the world distinguishes itself from the rest by certain unique features such as:

- Flexible admission rules

- Global jurisdiction

- Need based programmes at affordable cost

- Diversified learner group

- Credit transfer system

- Rigorous time tested course development process

- Multi lingual instructional packages

- Use of updated ICT for blended learning

- Strong and effective Student Support Services network

- Resource sharing, Collaboration & Networking with national & International institutions of repute

- Recipient of Centre of Excellence award from Commonwealth of Learning in 1992 & 1997.

- First to launch courses on-line in collaboration with Edexcel, UK & Department of Electronics, Govt. of India

- Houses educational TV Channel (fully digital) with 6 nodes catering to diversified nodes

- Imparting Interactive Radio Counselling thru a dozen FM Radio Stations to reach the unreached.

- Nationwide interactive teleconferencing for different target groups for more than a decade.

The Scattered Gems

Flexible yet firm

His Excellency the High Commissioner posted in one of the missions at Delhi approached the University for seeking admission to its Management Program. Entrance Test for admission to the said course was over. In a traditional system the University would simply express its regret. At IGNOU, however, a test was arranged for him and his wife (who too joined him) and they were admitted. No relaxation of eligibility was made but no rigid attitude in arranging for another test was expressed either.

A Learner - Centric Approach

Amit could not dear his Economics paper despite three attempts. His problem was the 'gap' between thinking and writing he was a slow writer. The University sought medical advice and based on the report permitted a few extra minutes to him to complete the examination. Amit came out successful & inspired by the attitude of the University, joined MCA. He is happily settled as a Bank Officer now.

The Learned Learner

Dr. C.L. Gupta, holding a Ph.D. degree in Hindi and working as Chairman, HP. Board of Secondary Education joined PG Diploma course in Translation. A person examining and certifying thousands of students was an examinee himself. Keeping up the prestige of his position, Dr. Gupta topped the list of successful candidates and won a Gold medal.

Creating Ambassadors' Through 'High Commission'

Rajya Priyadarshini, a housewife from Bihar and Babita Jetley- an airline hostess from Delhi moved to US to join their spouse. Both of them had one subject (course) less to complete iheir BA/MBA degrees respectively. They approached the University for help. The University contacted its Attache-Education in Indian High Commission at Washington Hid arranged for their examination. Both the ladies are University's 'ambassadors' promoting DE mode in US.

Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thee

1991 - The occasion was II Convocation of the University at Siri - Fort Auditorium. Due to constrain only 'graduates' were permitted to enter the auditorium. An elderly lady around 60 yrs of age was moving inside alongwith a young lady around 23. On told about the restrictions imposed, she retorted back by saying she too is a late taking her degree. She was the mother-in-law taking her degree (which due to her early marriage she could'nt complete) along with her daughter-in-law and in the ii the SAAS - BAHU shedding the conventional 'enmity' became very good SAHELIS.

Caring For The Last Wish

An ailing Cancer patient at 74 from Bhopal requested for early evaluation of his project report. The University fulfilled his desire of earning the Diploma in Creative Writing before he could RIP

Reaching The Unreached

Shri S.C. Thakur hailing from remote rural area in H.P could not complete his engineering graduation due to geographical as well as financial and family constraints. IGNOU opened the 'Gates to a promising career' in his own profession. He obtained a B.Tech. (Construction Management) degree with honours.

Education is Not Received, it is Achieved

Anita is a Senior Admn. Officer in LIC. She is also a housewife with two school going children. To provide importance to her career and to understand better the nitty gritty of human resource management she pursued the PGDHRM and topped the list of successful candidates to bag a Gold Medal.

Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin

Deepak & Jyoti Mehndiratta (Brother and Sister) are excellent examples of a determined effort overtaking all odds. Pursuing the Master of Computer Applications course 'on their wheel chairs' with all the Zeal and enthusiasm this brother and sister duo has indeed established an indelible mark in their achievement table which deserves to be emulated by similarly placed 'differently abled' youth of our country.

Seamless In Its Span

Dr. Koshy P Eapen, a passout from IGNOU has been awarded Cambridge Commonwealth Scholarship to study For Ph.D. in Geriatrics at the University of Cambridge, U.K.

Ignou All The Way

Shrt Rohit Agarwal of Ghaziabad is an ardent follower of IGNOU having successfully completed CTS, DTS, BTS, CES, CDM and CIG programs till date & is still 'on crease' **For** I lew more additions to his credit and knowledge.

NIOS - The Gateway To 'Darkness Visible'

What is NIOS?

An Open School" to cater to the needs of a heterogeneous group of learners at Secondary level was started as *a* project with in-built flexibilities by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 1 979. In 1 986, the National Policy on Education suggested the strengthening of Open School System For extending open learning facilities in a phased manner at secondary level all over the country as an independent system with its own curriculum and examination leading to certification.

Consequently, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India set up the National Open School (NOS) in November 1989. The pilot project of CBSE on Open School was amalgamated with NIOS. Through a Resolution (No.F. 5-24/90 Sch,3 published in the Gazettee of India on 20 October 1990), the National Open School (NOS) **was vested with the authority to register, examine and certify students registered with it up to pre-degree level courses,** in July 2002, the Ministry of Human Resource Development amended the nomenclature of the organization from the National Open School (NOS) to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) with a mission to provide relevant continuing education at school stage, up to pre-degree level through Open Learning system to prioritize client groups as an alternative to formal system, in pursuance of the normative national policy documents and in response to the need assessments of the people, and through it to make its share of contribution:

- to universalisation of education
- to greater equity and justice in society and
- to the evolution of a learning society.

What does NIOS do?

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) provides opportunities to interested learners by making available the following Courses/Programmes of Study through open find distance learning (ODL) mode:

- Open Basic Education (OBE) Programme for Children (Upto 14 years), adolescents and adults at A, B and C levels that are equivalent to classes III, V and VIII of the formal school system.

- Secondary Education Programme

- Senior Secondary Education Programme

- Vocational Education Programme

- Life Enrichment Programmes

The OBE programme envisages schooling by providing a learning continuum based on graded curriculum ensuring quality of education for children, neo-literates, school dropouts and Non-formal education completers.

For implementation of OBE programme, the NIOS has partnership with about 250 Agencies providing facilities at their study centres. It is a sort of academic input relationship with partnering agencies. The NIOS provides **resource support** such as adaptation of NIOS model curricula, study material joint certification, orientation of Resource Persons and popularisation of OBE to the **voluntary agencies and Zila Saksharta Samities (ZSSs)** for implementation.

At the **Secondary and Senior Secondary** levels, NIOS provides flexibility in the choice of subjects/courses, pace of learning, and transfer of credits from CBSE and State Open Schools to enable learner's continuation. A learner is extended as many as nine chances to appear in public examinations spread over a period of five years. The credits gained are accumulated till the learner clears required credits for certification. The learning strategies include; learning through printed **self-instructional material,** to audio listening and viewing video programmes, participating in personal contact programme (PCP), and submitting Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA). Enrichment is also provided to the learners through the half yearly magazine "Open Learning". The Study Material is made available in English, Hindi and Urdu media. A Question bank for On-Demand Examination System (ODES) has also been developed for Open Basic Education stage and Secondary stage. NIOS offers 26 courses in six languages for Secondary Examinations and 24 courses in Hindi, English and Urdu media for Senior Secondary Examination.

Vocational Education programmes of NIOS provide excellent prospects by offering about 100 Vocational Education Courses in trie areas such as Agriculture, Business and Commerce, Technology, Health and Paramedical, Home Science and Teacher Training. Besides, offering some life enrichment courses and courses in certain other vocations are also offered. Knowledge, skills and qualities of entrepreneurship have been made essential components in curricula for Vocational Education with emphasis on practical and on the job training in related industrial units.

The NIOS programmes pay special attention towards requirements of the first generation **learners, physically, mentally and visually challenged learners and pupil from** disadvantaged **sections of the society.**

How does NIOS function?

NIOS operates through a network of five Departments, two Divisions, ten Regional Centres and approx. 2500 Accredited Institutions (Study Centres) in India and abroad. It has a current enrolment of about 1.3 million students at Secondary and Senior Secondary levels which makes it **the largest open schooling system in the world.**

A significant initiative of NIOS is the ICT based **On-Demand Examination System (ODES)** where assessment takes place when learner feels ready. Respecting the individuality and sovereignty of the learner, this scheme attempts to remove the sting linked with the term examination and reduces the stress of appearning in all subjects at a fixed time and schedule.

The activities relating to Student Support Services such as:

- Admission/registration,

- Scanning of photographs,

- Pre-examination activities,

- Processing of result, and

- Issuance of certificates

are fully computerized to make them learner-friendly.

An Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) has been installed at the Head-quarters and in the Regional Centres to provide information pertaining to admission, examinations, result, and other aspects related to Student Support Services anytime, anywhere.

Source : NIOS at a Glance 2006

A Glittering Tribe Of Its Alumni

Nineteen year old Lakshmi is physically handicapped and moves with the help of crutches. She enrolled for the Class X Secondary course offered by the NIOS, after completing her 8th standard at Amarjyoti. Simultaneously, she was trained to become a watch mechanic in the vocational training unit of Amarjyoti Rehabilitation and Research Centre, Delhi. Today Lakshmi has not only completed her 12th/Senior Secondary from the NIOS but is also employed as a mechanic at the HMT Watch Servicing and Repair Centre at Amarjyoti, where she is a much sought after person. Full of enthusiasm and courage, she travels from Paharganj in Central Delhi to Karkardooma in East Delhi, a distance of about 20 kms., on her motorised tricycle. Her dear mother and loving brother have been a source of inspiration, Her firm determination has also helped her come a long way and become completely independent. Lakshmi does not plan to continue with her education but has certainly been able to make her life meaningful. She is very down to earth and when asked about her marriage plans, she categorically gave a firm NO for the simple reason that her husband may accept her but not the others.

Differently Abled

Arup Banerjee is a 25 year old mentally retarded boy. He has successfully completed the Class X course offered by the NIOS. He found the NIOS curriculum simple and easily comprehensible. He has now enrolled for the Senior Secondary Course and hopes to complete it too.

Arup is now employed as a helper at the Balwant Rai Mehta Vidyalaya in Greater Kailash, New Delhi, which is incidentally one of the NIOS study centres where he was enrolled.

A keen sportsman, **Arup** had won the bronze medal at the 1 991 Olympic Meet held at Madras.

His ambition is to secure a government job for which he has been making consistent efforts.

A student of The Spastic Society of Northern India (SSNI), New Delhi. **Namit Sachdeva** first appeared for the Open School Class X examinations in 1993, taking two subjects. He passed these and successfully cleared the next two subjects by 1995.

Namit has Cerebral Palsy and is wheel chair bound. His hand writing is slow and laboured, quite often illegible. Open School helped by giving him an hours extra time and allowed the SSNI authorities to provide a Special Educator who wrote out his responses.

Having now successfully completed the first two papers of Open School Class 12th, he hopes to get his Class 12th certificate by 1999.

A slow learner, this young man of 24, is now receiving training as an Assistant Librarian at The Center for Special Education, SSNI, New Delhi.

Working as a Receptionist at SSNI, **Pankaj Kapoor,** age 24, successfully completed his Class X, Open School in 1995.

He is a Spastic Quadriplegic, a slow learner and wheelchair bound. By giving him extra time during the examinations so that he could dictate his responses to the writers allowed by the authorities, he will be successfully completing his Class X Certificate with a new sense of confidence in his abilities.

He now handles the reception desk at SSNI with ease and efficiency.

Divya Arora aged 20 is a Spastic Quadriplegic, wheelchair bound and dependent for all her needs.

Initially unsure of her academic abilities, Divya studied under the Open School System Class 10th and successfully completed her course of studies in 1997. Taking the Open School system as her best choice - the facility of not having to cope with 5 subjects at the same time, helped Divya achieve brilliantly high marks.

Now completing her Class 12th as a private student, Divya is adept at the computer and speaks fluent French. She hopes to go to college for higher studies, with French as one of the main subjects.

The start that the Open School system *gave* her, has proved invaluable. Unable to attend regular school and having had to stay at home for many years, Divya truly appreciated the head start Open School has given her.

After successfully completing his class X Open School Board Examination in 1997, taking two and a half years to do so, **Mithun Barua** has registered for Class 12th, under the Open School system.

He hopes to complete all his subjects by the year 2000. Severely physically disabled, Mithun is a C.P Spastic Quadriplegic and will always remain on wheelchair. His strained and physical constraints prevent him from sitting comfortably for any length of time. The Open School authorities helped him by giving him extra time and a writer from SSNI (who understood his speech) wrote down his responses.

He hopes to be able to continue with higher education after completing his Class 12th, through the Open School

Source : National Institute of Open Schooling, New Delhi

Commonwealth Of Learning
The Trend Setter

What is COL?

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by the Heads of Government in Commonwealth Countries to encourage the development of open learning and distance education, through the fostering and sharing of knowledge, resources and technologies.

Headquartered at Vancouver, Canada, COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation dedicated solely to promoting and delivering distance education and open learning and is the only official Commonwealth agency located outside Britain. The COL is mandated to be in the vanguard of technological change in education and training thru its international network of partner organisations that have helped the Commonwealth's 53 member nations and their citizens realise widespread access to quality, current education and training for over fifteen years. Fully operational since 1989, COL is financially supported by Commonwealth governments on a voluntary basis.

Mission

"Recognising knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, The Commonwealth of Learning is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens."

COL's defining purpose, as reflected in its Memorandum of Understanding, is:

" .. .to create and widen access to education and to improve its quality, utilising distance education techniques and associated communications technologies to meet the particular requirements of member countries. The agency's programmes and activities aim to strengthen member countries' capacities to develop the human resources required for their economic and social advancement and are carried out in collaboration with Governments, relevant agencies, universities, colleges and other educational and training establishments among whom it also seeks to promote co-operative endeavours.

COL effectively combines development activities on an international, regional and local level with specialised, objective, professional expertise in all aspects of technology, materials and training. Its responsibility to provide services at all stages of institutional development and capacity-building in ODL extends beyond the life of any specific initiative, to encompass advocacy in understanding issues; anticipate

developments that inform policy makers and educational planners, promote best practices in distance education; demonstrate proven techniques; and encourage appropriate implementation.

The Future, NOW

COL is instrumental for the rapid, continuing evolution of ODL use in Commonwealth countries in the past decade - in basic education, such as at the National Institute of Open Schooling in India; in university level courses, such as at the Open University of Tanzania,-in regional skills training and upgrading programmes, such as the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme in collaboration with IGNOU **and** in a planned virtual university to serve the small states of the Commonwealth.

The Path Taken

COL has worked **to** optimise the efficient transfer of information, ideas, innovations and resources supporting ODL, empowering learners to obtain education where, when, and how they choose, to continue working while training or upgrading education and skills,-and to attain significant results, at lower cost.

COL's initiatives, programmes and research are inherently sensitive and responsive to needs in the areas of gender equity, sustainable development, environmental protection, civil rights and the appropriate use of low-cost and innovative technologies. Many of COL's activities have responded directly to the needs of Commonwealth developing countries. While often drawing upon the Commonwealth's developed countries for experience and expertise, COL encourages significant South-South co-operation in its projects.

Since COL began operations in 1989, it has:

- helped introduce, or enhance, hundreds of teaching/training programmes in more than 40 countries;
- influenced the conception and development of open schools and universities;
- conducted training seminars and studies on specific educational needs;
- established an extensive network of education and technology specialists around the world; and
- facilitated systemic changes in the delivery of education and influenced government policy.

Source : www.col.org

Revisiting The Road Less Traveled...

Let us revisit this issue by narrating another story.

Once a king had a great highway built for trie members of his kingdom. After It was completed, but before it was opened to the public, the king decided to have a contest.

He invited as many as desired to participate. Their challenge was to see who could travel the highway the best.

On the day of the contest the people came. Some of them had fine chariots; some had fine clothing, fine hairdos, or great food. Some young men came in their track clothes and ran along the highway. People traveled the highway all day, but each one, when he arrived at the end, complained to the king that there was a large pile of rocks and debris left on the road at one spot and this got in their way and hindered their travel.

At the end of the day, a lone traveler crossed the finish line warily and walked over to the king. He was tired and dirty, but he addressed trie king with great respect and handed him a bag of gold.

He explained, "I stopped along the way to clear a pile of rocks and debris that was blocking the road. This bag of gold was under it all. I want you to return it to its rightful owner.

The king replied, "You are the rightful owner."

The traveler replied, "Oh no, this is not mine. I've never known such money."

"Oh yes," said the king, "you've earned this gold, for you won my contest. He who travels the road best is he who makes the road smoother for those who will follow."

The moral of the story:

Everybody who was interested in making shortcuts and put less efforts in traveling the road went off with a lesser reward than the traveler who wasted his chances of winning by doing welfare of others. You are also like a "traveler" who is walking on the road less traveled. Walk like the traveler mentioned in the box. Do not get worried by the hard work already done and to be done. Success will definitely embrace you !

The Road Ahead

The story of distance learning has been a long one, tracing itself back to the Eklavya episode in the Mahabharat, which was more about self-learning, because Dronacharya, the teacher did not participate at all in the designing of the learning experience to modern times when distance learning is synonymous with the use of technology for educational purpose. It is reminiscent in many ways of the itory of the ugly duckling that eventually turned into a beautiful swan.

As distance learning evolved through its various stages, from correspondence courses, telephone supported courses, incorporation of radio, then TV and the recent use of the 'EDUSAT' a dedicated satellite for educational purposes, it continued to be regarded as a second option, mainly for those who could not have access to the main formal system. Considered the dumping ground for second rate faculty and third rate students, it has been trying to fight for parity of esteem, and has achieved it in only a very small measure.

Recent developments in distance learning have been propelled by the many convergences, in computing, in communication and in media that we are witnessing. The result is that we see in the future the emergence of 'blended learning' that will involve the blending of teaching-learning modes, the blending of resources ranging from printed text-books to electronic resources including the recent blogs, podcasts, wikij. and squldoos. A learner will choose the mix most appropriate to the learner's circumstances, including his learning style and cognitive strategy. The educational system will possibly transform to an educational diagnostics and navigational system, much the same way as today's medical practitioners work with high-end diagnostics carried out with equipment manufactured by specialist companies and patented medicines manufactured by pharmaceutical firms. Implementing the principles of Mastery Learning, the practice of the Keller Plan or the Kumon method and using extensively the copious amounts of data generated by the learner during the course of his engagement with the learning resources, it would be possible to have all learners realize their desired goals to a 6 sigma level of achievement.

This will assure the augmentation of the human capital and the development of talent on a scale never seen before. Our current formal system, is *an* exclusive filtering model, which identifies a small number of 'the talented' and provides them all the facilities and by implication denies these opportunities to all others. On the other hand technology empowered distance learning holds out the promise to provide 'talent development opportunities to all those who are committed and dedicated. The emerging world will not put much value to the mere memorization of information and the ability to recall large amounts of content from a given domain. Rather it will value the information gathering and processing skills that will efficiently produce meaning in the

desired context from vast amounts of raw information. The formal system which is so reluctant to change would become marginalized except in the limited instances where it is an example of excellence in the generation of new knowledge. Mere regurgitations of existing knowledge under the authority of the state and regulating agencies will usually invite scorn though it may elicit some compliance and deference. In addition to the vast array of distance learning opportunities described in this book, the use of the Internet opens up completely new universes of knowledge. The most well known and exemplary of these is the Open Courseware project of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where a large number of courses have been made available from the web-site for anyone to use to further his knowledge. The wikipedia is one large free encyclopedia for anyone to use. There are many resources in the forms of dictionaries and thesaurus. Many books that are now out of copyright restrictions are available through the web site of the Gutenberg Project. And of course, searching through Google is the very first step towards gaining information and knowledge in any area. If any of the terms used here was unfamiliar to you, all you have to do is to go to www.google.com type in the world or phrase and you will get a large number of leads to go further in your research.

As we get ready to meet the challenges of a rapidly emerging knowledge economy, the inadequacies of the formal educational system will get more glaring. It is now well documented that a majority of the graduates of our better Institutions are not considered employable by major multi-national players in the Global economy, and of our generalist graduates produced by the 400 odd Universities and 15,000 or so Colleges, close to 90% are unemployable. This is current data. If we extrapolate to another 1 0 years hence, there is no doubt that almost none will be employable on the strength of the formal education alone. Almost everyone will need supplemental knowledge and skills and distance learning would be the most practical way of pursuing these courses concurrently with formal degree programs, and later on as life-long learning programs.

The barriers to access of online learning were not significantly less than the barrier to access of traditional educational Institutions, with the PC and Internet access costs being what they are in India. But a new unprecedented and unexpected development throws open the possibility of an inclusive education model relying upon the post-office and the cell-Phone, The cell-phone has now become ubiquitous, and Mohammad Yonus has been given the Nobel Peace Prize, for practically demonstrating its reach and effectiveness to overcome poverty, through micro-credits and micro-finance. A similar revolution is waiting to happen by Using a model to impart education in small chunks of mobile learning objects and audio support, with high-order feedback, through a simple device — the all pervading cellphone. The micro-credits of learning that the learner accumulates, may later be aggregated for the award of a certified qualification. This hand-held learning will actually be a real opportunity to 'hand-hold' a remote learner via hit cellphone, Pocket PC, a PDAoreven a game console such as the PSR

So, how can a student make use of the distance learning opportunities? The UNESCO Delor Commission report had long ago identified the four pillars of "Learning to know", "Learning to do", "Learning to be" and "Learning to life together". Of these the formal system in good professional educational Institutions at best attempts to deal with "Learning to Do". The other 3 pillars will either remain absent or in some measure be fulfilled with the extra-curricular and co-curricular activities in good Institutions, but for most measure are ignored.

A good place to start woudl be the "Learning to Know" program, which may be seen as an almost essential requirement to prosper, flourish and thrive in the emerging Knowledge Economy. A good multi-cultural experience is also provided by becoming members of communities and part of the social Internet. Memberships of groups like Orkut are a step in tli.it direction. Similarly joining the community in a game of 'second life' can be an experience which is very appropriate for the future. Playing computer games can be very interesting fun and full of learning as well.

So, just go ahead and start traveling on this new road to the future and use the facilities available, and you will see that in a short time, your life is transformed beyond recognition. May be the following lines coined by Prof. M.M. Pant will give you an operational plan to keep moving:

"An e-mail a day

An sms or two

Some conversations on cell-phone

And your learning improves;

Visit the learning node

Meet your mentor

In face to face mode

And your learning gets better;

Make good use of the web and Internet resources

Discussion forums and instant messaging features

Heed the feedback and hear the discourses

To find your learning becoming richer;

They say slow and steady wins the race

Choose your blend as well as the pace

Soon you'll find your learning is whole

No matter what, you reach your goal!!"