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PANEL DISCUSSION ON USING THE INTERNET FOR COURSES

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ABSTRACT

The proposed panel would like to discuss the use of the Internet in the classroom for enhancing teaching and learning as well as its use in academia for administrative and research purposes. The Internet has not only revolutionized the computing industry, its wide reach has now extended to having an effect on all facets of life. Businesses, government and society itself has been deeply impacted by this technology. Higher education is right in the middle of the fray and methods of delivering college courses will change drastically in the near future.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

The business world has been transformed with the advent of the internet and intra-company intranets. Most functional areas are being affected by the internet. Business have been forced to examine their strategies and operations in light of the new capabilities offered by the internet. The capability of conducting business transactions on the Internet has resulted in the explosion of electronic commerce. Issues pertaining to e-commerce including Internet strategies, marketing on-line, advertising, purchasing, invoicing, payment systems etc. are now important elements of knowledge which a business student needs to have. This necessitates a change or addition in the content that needs to be imparted to business students. Several schools have therefore introduced new courses on business on the net, e-commerce, knowledge navigating etc.

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

Infusion of technology into the classroom is occurring at a lightning-like pace. Instructional pedagogy has moved away from an objectivist learning theory which proclaims the instructor as the "sage on the stage" where the student adopts a passive role in the learning process. Instead, active learning and experiential learning approaches cast

the instructor as a "guide on the side" in the role of coach. The internet is one resource that promotes active learning by providing the learner multiple sources of knowledge, multiple modes of accessing the knowledge, and branching which allows the students to learn at a pace and a manner suited to their own learning styles.

METHODS OF DELIVERY

Delivery of information in a traditional classroom setting is no longer the norm. Instructors are providing everything on-line including syllabi, class notes, class schedules, and "real time" course information. Students have the convenience of browsing this material at their leisure at a time of their choosing. The proliferation of these systems is currently being impeded only by the lack of standards. Holding electronic office hours via internet-based video-conferencing is only a couple of years down the road. Members of the panel are currently using the internet to:

- have students turn in homework, class projects, term papers etc.
- grade and return these assignments to the student
- conduct on-line tutorials and sample exams with instant feedback.
- conduct regular exams on-line
- conduct audio conferencing and video conferencing
- have students conduct research projects based entirely on data from the internet
- encourage and train students to use search engines on the WWW to conduct job searches and career planning exercises
- use the WWW, with appropriate Universal Resource Locators (URLs), to search for information relevant to course topics
- use interest lists to shadow professionals and practitioners
- instigate collaboration among students at different institutions

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- set up virtual universities for students to hold real-time competition, such as games and simulations, with groups of students from another university
- have students build web pages on class projects

Administering entire courses on line is now a matter of time. Packages such as WebCt (developed by the University of British Columbia), Webucator (SGI) etc. are facilitating creating, maintaining and monitoring of on-line classes. Features of such packages address most aspects administering a course including registering, providing instructional material, grading etc. The possibility of thus having classes which are almost completely mediating by computers and the internet impacts the current traditional model of academia. We discuss this next.

CONCLUSION

As seen from the discussion above, the Internet and its most popular resource, the World Wide Web, have opened up new possibilities. It has affected the world of business and created a whole new area of e-commerce. It has affected traditional campus-bound universities which are now seeking to diversify their programs and their mode of delivery. It has even affected societal interaction which is beyond the scope of discussion of this panel.