
Interviews with Badrul Khan



Interview with J. Goodlett McDaniel

In recent years, George Mason University (GMU) has become, in my view, the "gold standard" for the modern public university. Its commitment to teaching excellence is combined with cutting-edge research that enriches the academic experience. Located near Washington DC, its students enjoy all of the educational and cultural experiences unique to the region. With almost 20,000 undergraduate, 10,000 graduate, 700 law, and 2000 doctoral students, GMU is now one of the largest institutions of higher education in Virginia.

Distance education is one of the most important segments of GMU's academic life. J. Goodlett McDaniel recently assumed the post of the Associate Provost of Distance Education. The position focuses extensively on the creation and delivery of online programs to better serve the needs of GMU students. The appointment was based on recommendations that the university coordinate and expand high-quality distance education programs that support its mission and build new opportunities for students.

McWeadon Education, the institution which I founded, collaborated with the GMU Distance Education office to organize an E-Learning Certificate program (Sept. 18–30, 2010) for professors and administrators from several universities in Saudi Arabia (<http://www.elc.edu.sa/portal/index.php?mod=smr&country=America>) under the patronage of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education's National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning. The program was very successful and Dr. McDaniel's support and guidance was deeply appreciated by the participants.

—Badrul Khan

Badrul H. Khan, a Contributing Editor, is Founder of **McWeadon.com** (a professional development site) and **BooksToRead.com** (a recommended readings site) on the Internet. He is an international speaker, author, educator, and consultant in e-learning and educational technology (e-mail: khan@McWeadon.com). Dr. Khan acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Mauri Collins of McWeadon Education, USA, with this interview.

What is your role model in advancing Distance Education at George Mason University?

A recent Sloan report on distance education, the first national benchmarking study of 69 USA institutions of higher education, included faculty, presidents, provosts, vice-presidents, and many other respondents. GMU had the third highest participation of large universities in the survey. One significant finding was that 70 percent of all university administrators thought DE was key to the growth of the university, yet only 30 percent included distance education in their strategic plans.

Early on, I heard about Badrul Khan's E-Learning Framework, encompassing pedagogical, technological, interface design, management, evaluation, resource support, ethical considerations, and institutional issues (<http://bookstoread.com/framework>), from a graduate of the doctoral-level instructional design program at GMU.

Dr. Khan was willing to meet on a number of occasions to help me examine Distance Education at GMU, with the knowledge that the model supported a broad vision related to how strategic planning should occur.

Notably, the Sloan Report stated that faculty frequently felt unsupported in their efforts to build and launch distance education courses. The Khan model helped provide the framework and empirical underpinnings for building a sustainable vision for growing distance education at GMU.

How were you able to change the academic culture to support faculty engaged in distance learning?

Many pieces of a supportive and comprehensive faculty support culture continue to be built. Significantly, a Council was appointed by the Provost with a charge to build an overall model to shape the future of DE at GMU. Along with educating Council members about what already existed across the campus, pedagogical, programmatic, regulatory, and financial goals had to take shape.

A relatively modest student fee proposal was considered and adopted by the University Budget Committee. A course proposal process with a variety of incentives and supports was initiated with the use of those fees. Similarly, tracking and evaluation systems had to be engineered.

With the Sloan findings that 80 percent of faculty who had neither developed nor taught online felt that the outcomes of distance education were inferior to those of



J. Goodlett McDaniel is the Associate Provost for Distance Education at George Mason University (GMU) in Fairfax, Virginia. Prior to coming to GMU, Dr. McDaniel had been a clinician, administrator, consultant, and educator in health care for many years. He led efforts to build one of the largest distance education RN-to-BSN

programs in the United States prior to his appointment at GMU (e-mail: jmcdaniel@gmu.edu).

face-to-face courses, additional strategies had to be crafted to educate and assist faculty.

This work is ongoing. Figuring out how to grow and sustain together is tricky.

What is your view of the accreditation of distance education courses as a growing concern at institutions of higher learning?

Accreditation adds pressure and accountability to an institution in trying to measure outcomes that demonstrate course comparability and quality. Dr. Emily Egerton of the Duke University School of Nursing and I presented her Quality Standards Inventory model at a national conference three years ago.

The model helped to shape early efforts to quantify the extent to which sound pedagogical principles could be quantified in courses as they were being produced at GMU. The DE Council defined what quality meant using Dr. Egerton's work as well as that of a recent doctoral graduate, Dawn Hathaway.

Over a period of 18 months, an exemplary-standard was built, introduced, and implemented into a more comprehensive design, development, piloting, and evaluation cycle for courses.

GMU students build a Portfolio to demonstrate their learning and how they have met course and program outcomes. In conjunction with the Office of Institutional Assessment, a similar course portfolio has become part of the DE development process at GMU, so that we can demonstrate how course goals are being met.

The reflective narrative on the course development process seems to hold promise for determining how well we have integrated Dr. Khan's complete model into a working system.

What other actions have you used to encourage adoption of distance education at GMU?

Faculty needs to feel successful in the development of DE courses. GMU has to encourage "best practices" in online instruction.

All stakeholders have to be educated about what can be done with DE, including keeping students engaged, extending the GMU reach to those who cannot come to campus, and helping to solve the problems that formalize distance education at a large institution of higher learning can create.

About This Series

Badrul Khan interviews visionary leaders of e-learning and educational technology throughout the world in this series of articles for *Educational Technology*. He welcomes reader suggestions for interviewees. Contact him at khan@McWeadon.com .

Reader Comments

A Response to Marc Prensky's Review of *Security vs. Access*

LeAnne K. Robinson, Abbie H. Brown, and Tim D. Green

Marc Prensky was clearly unhappy with our book, *Security vs. Access: Balancing Safety and Productivity in the Digital School*, reviewed in the November–December 2010 issue of *Educational Technology*. While we realize that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, we feel that Mr. Prensky has misunderstood our goal in writing the book.

In his review, Mr. Prensky repeatedly asks for prescriptions that solve security and access issues in schools and school districts and is unhappy that we presented the current situation without adding strong calls to action. He writes, "The authors are trying to represent both points of view." This is correct. Strong opinions alone cannot create change in schools today. Developing solutions through dialogue and careful consideration, we believe, is far more effective and sustainable.

Mr. Prensky demands a book he can use. He is an expert in educational computing technology; however, the target audience for this book is not the established experts in this field, but rather the overworked, and occasionally overwhelmed, teachers and administrators who have not had the luxury of time to gather the information presented in *Security vs. Access*.

The goal of *Security vs. Access* is to help educators become judicious users of technology. It emphasizes the importance of balance in creating school environments that are safe and productive. As educators, student learning in a safe environment is always uppermost in our minds. As former K–12 teachers ourselves, we know that extreme calls to action from outsiders have never resulted in developing a useful solution to a problem within a school or school district. Such demands only foment fear and confusion, which may lead to radical and problematic outcomes. Many such examples are outlined in our book, highlighting the importance of promoting constructive communication to avoid such pitfalls.

We have the utmost respect and regard for teachers and administrators, and we assume that when they are provided adequate information they will be able to develop solutions to the problems facing their unique school settings. As enthusiastic promoters of educational technology, we find Mr. Prensky's suggestion to offer strong prescriptions tempting, but inappropriate for the goals of the book. The point of *Security vs. Access* is to provide teachers and administrators with information that helps them develop their own appropriate, unique solutions to the problems associated with using computing tools in their particular school or district.

From our perspective, the most gratifying part of Mr. Prensky's review comes in the final section, "A Useful Book Would Have Been..." After reading *Security vs. Access*, Mr. Prensky does exactly what we hope readers will do: Use the information provided in the book as a starting point; form their own opinions; and set a course of action for themselves.