Twenty-First Century Challenges: Will Outreach Become an Equal Partner?

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We stand on the frontier of a new century — and the environment of that century will be electronic, its currency will be information, and its scope will be global. In this new age of the electronic moment, the academy faces challenges from new technologies and new learners that will produce significant pressures for change.

How well is the academy "positioned" for such change? Environmental scanning of articles over the past year suggests that there may be significant problems facing institutions that have not planned for this transition to the future. A vital and dynamic outreach program can assist in providing the paradigm for such change. Here are few impressions from scanning the literature.

New Technologies, New Learners, New Competitors

The impacts of technology continue to grow. Last fall (November 1996) it was reported by Edupage — the electronic newsletter of EDUCOM — that the number of U. S. households linked to the Internet had doubled during 1996 to some 14.7 million. If this rate of growth continues, it will exceed processing capabilities. Indeed, many institutions are now examining an Internet 2 project to develop new capabilities. The U.S. is becoming a "wired community" with world access.

In this country more people are now employed building computers than automobiles, and in 1996, computers outsold television sets ($19 billion to $10 billion) for the first time. The percent of homes with television is now 99%, which is higher even than the percentage having telephones (94%). 1996 was also the year when more e-mail messages were delivered than regular mail, yet we live in a world where more than 70% of the population has never made a telephone call.

In the November 10, 1996 edition of *The New York Times*, the CEO of AT&T, John Walter, states:

It has been said that digital technology eats everything and tramples anyone who tries to oppose it. I believe this understates the case. You don't have to oppose digital technology to be trampled. Innocent bystanders will be flattened too. There is no neutrality in the Digital Revolution. You must become a digital revolutionary or risk losing everything (13).

Add to these impacts that of the "new learner," and the future facing the academy becomes more complicated. The new learner is that group of individuals (now the majority) living in the United States who were born after 1957. For these citizens who have never lived without the age of the electronic moment, reality is defined and conditioned by the 21-inch syndrome. They formulate perceptions of the world in multiple, electronic-based stimuli, whereas the older cohort — born in an earlier age — was conditioned by the linear learning mode of print-based information. The preferred learning mode of the new student does not usually match the traditional, assembly-line pattern of instruction practiced by most institutions.

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Information is now diffuse, it tends to leak, and individuals with access to broad-band technology can pick and choose their information and learning bases in a sort of "mass customization" that is increasingly efficient and cost effective. Yet David Shenk reminds us that accessing information is not the same thing as education (1997).

Eli Noam of Columbia University likens the impact of the information revolution on the university to that of the printing press on the medieval cathedrals, where printed matter permitted individuals to read, interpret, and judge for themselves without the necessary intervention of the priests in the process (1995).

Obviously, when Forrest Gump can talk to President Kennedy, we are living in a world where seeing is no longer believing — but electronic media does provide the opportunity to extend experiences in new and different ways. The very best teachers can now be shared world wide, at the speed of light. Students can "virtually" go to

places and do things that were previously too expensive, too dangerous, or impossible. Technology can take students under the sea, into outer space, into a volcano — even inside the human body or a DNA molecule, and every student can have a front-row seat!

What has become "possible" through technology is now becoming "expected" by new learners and their preferred learning modes. This new way of "seeing" provides enhanced opportunities for understanding.

Teaching in higher education has followed the Industrial Revolution production-line mentality of drill, proctor, test. Students of today are using new capabilities to demand new models of education, thus evolving changing roles for teachers and students.

The impact of change is coming not only from technology and new learners. Institutions are also being pressed for relevance, for the immediate applicability of learning, for more efficiency and cost effectiveness by societal groups. Learners in these groups are demanding access in new ways.

John Tagg and Robert Barr in the November/December 1995 issue of *Change* magazine suggest there is a changing paradigm for undergraduate education that consists of a move from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. This change fits a new world where individuals can access information through the creation of a heuristic environment that can lead to successful, self-directed development of individual learning skills.

With the new learner so conditioned by the age of the electronic moment, individual institutions that continue to practice the old linear learning modes of "professing" may find smaller and smaller audiences. The former audiences may turn to new providers in the private sector who see education as a large, under-tapped "market."

In his article in the October 1995 issue of *Science*, titled "Electronics and the Dim Future of the University," Eli Noam suggests,

> The inexorable specialization of scholars means that even research universities cannot maintain coverage of all subject areas in the face of the expanding universe of knowledge, unless their research staff grows at more or less the same rate as scholarly output, doubling every five to ten years. This is not sustainable either economically or organizationally, nor would it permit the existence of smaller-sized elite universities.

Noam foresees a future where the economic and organizational pressures might "recast" the institution into a ". . . university that will then exist as a sort of office park of semiautonomous units, each a soft money tub on its own bottom . . . and partly run from a distance by telecommuting staff and specialized subcontractors."

No lesser light than Peter Drucker (*Forbes*, March10, 1997) suggests that large universities will cease to exist in the next thirty or so years.

Other forecasts envision the university of the future as a McGraw-Hill University, a Disney/Spielberg University, a Western Governors Virtual University, or an IBM GLOBAL CAMPUS. The IBM entry was announced in October of 1996 at the EDUCOM national meeting as a proposal to provide an education and business "framework" that helps colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions to redesign learning, teaching, and administrative functions (http://www.educom.edu). There are those of us in the profession who thought institutions could and should do that for themselves. IBM clearly believes otherwise, and thinks there is an income potential for that opinion.

Since environmental scanning has suggested impacts on the institutions: new technologies, new students, even new or more competitors, what does scanning have to say about how the institutions of today are reacting to these challenges? According to the scans, the academy is not doing too well.

In the July/August 1996 issue of *Change*, John Brown and Paul Duguid's article "Universities in the Digital Age" noted their intention "to make the general point that the radical changes occurring in a university's environment — from the reconstitution of its student body to the re-engineering of its technological infrastructure — will require quite different institutional arrangements from those found today." The authors suggest that institutions of higher education exist to provide quality of access to academic communities or "communities of concepts," and in the future, institutions must "re-tool in a two-pronged manner: they must seek to provide wider access to communities, and not just to information, and they must expand ways to represent new forms of access and practice."

Methodologies of distance or open learning are often suggested to meet these needs for new forms of access and practice.

The book *Continuing Higher Education: The Coming Wave* by Lerner and King suggests that the models of continuing education should be used by the academy to respond to the flood of societal challenges facing our institutions.

Again, in the July/August 1996 issue of *Change*, an article by Alan Guskin on "Facing the Future: The Change Process in Restructuring Universities," suggests,

> We are too good at analyzing all the difficult issues involved in doing something — anything — and thereby immobilizing ourselves. The longer we analyze the current ways of operating the further we fend off that awesome day when we will have to change something. Analysis thus becomes a defensive maneuver to avoid making fundamental change.

Chancellor Guskin notes that one of the serious problems facing us is the decline in financial resources and observes,

> The argument is that since most of the financial resources in universities are in personnel and related costs, and since most personnel costs are in the academic area, then what is needed is to reduce the number of faculty members and get those remaining to be more productive. However, since the only way to make faculty members more productive in the present educational model is to have them teach more students and courses, faculty naturally resist as best they can.

Guskin has brought us back to the shift in paradigm mentioned earlier — that of shifting the focus from instruction to learning, and has highlighted the role technology may be able to play in support of future efforts at more productivity.

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New Incentives, New Paradigms, New Partnerships

If the academy is able to articulate our challenges, define our problems, and undertake meaningful change, how then — using what we know of organizational and change theory — do we identify those incentives for each stakeholder to ensure they will involve themselves to support the necessary efforts to move successfully into the twenty-first century?

A simplified list of stakeholders might include students (the new learners), faculty and staff, and the sponsoring society (or its variety of important sub-groups public and private). It should be noted that there are increasing numbers of these subgroups of special interest who demand to be heard and served — and who often have conflicting values between and among themselves, and with the basic missions of the academy.

In scanning the literature, the suggestion is found that the academy — or the higher education enterprise — is too often preoccupied with protecting self interest. The academy is charged with drifting from or failing in the mission to support the needs of the general population. It is charged that the academy is too costly, with expenses rising at a rate far in excess of most of the other

society services. It is noted that there are, in this new information age, other alternatives available to meet the needs for educational opportunity served for so long by the academy.

Management of the educational enterprise becomes increasingly difficult with pressures from various constituencies, attacks on tenure, prescription of "teaching loads," calls for new institutional roles and responsibilities for every topic from economic development to internationalization of the society. The burden of trying to do everything for everyone is a load that is bending many institutions and breaking not a few presidents.

Grade-iinflation charges are mixed with inflated institutional ambition — two-year institutions want four-year status, colleges become universities (if only in name), universities want research status and AAU membership. Legislatures want colleges and universities to provide technical training, and all the while dollars for support decline and costs rise.

The Challenge

What incentives, models or partnerships are available to respond to this impressionistic complex view of the situation? The challenge of tomorrow is to respond to the needs and opportunities for education by merging and managing the virtual and real worlds. The problems fostered by technology will respond to applications of technology for their solution. The need for a new institutional paradigm is answered by the successful models that the outreach and service areas have developed over the years, and new partnerships are available and desirable from almost every quarter of society.

A first step has been suggested by the late Ernest Boyer in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 1994). He quoted Oscar Handlin's statement of the challenge facing us in higher education, "Our troubled planet can no longer afford the luxury of pursuits confined to an ivory tower. Scholarship has to prove its worth, not on its own terms, but by service to the nation and to the world."

The need to re-examine our institutional missions to re-define the "business we are in" is paramount. If we are, indeed, intending to provide only a campus-bound, resident program of instruction for the increasingly few, increasingly privileged, economically elite (for that is the only group that will be able to "afford" us), then that narrow task may be left to an increasingly few institutions with the mega-star names.

If, however, we are in the business of education for the society we serve, then the successful models used by extension, continuing and distance education, or outreach operations provide a real learner-based, well-managed guide to the future. This guide has developed over long, hard years of survival that gives the activity a curious hybrid vigor.

The vigor comes from successfully identifying educational needs and educational resources, developing programs of study to meet

those needs or solve problems, choosing efficient and cost-effective methodologies of delivery that assure access for the audiences to be served, presenting the event in a polished and professional manner, evaluating the activity with feedback mechanisms that inform and strengthen future offerings — *and* using the "preferred" learning elements with regard to time, place, pace, and method of access. This process of mass customization has long been the hallmark of successful outreach operations.

Clearly, if we look to successful outreach models, the incentive for faculty has been recognition, additional payments and, for some, the sense of accomplishment of mission in presenting their content area and serving the public's need to know. Further, the new technologies provide means for faculty to be excited all over again in a rediscovery of their fields through enriched teaching materials and opportunities, and to command the services of teams of specialists in development of materials and processes to enhance the educational activity. Teaching roles will change, but the need for the function remains, whether it is the "sage on the stage, or the guide on the side."

Just as technology demands new partnerships, it also permits them. Few institutions, prior to the advent of distance-education technologies, had regular dealings with satellite vendors or television stations, or — for that matter — telephone companies for more than local service. Today's computerized world makes possible and necessary multiple partnerships with individuals, groups, and organizations that were once foreign to the regular operation of an institution.

Further, new technologies permit and encourage multi-institutional partnerships in common programs on state, regional, national, and international levels. The needs of new learners world wide demand new partnerships between institutions and students world wide since no individual need be disenfranchised from access to a specific educational opportunity by an accident of geography. Institutions will be called on to decide what their missions suggest and permit with regard to these new demands. Institutions can extend their reach and influence by the process of selectively "partnering" with other enablers to "fill in the gaps" of institutional need where the other partners provide capability, efficiency, and effectiveness of operation. No institution, for example, will likely operate a satellite system as a part of its physical plant system, but it can make use of partners in that business.

As societies change, their institutions adapt — or fail to, and thus survive or pass from the scene. If the academy chooses to serve the broad, changing educational needs of an increasingly complex society, it would do well to look to the successful practice of the outreach areas of institutions, and enhance the fundamental partnership between the teaching, research, and outreach functions to "prove its worth, not on its own terms, but by service to the nation and the world" in the twenty-first century.

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