Preface

In the 7 years since the first edition of the *Handbook of Online Learning* was published, innovations in computer technology and the Internet have expanded exponentially and their impact on the quantity and quality of online learning has been dramatic. Online programs that were just beginning are now well established in many classroom-based universities and organizations. We represented one of the few graduate universities with a long history in distance and online learning. Now we are members of a very large community of higher education institutions that rely on virtual classrooms to deliver at least a portion of their education and training curricula. During this time, many of our values, beliefs, and concerns have remained constant. We continue to believe that education and training thrive in an intimate learning community that supports academic rigor. We maintain that technology must serve learning needs rather than the other way around. At the same time, we have welcomed the institutionalization of online learning and the availability of a burgeoning conceptual and applied literature represented by a wellspring of new books and journals in the field. We view technology and the Internet as innovative forces that interact with pedagogy in potentially creative ways. As such, we assert the need for best practices to support the development and maintenance of high-quality, innovative online programs and courses.

As we have become more expert about how to work in virtual space so have our students, faculty, and administrative colleagues. Our experience continues to convince us that online learning can serve students from diverse locations around the globe and engage them in productive, exciting, and satisfying learning communities. We recognize that the vast array of available learning platforms and Internet resources can be overwhelming to faculty and administrators seeking to design and launch online programs. We have become more sensitive to the barriers to adopting new technology and networked approaches to learning, as well as to the frequent resistance by administrators and faculty in employing new teaching methods. This handbook builds on our experiences and also picks up where the previous edition left off. We hope we have captured the progress and possibilities that lie ahead and provide a useful roadmap for navigation.

As before, our primary goal in this edition of the handbook is to clarify and illustrate theories of online learning and pedagogical implications of teaching and training in online environments and virtual worlds. A second goal is to provide practical guidance and best practices to educators and trainers who teach and administer online courses and programs.

In this edition, we have included several new authors who are highly respected, knowledgeable contributors to current topics within the online education landscape. For example, we have included eleven new chapters addressing such important areas of interest as globalization, emergent technologies, virtual libraries, and accreditation of online programs and institutions. In addition, the eight chapters which are retained from the previous edition are all significantly revised and updated. We are extremely grateful to our contributors for their dedication and commitment to the field of online learning. Their chapters reflect their passion and enthusiasm for teaching in the virtual environment. One of their most important lessons is to remind us that students learn most when they can be collaborators in their educational experiences. As well, our students continue to inspire us and serve as our first source of innovation.

On a more personal basis, this project was supported by the love and commitment of our life partners, Jan Rudestam and David Read, who graciously endured our numerous phone calls and absences. Our dear friends and colleagues at Fielding Graduate University also deserve our appreciation for their ongoing support and wisdom. We want to acknowledge one another as well. We worked as coeditors while one of us resided in Santa Barbara, California, and the other in Vancouver, British Columbia, reinforcing our belief that the Internet can effectively support long-distance writing projects.

We sometimes take for granted the exceptional services and encouragement provided by members of the Sage Publications family of editors and staff. In this case we deeply appreciate the contributions of James Brace-Thompson and Lisa Shaw, our chief editors, for their encouragement and ongoing enthusiasm for our work; our editorial assistant, Ashley Conlon; our production editor, Karen Wiley; our copy editor, Renee Willers; and the Sage staff. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the reviewers of this edition: Chris Dede, Harvard University; Carol Watson, Indiana University; Pamela Whitehouse, West Virginia University; Jeffrey Alejandro, East Carolina University; and Jody Clarke, Harvard University.