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EDITORIAL

Several changes occurring in the teaching/learning environment in higher education, namely the increasing use of technology for instruction and meeting the needs of learners in an information society, will also affect the ways in which faculty conduct their work in this new milieu. In this issue of DEOSNEWS, Dr. Michael Beaudoin provides a glimpse of possible scenarios as distance education rapidly becomes part of mainstream higher education. He discusses how and why these institutional changes are occurring and how it may transform the role of the professoriate. Dr. Beaudoin presents the challenges and opportunities facing faculty in the academy and urges meaningful involvement by faculty in shaping this new environment.

For further reading on this topic, you may be interested several articles in *The American Journal of Distance Education*: "Tenure, Promotion, and Distance Education: Examining the Culture of Faculty Rewards" by Linda L. Wolcott (Vol. 11 No. 2), "An Institutional Support Framework for Increasing Faculty Participation in Postsecondary Distance Education" by Don Olcott and Stephen J. Wright (Vol. 9 No. 3), and Dr. Beaudoin's seminal article, "The Instructor's Changing Role in Distance Education" (Vol. 4 No. 2).

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A NEW PROFESSORiate FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Michael F. Beaudoin

INTRODUCTION

As we rapidly approach the next millennium, the role of the professoriate within the context of an evolving teaching/learning environment is undergoing profound changes. While much attention is given to instructional technology, we have not yet fully discerned the impact of technology on learning, and thus how it affects teaching. Since teaching is how many within the academy earn their living, how they gain a certain measure of personal satisfaction and professional recognition, it would seem prudent to examine how and why this phenomenon is occurring and what teachers might do to acclimate themselves to this new academic milieu. The students themselves contribute to no small extent to this transformation. They are products of a digital age, being exposed in their early years to the interactive format of digital media at the expense of a more passive relationship with television. Thus, they are more active participants in the shift from broadcast to interactive learning than are their faculty. They prefer to discover than to be taught, to construct a customized curriculum rather than absorb one that is prescriptive.

Not all wish to embrace these trends that are inexorably affecting the teaching profession, but we must not, indeed can not, avoid them. The changes described herein are not necessarily endorsed, nor are they promoted as more desirable than the more conventional roles with which many are most familiar. But faculty will need to be constantly adapting to new ways of interacting in new roles, with new students, and at new institutions -- increasingly peripatetic and required to evolve their practice during

their careers. Curriculum vitae more frequently reflect greater diversity in what, where, and how teachers have practiced their trade using diverse teaching methods. We are witnessing a trend from teaching primarily in a lecture mode, classroom-based, homogeneous students in a fixed location, to working with larger numbers spread over a wide geographic area, and utilizing varied instructional methods. A gradual progression from rather traditional to increasingly non-traditional means and venues is a career migration pattern that likely will become more common.

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE WORKPLACE

Imagine, for a moment, what the typical mid-sized private or public institution might look like just ten years from now, and the impact of this change on instructional personnel. Even though enrollments would be higher, physical facilities would not increase proportionately. Many matriculants would be taking selected courses from one institution, but receiving their degree from another. Some students will complete their degree studies with campus residency requirements of only a few weeks, with all other studies completed off campus. Students enrolled full time would spend less time on campus than they do now; most would be in residence for no more than two years, with initial exposure to the fundamentals of a profession or discipline, but acquiring the skills needed more independently in field, clinical, or work settings.

Full-time faculty numbers will have increased only slightly, but most institutions will employ many more adjuncts faculty, including some outside the area who will teach via electronic media delivery. As many as 50% of the courses might be delivered online from other sources. Rather than more lecture halls, there will be additional communal computer labs equipped with a wide array of multi-media instructional devices. Many institutions will be affiliated formally with several other institutions in consortia that share students. Students can pick from the curriculum menu at each member institution to fashion their own program of study.

Many institutions will enter into new contractual arrangements with for-profit corporations which service the education sector as it becomes increasingly industrialized. For example, institutions will contract with outside parties to market some of their programs, and to warehouse and mail texts and materials to students studying primarily off campus. Much of the instructional content will be designed and pre-packaged in a multi-media format by specialists and vendors. These packages will be augmented and presented by resident faculty or guest faculty engaged to teach online. Continuing education activities will be more closely tied to professional degree programs, as continuous education lasting several years beyond graduation will be offered.

There are many in the academy who dismiss most of these future scenarios. The skeptics question why there is so much attention given to recent developments when, in fact, significant historical changes have been occurring all along with relatively little real impact on how the academy functions. They note that, if anything, these innovations have contributed to the expansion of the academic enterprise.

What exactly is different about what we are witnessing today that could so fundamentally change the profession? Will the Internet, interactive video, multi media, desktop software, and wireless communication really transform the content and delivery of higher education as quickly and as broadly as many futurists claim? They tell us that this technology is driving the restructuring of

academe and will force educators to realign and redesign the teaching/learning environment dramatically. Those who do not address these critical issues now, they say, will likely be among the 500 or so colleges that are predicted to go out of business in the next two decades. The ones that survive are those that will incorporate technology to broaden their course delivery base, and thus attract more students, be able to retain faculty, and be in a better position to compete with for-profit companies and institutions. For example, the University of Phoenix is not only attracting students no competitors had previously but is also aggressively seeking students from other institutions which can't or won't modify the way they do business. Those institutions may not even be asking themselves the right questions regarding their future.

The questions to be addressed are not simple. It is not merely a matter of inquiring about what brand of software to purchase and how many classrooms should be wired next year. Instead, more provocative questions must be asked that encompass fundamental issues such as:

- * how many faculty will be needed?
- * will the notion of classrooms survive?
- * is the present structure of the institution viable?
- * what is the role of the institution in view of new providers?
- * will students and teachers need to meet anymore?
- * will campuses even be necessary?

The changing context of higher education makes it impossible to ignore these questions. First, there are workplace trends that require retraining of the present workforce, since the shelf life of many technical degrees is now less than five years. Second, demographics are changing: five million working adults are currently enrolled part time in higher education courses and probably another five million would like to enroll but can't. These lifelong learners, plus the projected growth of traditional age college students will add 20 million FTEs (full time equivalents) in the next few years (Dolence and Norris 1995). Today, students want convenience, credits, and credentials. What is important to these busy and ambitious adult learners is career enhancement, not the college experience. They want information delivered to them.

These factors are making new demands on the academy and specifically on its teaching personnel. There is an expectation that teachers demonstrate measurable improvement in students' knowledge and skill development; and there is a more competitive environment, not only among educational institutions themselves, but also with business entities both locally and globally. It is this confluence of competition, cost, technology, and need that is driving change in the professoriate's historically placid environment.

Just a few selected statistics should dramatize the transformation occurring in academe. Forty percent of post secondary students today are working adults over 30 years of age studying part time; the projection is 60% by the year 2,000. The percentage of courses being taught with electronic media doubled from 1994 to 1995, and it is now commonly used in one of five classrooms. Today over half

of students and faculty make continuing use of information technology including the Internet and the WWW. E-mail is now used in approximately one third of all college courses. In 1990, about 100 institutions had academic offerings incorporating some form of distance education delivery with classroom instruction; by 1995, seventy-five more institutions were offering degrees entirely on line (National Center for Educational Statistics 1997a).

The recent report released by the National Center for Education Statistics (1997b) on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions from the U.S. Department of Education reveals some rather startling figures on twelve hundred institutions surveyed in Fall 1995. In that year, approximately 60% of public institutions responding offered distance education courses, as well as 12% of the private institutions. Of a total population of 750,000 students enrolled in distance education courses in 1994-95, approximately 5,500 students received degrees or completed certificate programs by enrolling exclusively in distance education courses. By fall 1998, at least 85% of all institutions with enrollments of 3,000 or more will be offering distance education courses.

These activities are not limited to fringe institutions with reputations for engaging in avant garde educational practices. The initial resistance to distance education has dissipated even among some of the elite halls of academe such as Yale, Duke, Stanford, Harvard, Cornell, and Chicago which are all getting very serious about distance education. And, of course, we are now seeing the emergence of new and entirely online regional entities such as the Western Governors' University and the Southern Regional Electronic Campus.

The attention and activity taking place in the arena of instructional technology and distance education at this time is remarkable. It seems that practically every professional conference today manages to include technology as one of its themes; indeed, many meetings are devoted exclusively to distance education issues. Ten years ago, The Chronicle of Higher Education occasionally ran an article related to distance education. Now it has a section on "Instructional Technology" with several articles every week.

In fact, the October 3, 1997 issue featured a piece entitled "Rethinking the Role of the Professor in an Age of High Tech Tools" (Young 1997). It began by stating "New technologies could take over many of the instructional duties that now define professors' jobs . . ." Here are a few paraphrased excerpts which are especially germane: . . . some expect that teaching will become more efficient and that students will benefit as parts of the professor's job are taken over . . . Others worry that professors will be left on the sidelines . . . would students and institutions be better off with a new arrangement that allows the professor's tasks to be divided up? . . . courses could be designed by distant teams . . . individual professor's lectures could be replaced by multi media Web sites . . . With many of their responsibilities removed, professors could spend more time leading discussions that take place in classrooms or on line. . . and technology can be used for basic teaching . . . Doing away with human contact would be disastrous . . . The faculty need to wake up and realize . . . jobs could be radically changed for the worst over the next ten years . . . some who have taught with technology say that computers can help foster a more interactive and lively learning environment appropriate for today's information rich world . . . some say such technological tools are fine as supplements, but should not replace traditional lectures . . . And so the debate goes.

A companion piece immediately following this one in the same issue of The Chronicle reports a

fifty-five day faculty strike at York University in Canada resulting in an agreement with administration that faculty would not be forced to use technology in their classrooms. But a week earlier in the Chronicle it was reported that UCLA now requires all of its faculty to put all of their courses on the WWW. These two extremes demonstrate what happens if both administration and faculty overreact and don't thoughtfully consider ways to reconcile different perceptions about the use of technology.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ACADEMY

While we have tinkered around the edges of the academic enterprise dealing with such issues, for examples, as core curriculum and the integration of liberal and professional studies, which are certainly important matters, we have tended to largely ignore what has been going on in business and industry, but we can't do so any longer. Several technology-based industries, collectively known as digital commerce, with enormous wealth and influence, notably computers, communications, media and entertainment, and electronic publishing are now aggressively challenging the academy's previous monopoly as the purveyor of information and knowledge. This is going to force institutions to more boldly rethink their place and purpose, not just in philosophical terms, but in very pragmatic ways as well.

We will see a major shift occurring in the next 10 to 15 years in the composition and structure of our educational institutions. There will be fewer residential colleges, although many will remain to provide younger students with the traditional trappings of a campus experience. There will be an expanding continuing education and training sector, delivered primarily by employers and companies such as Sylvan Learning Systems. In fact, these outfits are already working under contract with many colleges to provide remedial instruction to degree candidates who are not adequately prepared for postsecondary-level work. Another major component is the expanding global electronic campus whereby students can access learning opportunities via computer from home, work, dorm, community, or other location, whenever it is most convenient.

This notion of education on demand, rather than when the registrar schedules classes, has contributed a new buzz word to our educational lexicon: asynchronous learning, meaning that learning activities can occur without having to be synchronized with a scheduled instructional event. We can now categorize students as those who go to school when we open the doors for them, and those who go to school online without having to go through the doors at all.

Many among the professoriate are unaware of how many elements of this new teaching/learning model are actually already in place in their own institutions, which now constitute the newest and fastest growing programs within the academy. Several such enterprises are already serving as prototypes of new offerings, from low-tech to higher-tech academic programs. Students who are enrolled in degree programs may spend little or no time on campus, satisfy course requirements through self-directed study supported by campus based faculty (mostly adjuncts) via correspondence, e-mail, fax, telephone, or other media. Instructional materials are frequently developed primarily under contract with an outside for-profit company, as is the recruitment of students and the distribution of study materials. Some of these arrangements no doubt strike campus-based faculty as a bit unorthodox; they are skeptical that such programs compare favorably with conventional programs in terms of academic integrity, learning outcomes, and student satisfaction.

This approach, and variants of it at hundreds of institutions around the world, is being referred to as the Virtual University (it also gets labeled as distance ed, distal ed, distributive ed, etc.). Whatever it is called, it is going to look, feel and be quite different from what faculty have been accustomed to. It will be characterized by a move away from a campus-centric model of higher education to a consumer-centric model. This is leading to disintermediation, meaning that students seeking service and information can get it increasingly through automated systems not necessarily requiring human mediation. University infrastructures won't necessarily disappear, but they'll be utilized in different ways. The implication of this for faculty should be quite obvious since they also function, in effect, as intermediaries between students and knowledge. If some new, more cost effective medium is available, it will likely be introduced into the workplace. This will inevitably lead to restructuring and reassignments for many employees, including faculty.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PROFESSORiate

We now can envision a not too distant future where the geographic hegemony of higher education will be eliminated because students simply won't need to come to a campus to learn, and where the teaching function will be less critical to the very *raison d'être* of higher learning. For centuries, faculty have controlled the place, the time, the content, the delivery, and the quality of education. Indeed, this is what has defined the professoriate and given it whatever authority it has exercised within the academy. As universities move into the digital age, will this unique role in knowledge delivery be demeaned? Rather than enjoying the most prestigious title within the academic workplace, will faculty roles be viewed as utilitarian?

Make no mistake; academia as we know it is vulnerable to culture shock and what has been observed or experienced thus far is only the beginning. The biggest mistake would be to dismiss all of this as a passing phase, not recognizing that it has already insinuated itself into the academic mainstream. In fact, the boundaries and distinctions between traditional and so-called non-traditional education can no longer be clearly demarcated, and faculty will be expected to act out their roles comfortably and effectively in both milieu.

Faculty should recognize a subtle but not small point; their core competency should not be seen as simply transferring knowledge, but rather orchestrating knowledge that leads to understanding. True, faculty no longer hold the monopoly on information and ideas; they are but one of numerous resources now available by which students can learn. Faculty must accept the fact that students can have many useful learning interactions without necessarily involving a teacher in a classroom. Students interact with each other, with their medium of choice, and with their practice environment. In short, much valid learning already takes place among self-directed students with little, if any, dependence on faculty. So the teaching profession might as well get used to it.

It is ultimately the role of mentor, facilitator, and guide through the transformative process of learning that should give meaning to what teachers do. This role is not that easily replaced or replicated, no matter how sophisticated the technology may be. It is not what happens between students and a teacher in a classroom which defines the quality of education. The true challenge for those who serve as the brokers in the knowledge axis is to create the conditions for continuous conversation, or what Dewey called "productive inquiry." This inquiry does not require our personal intervention or further involvement in the student's successful and continuous growth once skills for true lifelong learning

have been imparted.

If the academy is destined to change in order to better respond to new circumstances, can we be assured that there is a pivotal role for faculty to continue to play? What new constructs could be in place within a very few years? To reconstruct higher education, we need to be clear about what learners really need and what nonessentials can be jettisoned. These issues were recently examined by EDUCOM, a consortium of businesses and universities which convened in 1996 and produced an important white paper. It stated that students today need access to authentic communities of learning, they need resources to help them learn, and they need accepted credentialing as verification of their learning (Twigg and Oblinger 1996). This, in its essence, means they need faculty, facilities, and an institutional affiliation. Currently, all these components are typically aggregated and self contained on a campus.

Distance education has made it possible, however, for students to be separated from the campus, yet still get what they need. And because working adult students tend to have little allegiance to a particular institution and are more interested in the credential, smaller certifying bodies might replace larger permanent institutions. These entities could set their own standards, evolve to meet particular student needs, add or subtract faculty as needed. Faculty could be widely dispersed along with their students rather than location bound at a costly physical plant. A student's academic career would no longer be linked to a particular place, time, or pre-established infrastructure, but based on a network of flexible arrangements shaped largely by the student in consultation with a credentialing body and its faculty. Few faculty would come to a single campus-based office on a regular schedule. Instead, they might hold faculty appointments with several credentialing bodies in widely dispersed locations around the globe and conduct more individualized mentoring sessions live or on line rather than teach in pre-determined congregate settings (Brown and Duguid 1996).

What else would faculty do in this new era of digital education? Many of the very same things they do now. They will have to adjust from transmitting information in person to students sitting dutifully in classrooms, to monitoring and evaluating the work of distant learners they may never personally meet. Faculty will have to pay more attention to process and less to the content that has distinguished them as resident experts in some rather esoteric subject areas. They will also have to plan how to share the teaching load with technology, and become familiar with new regulations governing intellectual property and fair usage.

One of the most important things faculty must do to find a comfortable division of labor between themselves and the new bells and whistles of the 21st century is to disabuse themselves of some of the prevalent myths regarding out-of-classroom learning. The growing body of research informs us that effective teaching and learning at a distance has been demonstrated in almost every subject area. The literature tells us that distance education students who evaluate their courses almost always express strong satisfaction for the personal attention and assistance they received from their faculty mentors. Concern is expressed that pre-packaged instructional materials being used independently will result in students becoming overly reliant on stock answers, and discourage critical thinking and self-directed learning; but in fact, these students generally spend more time researching additional sources than do their classroom based counterparts.

There is another myth that faculty should get beyond if they wish to effectively incorporate

technology as a medium of instruction. For a generation, distance educators felt that, to prove the efficacy of out-of-classroom teaching, they had to emulate what typically goes on in a classroom. We are finally recognizing that the task is not to replicate what occurs in the classroom, but rather to create the conditions and dynamics that will optimize the teaching/learning process most appropriate to that particular situation. What you do with students 500 miles away, and how you do it, should not necessarily be the same as what would take place inside a classroom which, after all, is just a venue and not an essential ingredient for effective interaction.

As faculty acquire more experience with technology, they tend to be less skeptical about its uses and more creative with its possible applications. As this occurs, they must insinuate themselves into the planning taking place at their institution so that they can influence the discussion and the decisions. Too often, those organizing such efforts invite the technocrats, but seldom include faculty. As a consequence, pedagogical issues are frequently and ironically left out of conversations about melding technology and teaching. Ultimately, it is the opportunity for meaningful involvement, professional rewards, and institutional support that are key factors in promoting faculty receptivity and contributions to new technology-based initiatives. The notion that there is minimal need for strong faculty in such efforts must be dispelled, for it is precisely in the design and delivery of these new learning activities where participation of competent and committed faculty is most critical to preserve those educational principles we believe in and aspire to continue promulgating.

CONCLUSION

Technology is just a medium; it is the professoriate who must define its application for the purpose of achieving worthwhile educational ends. Many institutions are now at a critical juncture. Considerable resources are being invested in enhancing and expanding technology infrastructure, academic programs are being designed to accommodate new interests, and new markets are being identified. At the same time, meetings are being convened and committees formed to engage in strategic academic planning, or at least to talk about it whether or not it is actually done. It appears to be an exciting enterprise, but are we, in fact, asking the right questions about our future? Is the faculty playing a meaningful role in the discussions and decisions? In view of institutional directions being set now, will faculty be doing the same things ten years from now? Will they want to be where they presently are ten years from now? In short, does the professoriate want to wait for the future or does it want to make its future? The changing environment in which the professoriate exists should make the answer to such questions quite obvious. If not, then the profession will likely undergo even more profound changes, becoming as vestigial as the lectern is likely to be as we enter the next millennium.

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