

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE EXTERNAL DEGREE

The fact of our standing on the doorstep of 1984, poses an irresistible invitation to reflect on our past and speak of our future.

It's an invitation to compare prophecy with reality, reflections with visions. It is within this context that the theme of this conference is indeed fitting and proper.

As you will recall, a major ingredient of the Orwellian vision of the coming year was the omnipresence of an overpowering technology. While to date, and at least in this country, we continue to escape the prophesized oppression and loss of personal liberty, if anything, Orwell underrepresented the power of the technology that is the reality of 1984.

It is indeed our fortune that at least for the moment, the technology is our servant and not our master, and at least in its intent, has the ability to liberate and not oppress.

What I would like to share with you this morning is what I view to be the advent of powerful and liberating applications of technology to higher education and specifically, the external degree.

For years now I have heard educational futurists talk about the coming revolution in media-delivered instruction and academic services. For years now the technology has been available. For the first time, however, the educational community is starting to focus its attention towards marrying the intellectual resources of the campus and the technological resources of the market place. In the words of George Allen, former Redskins coach, "The future is now."

The Division of Continuing Education at the New Jersey Institute of Technology has an electronic information exchange system which links 1,500 participants all over the world with instructors and each other using micro-computers or terminals, telephones, and modems. Access is available any time of the day. A student can work alone or send messages to an instructor or other student who responds when the message is called up on the computer. Scheduling and geographic problems are eliminated.

At the present time topics range from Leadership Training, Small Business Development, and Computer Programming to Technical Writing, Business and Professional Ethics, and Fundamentals of Cybernetics.

With appropriate equipment, instruction can be accessed at home, at corporations, or other participant sites.

The Emory School of Medicine TV Network broadcasts live to 32 institutions in the Atlanta metropolitan area and leases or sells videotapes to thousands, nationally and internationally.

Stanford University's Instructional Network broadcasts live courses to engineers and other high tech staff employed by 118 business and Industrial firms.

The College of San Mateo uses microcomputer and videotapes to deliver instruction to employees in the electronic industries in San Francisco.

Learn Alaska broadcasts telecourses from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.. Over 100 courses are for public school children, 13 are university level, and 30 are noncredit adult education courses.

The Adult Learning Listening Network broadcasts radio courses in a cooperative program among 6 California colleges and universities. Also available are cassette tapes of courses for the commuter and a support service using audio teleconferencing.

Dartmouth uses satellite reception from 13 of the 100 satellites now in orbit. Selected programs include Spanish from the SIN Network and French from Canada's ANIK satellite. Dartmouth also has a two-way microwave interactive television link with Vermont Medical School, and hospitals in New Hampshire. The network (INTERACT) provides daily satellite medical programming.

In addition to these examples, there are over 50 consortiums and colleges in the United States which are providing access for the distant learner, and there are a dozen more international consortiums. The "To Educate The People" program intends to develop a national credit-bearing 24 hour instructional network over cable television.

You're already familiar with many of the colleges which have produced telecourses now available throughout the country: The Coastline Consortium; Wayne State University with its four full year degree program; Delaware, Widener, and Neumann cooperative program; and many others.

With the expansion of efforts already under way, combined with new ventures in the planning stages all across the country, we stand on the brink of an era in which the delivery of credit bearing degree programs can, and in many cases will be completely independent of any campus or physical site. Edison State College, in cooperation with other New Jersey based institutions is currently organizing a collection of media based delivery modes, which when completed, has the potential of turning every factory and worksite into a campus or college classroom. It is our intention to pursue this with the military and especially the Navy. We realistically expect that by the end of the decade, every aircraft carrier and capital ship on patrol around the world will be transformed into a floating campus. For years study after study has shown that one of the biggest problems facing men and women at sea is boredom. Very soon we will have the best intellectually prepared services in the world. The implications of this event is of enormous significance, not only for external degree programs, but for higher education in general.

One of the initial casualties in this movement will be the term "external degree." The current dichotomy which differentiates between the traditional campus-based degree and the distant or external degree will be blurred into irrelevancy.

I would go so far as to suggest that next year's annual conference on the external degree might more accurately describe itself as the annual conference on the "distant learner." For the first time in the history of higher education we will have available to us the means of providing universal access to collegiate instruction. The staggering magnitude of potential changes brought about by our ability to diversify the delivery mode of instruction suggests consideration of a host of issues. I will touch on just a few.

First, the issue of quality must be addressed. Is not the technological delivery of instruction cold, sterile, and devoid of the stimulating interaction that takes place among the students and faculty in more traditional modes? In many cases it probably is. However, not all instructional formats are best for all people, nor is every approach equally suitable for every learning style or every learning situation.

The key to the issues is in diversity of approaches. There is no one right way to teach, nor is there one right way to learn. The more options available to a learner to adopt particular learning modes from a variety of high quality options serves the best interest of students and the academy alike.

Next, consider the governance and accreditation issues. The Council on Post-Secondary Education in association with the state higher education executive offices are currently working on a set of joint principles to be applied to media delivered instruction, especially dealing with the questions of quality assurance, accreditation, and state licensing authority. I have reviewed a preliminary draft of the policy statement under development, and I am both pleased and encouraged by the supportive and forward-looking spirit of the proposals under consideration. I would like to share with you two statements of principles in the document which reflect the spirit and concern for the issues raised by the Joint Task Force. Be mindful that these statements are contained in a working draft of a document that has not been finalized nor approved for general public release.

"The policies and procedures for assessing long distance learning should encourage the development and use of technology for education purposes. Specific requirements by state authorizing agencies and accrediting bodies should not become barriers to constructive innovation."

The interests of higher education and the general public would be best served if institutions voluntarily seek appropriate approval even in situations in which they may not be required to do so. A general intent of the Task Force's recommendations is to make accreditation and authorization of telecommunications-based educational programs as thorough but reasonable as possible. If this can be done, then the burden of seeking approval will warrant an institutional investment in public accountability." I suggest that all of us interested in this subject, follow closely this development and review carefully the final document. It is of great significance.

I am especially pleased that at least in the draft stages these two organizations have put the positive educational potential of the technology ahead of provincial concerns of territory and turf. Fortunately, it looks as though we will not be bothered by state licensing authorities erecting jamming equipment to block signals from institutions in neighboring states or regions.

This movement will draw attention from different kinds of regulatory bodies normally not associated with higher education. The FCC will have a responsibility together with more traditional quality control authorities in protecting consumers against misrepresentation and compromises in the academic integrity of materials transversing the airways and telephone lines. In that the work of our faculties and campuses will be open to public scrutiny in a way as never before, one would hope that qualitatively we would meet the challenge in a way yet to be seen in

existing prime time media. I suggest that we not emulate the existing prime time models lest we find ourselves faced with courses like the "A-Team" starring Enrico Ferni and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

We are already witnessing new efforts of institutional cooperation in the development and delivery of new instructional products. As in the evolution of any new technology, the developmental costs are enormous. In response to this fact, colleges and universities are pooling resources and sharing outcomes. At least in one area, we have found a set of issues around which institutions are comfortable in working together and for the moment have forsaken the usual competitiveness that often characterizes inter-institutional relationships. Some positive by-products of this common sense of purpose has resulted in a liberalization in transfer policies and a broadening of articulation agreements. As the development of materials continues, the cost will and has already begun to come down. The technology has resulted in a sharing of institutional and intellectual resources in a way that has not taken place before. Students will have access to exposure with the best of our faculties, and institutions can tap scholarly presentations for their students by international experts which they never would have had access to.

As you might imagine, the issues are much more enormous and complex than I have indicated here. They are broad ranging issues related to social policy, universal access, evaluation and assessment processes, the responses from organized faculties and collective bargaining, and the demand for new types of trained professionals within the academy. Other issues relating to campuses and the private sector educational programming, in corporations, labor, the military and their relationship to the traditional campus, and all of the other issues confronting us now, still await our examination.

There will be significant issues confronting the faculty which will create new notions about class size, teacher load, as well as technical training necessary for academic production graphics and special effects. It is not far fetched to speculate on a spring awards show where statuettes are handed out for the best performance by an Assistant Professor with a tenure track appointment.

Seriously, the marriage of the academy with the technology, like past innovations, will be both inspiring to many and threatening to some. But that is the consequences and fate of any meaningful innovation. For those of us long associated with external degrees and/or the adult learner, the benefits are so enormous and profound that they deserve our willingness to contest the issues and solve the problems. So 1984 awaits us. For the most part, it shall find us reasonably free and optimistic about at least the possibility of a better future. We have been haunted and frightened by Orwell's work from the time his prophecy was pronounced. Good still contests with evil, and the free spirit of individuals must still fend off those who would deny it. And through it all we have retained a good deal of control over our destiny. The positive balance we have thus far maintained is due in large part to our resolve to be uplifting in our efforts and committed in our resolve that the future shall be better than the past. To those of you who become weary in the contest, I leave you with these words from Maciavelli: "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things." (Maciavelli, 15:13.)

Thank you.