

# Lani Gunawardena's Introduction

Hello and Welcome

I am your teacher, Charlotte Nirmalani Gunawardena. My nickname is Lani, so please call me Lani. I am very glad to be teaching this course at the University of São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this course. Our role is to facilitate your learning and to make you feel that you are part of this learning community.

Professionally, my identity is strongly linked to the field of distance education and online learning. This is the field that I have a strong passion for and I live and breathe it every day of my professional life. I am Regents' Professor of Distance Education and Instructional Technology in the Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences (OI&LS) program in the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, where I have worked for over 24 years.

As a professional in distance education, I still battle with two major concerns. One is the need to provide access to education to the disadvantaged, the less accessible. With high tech gadgetry and expense we make the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" wider. My second concern is the need to develop sound instructional design principles for distance education, specifically online learning in order to support the distance learner to learn in new and different ways.

Another area of professional interest is intercultural communication. Increasingly, I have blended my interest in distance education with my interest in intercultural communication as the distance education field is becoming global and international. I just completed writing and editing a book with Insung Jung on *Culture and Online learning* that will be published by Stylus this year.

For further information on my professional life, research interests, and projects, you can go to the OILS web page <http://oils.unm.edu/contact/faculty-profiles/charlotte-lani-gunawardena.html> and my personal website <http://cgunawardena.wordpress.com/>

Now a little bit about my personal life:

I was born and grew up in Sri Lanka. I have lived approximately the same number of years in both Sri Lanka and the U.S., (a few more years in the U.S.), and I am a dual citizen. I consider myself to be a "global nomad" living at the edge of two cultures (Sri Lankan and American), in some ways belonging to both and in other ways belonging to none, so I can look at both with an outsider's eye. It is perhaps this sense of not being tied to any one country or society that fuels a passion for international travel and a sense of comfort in cultures different from my own. Yes, I get a great kick out of visiting new places and meeting and working with diverse people.



(Me as a kid carrying my baby sister with my other sister looking on during one of my memorable trips with my parents to Nuwara Eliya, the tea country of Sri Lanka)

One of my hobbies is international travel. Fortunately, my work takes me to many different countries. I try to find time to see the country and enjoy the people when I make an international trip for work. Here are some photos from a trip to Europe when I visited three countries for work and fun: Lisbon, Portugal, as a keynote speaker for a conference organized by the European Distance Education Network, a visit to Nimes, France, to present at the Cultural Attitudes Toward Technology conference, (a great conference if you are interested in culture and technology), and a visit to the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) in Barcelona, Spain. Last summer (2013) I was in Ghana, Africa helping to set up a physician assistant program that will be offered at a distance using eLearning and mobile learning technologies, a program that OILS students helped to design and are currently working on.



Lisbon, Portugal, admiring the beautiful **Azulejos (tiles)**



At the Open University of Catalonia, Spain



At Pont Du Guard, a 2000 year old Roman bridge in Nimes, France

When I am not traveling, I like to garden. I have several roses, native plants to Albuquerque which form a xeriscape (quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment), and vegetables. A real assortment as you can see below.



That's all for now. You will get to know me better as the course progresses. I hope you will tell us a little about yourself in your introductions.

I hope you enjoy this course!  
Lani