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AAF invites the contribution of accomplished leaders and managers, program and platform developers, teachers, researchers, policy makers and others contributing to **AAF**'s goals by way of innovation and processes of continuous improvement. With few exceptions, those considering submission should be senior members of their profession and should write of their relevant findings or views based on demonstrated accomplishments.

AAF seeks to stimulate the kind of innovation that leads to improvements in the efficiency, effectiveness, and reach of higher education venues. Prospective authors are urged to reflect this goal to ensure that their topics are congruent with them. The journal's primary method for achieving its goals is a forum in which appropriately qualified individuals explain their innovations and assert their views. The journal's sense of qualified individuals gives considerable weight to demonstrated accomplishment, theoretical or practical.

The journal's audience consists of senior academic administrators, program developers, market specialists, and research and assessment specialists (**AAF** is also distributed without charge to the U.S. Senate, selected house members, and the governors of all states). The safest generalization about these readers is that they are looking for a good idea that they might implement or adapt to their setting. Articles should provide insight into the author's perspective and practical accomplishments without the burden of extensive argument or citation. Readers tell us that they appreciate our crisp style and compact format. They also tell us when we fail to exercise the editorial control needed to achieve it.

Most articles should contain between 500 and 2,500 words. Preference is given to 1,500 word articles that leave **AAF**'s readers with one or two important insights. In rare cases, topics requiring longer articles may be managed via a series of shorter articles to be carried over two to three issues. However, each part of such a series must be meaningful to someone who might read only that part.

Include a brief (100-250 word) biographical sketch with your article. Summarize your credentials and your senior professional accomplishments in the area addressed in your article.

To submit contact us by email at editor@InterEd.com or phone (208) 938-9007.

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Assessment and Accountability Forum was founded to provide a professional forum for enhancing the science and practice of quality management in university-based, adult-centered higher education. In 1995, **AAF**'s scope was expanded to address innovation, growth, diversification and quality management in all venues of adult-centered higher education, including continuing, professional and corporate-focused education. While the range of permissible topics is greater, the unifying goal remains:

To stimulate the development of better visions, models, standards, practices and metrics for higher education leading to net increases in efficiency, effectiveness and the range of audiences served.

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The Deconstruction of Higher Education

ALAN J. HUNT

The internet is changing how educators, students and administrators interact. Technothusiasts see the internet as a river of information flowing into the waiting mind of a student and once 'overflowed' with this river the student becomes educated! These people prophesize that universities will crumble. Peter Drucker, a noted futurist, predicts a universal university extinction within 30 years.

The future, as its wont, remains uncertain but nevertheless imminent. At present, we still have options to influence that future. We can choose to exercise those options — we can be victims or we can be leaders.

Change, not extinction will happen. The techno-vision of education as information lacks an understanding of education as knowledge. Knowledge results when information is used within a social context and is molded to knowledge 'about' and 'to be'. This social context is one of the critical elements of higher education and most importantly, the one that the internet is least able to provide. The social context of education is strong. A professor is asked a 'killer question'; this draws her and the class into a discussion of some topic beyond the curriculum, but nevertheless engaging and demonstrative of how knowledge is formed. Within the social context of education students almost steal or find knowledge as they engage each other and the professor. The give and take of real people in an academically charged context is impossible to simulate with asynchronous electronic education. Despite the best audio-technology in the world, I have yet to feel the emotional intensity of a live performance from a CD, and I know I am not the only one! The information is the same, the artist the same, the CD even has the benefit of seamless editing, but it

inevitably falls short of the live performance, and its social context. The mavens of the internet will try to create 'a social context' with varying degrees of success, but over an extended period, as education changes, it will more resemble things familiar than things unknown.

DECONSTRUCTION OF ACADEMIA

The internet through the separation of the economics of information from the economics of things, is a major force of deconstruction. A deconstructed industry is one where productive activities become discrete rather than integrated and the overall profitability from the individual activities is higher than the profitability from their integrated progenitor. The major tool of deconstruction is a decrease in transaction costs, between elements of the value chain. As the transaction costs of distributing, producing and administering education fall, an existing educational institution is subject to increasing deconstruction. Educational deconstruction is amplified by the uncoupling of the trade-off between richness and reach. If we ignore this 'uncoupling' we become more susceptible to radical deconstruction and less able to plan a positive deconstruction.

A user defines the 'richness of information' with its quality — very useful information has a high level of richness. Reach is defined as the number of people who share or exchange information. Class size, total enrollment or the demographic and geographic dispersion of our student body are measures of reach. In the traditional educational economy, access to education faced a trade-off — the greater the reach of educational information, the less its richness. This inverse relationship was maintained by economics, limitations of technology and physical con-

straints. Internet technology reduces transaction costs and enables educational practitioners to provide formerly impossible levels of richness to a large number of consumers.

Technothusiasts see the internet as a river of information flowing into the waiting mind of a student and once 'overflowed' with this river the student becomes educated!

The increase in reach is more obvious than the increase in richness. A review of the varied activities that learners can engage in while online argues strongly for increased richness. A learner can visit the Federal Reserve website, obtain Alan Greenspan's latest speech and access an array of supporting research materials. They can find newspaper articles and reviews of the speech and converse with fellow learners about it. They can use online testing, have instant feedback and marking, obtain case studies and find expert analysis. All at the click of a mouse! A potential overlap between web and distance learning and traditional learning — two activities most institutions keep as separate entities — emerges with the new technology.

As web and distance learning increases the richness of its offerings and the rest of the college expands its ability to reach more students through internet mediated learning, an area of ambiguity and tension emerges. Traditional practitioners become distance education providers and distance education providers reach new levels of richness in their offerings surpassing the traditional professor. The distinction between distant and traditional education blurs. A naïve answer to this tension would be to direct distance-teaching units to concentrate primarily on expanding reach, while the balance of a college would focus

on using the internet to increase the richness of its offerings. A bipolar mutually exclusive solution of this type would stifle creativity throughout the college. Rather than trying to segregate technological innovation we should strive to integrate it into our institutions, providing richer material to more students in more diverse ways. A result of an integrated approach would be greater attention to 'social context' as this is what the traditional professor does best.

Failure to move resolutely forward into electronically integrated education leaves us susceptible to radical deconstruction. Factors making an organization susceptible to deconstruction include an intellectually skilled workforce, information intensive processes, high fixed costs and uneven profitability from value chain components. By any reasonable assessment, higher education gains an A+ on the susceptibility rating scale.

Radical deconstruction creates a downward spiral of enrollment and revenue. The first areas to be drawn into electronic delivery would be those where learning is least dependent on the social context of instruction — namely studies in accounting, mathematics, business and economics. MBA programs present a rich ground for student prospecting and appear to be the area of greatest competition between electronic and traditional educators. As students are lured away from a traditional institution, its revenues decline, but its costs remain fixed — a financial legacy of bricks, mortar and tenure — the result of which is a financial crisis! The deteriorating financial situation affects the ability of the institution to complete its mandate. This reduction in service further results in more student defections and further deterioration of services,

a vicious circle that ends with the demise of an organization. There are few barricades against this onslaught — the social context of education is one and accreditation is another.

A planned deconstruction can be used to manage change while retaining much of the social context of education. A future of multiple educational modes is possible. Seminars can still be given in the traditional classroom as well as online — online and offline can co-exist and complement each other. All learning styles could be accommodated. Outwardly, this world resembles the world we inhabit today. At the termination of her studies, the student's accumulated knowledge would be recognized with an accredited degree. The market place would continue to evaluate degrees. Yet, in a critical sense this world would be different from the one we know. In one possible future, education is accomplished by three distinct bodies, which although having a high level of communication and coordination, are separate entities and are self-organizing.

Degree Granting Bodies (DGBs) could exist. These institutions would work with students to plan their learning, verify that the learning occurred, and validate that learning by the granting of a degree. These DGBs would be composed of advisors who work with students and evaluators to ensure that genuine learning, as planned, transpires. The modes of planned learning can be mixed or homogenous, and electronic or traditional. Federal funding could sustain this portion of the educational matrix. Facilities (strictly the bricks and mortar portion of education) could become entities in and of themselves. Some of these buildings already exist — libraries, high schools that are

Continued on page 10.

empty at night and for several months a year, community centers with meeting rooms and such. Conceivably, counties and states could undertake and operate purpose-built educational centers with laboratory facilities, as both educational and economic development tools. Counties and states could fund these bricks and mortar facilities. Faculty would be associated with facilities and DGBs and provide offerings at facilities, work online as independent contractors, or as part of a traditional or electronic institute. Students would mix and match their academic program and pay tuition accordingly.

Mentors and professors could come full circle back to the 1700's where they are paid directly by their students. Students would weigh the value of the credit against the cost of the instructor! Professors could choose to return to the guild system. Union organizations may provide standards of guild admission and cover insurance and other benefit programs through dues and commissions.

The future, as its wont, remains uncertain but nevertheless imminent. At present, we still have options to influence that future. We can choose to exercise those options — we can be victims or we can be leaders.

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