

The History of Distance Learning: A Timeline

1728

Caleb Phillips places an ad in the *Boston Gazette* for the world's first correspondence course: "Any persons in the country desirous to learn this Art, may, by having the several lessons sent weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston."

The "art" is the art of writing shorthand, and it's wicked pissah.

[Image: Front page of the *Boston Gazette*.]

1840

After an embarrassing lapse of 112 years, distance learning picks up again when British educator Sir Isaac Pitman offers to teach his own shorthand method via correspondence course.

The course helps Pitman disseminate his method to a wide audience.

[Image: Title page of *David Copperfield* in shorthand.]

1873

Back in Boston, Anna Eliot Ticknor establishes the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, consisting of a network of women sending lessons to other women.

Dubbed "the silent university," it is intended to unobtrusively enrich the intellectual lives of women at a time when they are expected to dedicate themselves to the household.

[Image: Portrait of Anna Eliot Ticknor.]

1922

Distance education becomes audible as Pennsylvania State College uses the radio to teach remotely.

By 1925, more than 200 colleges are riding the radio wave.

[Image: Drawing of radio tower emitting waves across the globe.]

1953

Students actually become *more* educated from watching TV when they participate in the first televised college course, offered by the University of Houston.

Dragnet is also very good but doesn't teach anyone anything.

[Image: Publicity shot showing the two main characters of the TV show *Dragnet*.]

1965

Students find their calling with telephonic courses offered by the University of Wisconsin.

None, however, manage to be as cool as *Mad Men's* Don Draper (right).

[Image: The character Don Draper in a 1960s office, talking on the phone.]

1971

Social critic Ivan Illich explores computer-based education in *Deschooling Society*.

Despite the similarity of the name, Ivan is *not* the fictional character Ivan Ilyich from the famous novella by Leo Tolstoy (right).

[Image: Portrait of Leo Tolstoy.]

1976

Coastline Community College feels no need for a physical campus and instead offers courses exclusively over the airwaves.

The college later concedes that students exist in three-dimensional space and begins offering on-campus courses in California.

[Image: Diagram illustrating the curvature of space created by the gravity of the Sun.]

1981

The School of Management and Strategic Studies is among the first institutions in the United States to offer an online program.

The target audience is "high level executives." Don Draper (right) is unimpressed.

[Image: Don Draper wearily looking out an office window.]

1997

Blackboard Inc. is founded, offering a standardized platform for online course delivery and management.

Actual blackboards become quaint relics of a time gone by.

[Image: Vintage photograph of students standing at a blackboard.]

2000

The modern era of distance learning begins with the proliferation of online schools. The next 17 years will see the birth of CourseNotes, YouTube, Udacity, and the online division of SNHU.

Learning from a distance has long been with us and will continue to play an important role in our society as long as we remain true to the spirit of reaching out to anyone who is willing to work hard and foster curiosity, regardless of such supposed limitations as income, class, and geography.

[Image: Student using virtual-reality goggles in a classroom.]

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