

REVIEW: LEARNING TOGETHER ONLINE: RESEARCH ON ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING NETWORKS

“Learning Together Online: Research on Asynchronous Learning Networks” (2005), edited by Roxanne Hiltz and Ricki Goldman has just become available from Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers. ISBN 0-8058-4866-5 (cloth), ISBN 0-8058-5255-7 (paper), 296 densely packed pages. This text is recommended reading for those who are interested in research in online education, especially asynchronous learning networks. Hiltz and Goldman bring their long history of engagement in the field to this book, providing at the outset a complete history of the field and ending the book with a prognosis for the future.

Hiltz and Goldman set the tone for the book in the preface in which they quote “The Institute of Higher Education Policy, 2000”:

The public debate over the merits of Internet-based distance learning too often consists of high-pitched vitriol and hyperbole. Proponents ooze with blind adoration, declaring that online learning can resolve all the problems confronting traditional education. Opponents insist that courses taught on the net are incapable of living up to the standards of the traditional bricks and mortar classroom.

The Hiltz/Goldman text seeks to set the record straight, by providing detailed objective information about what has actually happened in the field of learning networks.

LTO contains two parts: (1) Foundations of Research on Learning Networks and (2) Learning Networks: what we know and what we need to know. Contributors include familiar Sloan-C regulars such as Peter Shea, Karen Swan, Chuck Dziuban, Linda Harasim, and, of course, Roxanne Hiltz, who is widely recognized as a pioneer in this field. In many ways this text reflects much of the best thinking in the field and should be required reading for classes of students studying online education. Topics range comparisons of online and “in-seat” to methods of quantifying effectiveness in Part I. Faculty roles, student satisfaction, technology, media, and learning communities are discussed in Part II.

Overall, the text is highly recommended for those interested in pursuing research in learning networks and should work well for graduate level courses in online education.

--JRB