



Experts in improving learning and
reducing cost in higher education.

The Learning MarketSpace, February 1, 2000

Written monthly by Bob Heterick and Carol Twigg, *The Learning MarketSpace* provides leading-edge assessment of and future-oriented thinking about issues and developments concerning the nexus of higher education and information technology.

MERGER MANIA

We have commented before on mergers and consolidation in the information industry. The latest and biggest, the proposed merger of AOL and Time/Warner, got us to musing—musing not only about what it might mean to the information industry in general but also what implications it might have for higher education in particular. (It is interesting to reflect that the combined market valuation of these two behemoths is the same order of magnitude as our country's total annual expenditure on institutions of higher education.)

Market analysts were at first excited, then cautious about the prospects of this merger. Upstart marketplaces AOL was buying established, marketplace Time/Warner. If you recall from our inaugural issue (certainly at my age that's not likely for me) we said, "Every business and organization today operates in two worlds: a physical world of resources that we can see and touch and a virtual world of information. Jeffrey Rayport and John Sviokla from the Harvard Business School have coined the term marketplaces to distinguish this new information world from the physical world of the marketplace."

Both parties to the merger seemed to be saying that there was a synergistic, even symbiotic, relationship between marketplaces and marketplace. Analysts, on the other hand, weren't so sure. Some suggested that Time/Warner's inability to establish a foothold in cyberspace—the marketplace—was their *raison d'être* for merger. Most commentators seemed to agree that the symbiotic factor was real in general, even if not for this particular merger.

The "marriage" would combine the marketplace presence of AOL with the marketplace clout of Time/Warner. It is difficult to deny either the strength of AOL as a cyberspace portal or the extraordinary content and content-development assets of Time/Warner. And, if vertical integration is to be the watchword of cyberspace, then this is a marriage made in heaven.

Those who have worried about the creation of virtual universities should find solace in the prospect of synergy emanating from the combination of place and space. But while exorcising that demon, it should give pause when we consider how most of our "place" institutions have treated the "space" of distance learning. Most institutions still operate a separate and distinct entity for distance learning. It is not a part of the place-based academic structure. The distance learning, or continuing education, division of most institutions doesn't have full-time teaching faculty but rather relies upon not-always-successful strategies to entice regular academic faculty to participate. Those programs that do have full-time faculty participating generally find that they are viewed as second-class citizens in the academic structure of the institution. One would have to question whether such institutions have succeeded in marrying place and space or are even interested in doing so.

The merger of content and portal is another idea that would seem to hold a number of lessons for higher education. Much like Time/Warner, our place-based institutions have developed real skill in developing content to be delivered in the place-based world. American higher education is generally the envy of the world and rightly so. Like Time/Warner, our institutions of higher education have generally been unsuccessful in translating this place-based skill to the marketplace. Much of what passes for distance education simply moves the lecture into cyberspace carrying with it all the deficiencies of lecture-based learning.

Certainly, companies such as Blackboard, eduprise.com, and WebCT think they can contribute significantly to "cyberizing" the place-based portal provided by our traditional institutions of higher learning. As with AOL, these companies bring internet-based skills to a marriage. Unfortunately, most of their customers are still laboring under the Gutenberg Fallacy—trying to make the new look like the old. Continuing to try to maintain 20- or 15-1 student-faculty ratios in cyber classes is guaranteed to put a lot of strain on the marriage.

Analysts have also raised the issues of culture and size in regard to the AOL-Time/Warner merger. Optimal corporate size is generally conceded to be quite different for place and space-based organizations. Marketplaces companies generally rely upon a few radical, if not eccentric, thinkers to break from the current paradigm and produce new and sometimes heretical ideas. These ideas are usually brought to the marketplace by small teams of committed ideologues. We have commented before that successful net-based products seem to thrive in smaller organizations or in the "skunk-works" of larger because these seem to be environments that encourage and reward paradigm-busting entrepreneurship. Size is similarly a problem for

organizations attempting to enter new lines of business.

Size brings with it the culture of bureaucracy. Cultural differences have sunk many a merger and will sink many more in the future. Very few organizations relish the thought that they need to cannibalize their existing product lines to help prepare the products that future customers desire. Trying to do anything new continually runs afoul of established procedures and the plethora of checks and balances that have been put in place for the traditional business line. All the bureaucracy of the current institution has been established to deal with the current (some would say past) mode of doing business. The culture of the old is as incompatible with the new as is the physics of Einstein with that of Aristotle.

The principal lesson that higher education institutions can draw from the flurry of consolidation taking place in the information industry is the necessity to have a vision of the future and the role that they intend to play in that future. To do that requires them to understand both the value of reaching non-resident learners and how much of a role it will play in their future. Most institutions continue to operate as though the future is a simple extrapolation of the present, which probably explains why they view their distance learning activities as out of the mainstream.

For good or bad, successful or not, the AOL/Time Warner merger speaks volumes about the leadership of the two companies involved and their commitment to establishing new roles for themselves in a radically transforming information economy. That, more than any one specific, ought to be the lesson for higher education.

—RCH

WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

Have you noticed how much of today's discussion about distance (or online) learning seems to revolve around the question, where do we draw the line?

We're reminded of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' characterization of the process of grief as a series of stages through which the dying and those close to them ordinarily pass. The first stage, usually at the point of initial disclosure, is denial. The reality of the disclosure is too shocking to admit and disbelief is the most immediate defense. The second stage, when denial is no longer an effective way of coping, is rage and anger by which the pain of loss is projected onto others. The third stage, bargaining, represents a last effort at overcoming death by "earning" longer life. The fourth stage, depression, follows when the full impact of imminent death strikes. Kübler-Ross calls the fifth stage, acceptance, when the grieving come to grips with the fact of death. Those in the process may go back and forth, skip about or have periods where the stages seem to overlap, all according to their particular needs.

The process popularized by Kübler-Ross has been applied to various kinds of situations involving loss. For many in higher education especially those not directly engaged in the process, watching the move from face-to-face teaching to distance learning represents a deep-felt loss. As a consequence, the ongoing conversation about new forms of online learning has frequently been highly emotional. All of us who have participated in it have, at one time or another, experienced or witnessed feelings of denial and anger.

Considered in this context, the question of where to draw the line seems like a variation on the bargaining stage. We've moved beyond denial: the thousands of students successfully involved in online learning have pretty much convinced us that it's here to stay. While there are still plenty of people in higher education who are angry (an opening gambit of "it's people like you" is usually a dead giveaway), most forward-thinking academics pride themselves on being rational and are willing to discuss the issues surrounding distance learning calmly and objectively.

That's when the bargaining begins.

Here are some examples of what we mean. Version one says distance learning is suitable for adult students who require flexible arrangements in order to participate in higher education ("their" students) but not for young students ("our" students). There are many corollaries to this assertion such as the assumption that distance courses lack structure, which is okay for mature adults, whereas classroom teaching offers the structure so badly needed by our unfocused youth. The bargain: we will co-exist with distance learning as long as it is confined to other institutions (it's okay for Jones but not for State U) or to the continuing education branch of our own.

Version two declares that distance learning is okay for training but not for education. Of course, training means lots of different things to people in higher education. To many, it means any subject taught by a for-profit organization. (If the University of Phoenix teaches it, it must be training.) To others, it means any lower-level subject. Our favorite example occurred during a discussion of this topic when the president of a well-known institution conceded that online learning might be okay for training but not for education. When asked to give an example of what she meant by training, she replied, "Calculus." A third variation on this theme says it's okay for introductory-level courses but not for advanced courses. The bargain: we will co-exist with distance learning as long as it is confined to other courses (not ours).

Of course, these distinctions among intended audience, level and subject matter tend to get a bit confusing. Now let me get this straight . . . It's okay to do advanced courses in philosophy online as long as the students are over thirty? Or is it that introductory courses for traditional-age students are fine as long as we don't make a

profit?

As in all things academic, the last bastion of defense (resistance?) is the liberal arts. Somehow, in this debate, the liberal arts connote shaping young minds, advanced cognitive skills, eyeball-to-eyeball interaction, deep thinking--all rolled into one. None of these activities, the bargainers assert, is possible online. They'll even concede that advanced-level professional studies can be studied at a distance. (After all, engineers will put up with anything!) But when that line gets drawn, the liberal arts are assumed to be safely on one side of it.

When SUNY Empire State College began using computer-conferencing to offer courses in 1986, its first course was an advanced study in American foreign policy. It was quickly followed by courses in artificial intelligence, feminist theories of writing, constitutional law, and ethics. The descendant of those early conference-based courses, the [SUNY Learning Network](#) has offered hundreds of courses online from most of SUNY's sixty-four campuses. Yes, there are professional courses in business and computing, but there are also courses in History of Economic Thought, Developmental Psychology, Children's Literature, The Eastern Religious Tradition, The Learning Organization, Women's and Family History in America, Death and Dying, Pluralism and Diversity in America and, even the Films of Woody Allen.

Since its founding in 1919, The New School for Social Research has been Dedicated to identifying and illuminating the larger social and political issues of our time. The first university-level courses in Black culture, the history of film and women's studies were taught there. In 1994, The New School created its [DIAL](#) (Distance Learning for Adult Learning) program designed to offer people the opportunity to take New School courses at their own convenience via the Web. More than 300 courses have been offered online each year in humanities (The Gothic Novel, William Blake, The American Autobiography, African American Women Writers, Zen Theory and Practice); the social sciences (The New Feminism, American Exceptionalism, The 1950's, Multiculturalism, American Indian Spirituality, Psychology and Maternity, Writing Therapy); and others in media studies, natural sciences, foreign languages, music appreciation, theatre arts, and so on. The SUNY Learning Network and The New School are illustrative of the thousands of online courses being offered in the liberal arts at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the country. These courses are characterized by intense interaction and communication as talented and dedicated faculty guide students through the classic processes that characterize liberal education. The University of Phoenix, which limits online course enrollment to a maximum of thirteen students, describes this process on its Web site as follows: "Students are discussing issues, sharing ideas, testing theories—essentially enjoying all of the advantages of an on-campus program, with one exception. No commute!"

Like the bargainers, those in higher education involved in online education care deeply about teaching and their students. They value liberal arts education as well as professional preparation for the same reasons as their residential colleagues do: to encourage students to challenge assumptions, to imagine and to strive for a better future. What online educators have learned, however, is that neither a campus nor a classroom is required to achieve this goal.

Where do we draw the line? It remains to be seen.

—CAT

UPCOMING LEADERSHIP FORUM EVENTS

NEW LEARNING STRATEGIES

February 29, 2000

Renaissance Charlotte Suites, Charlotte, North Carolina

Co-sponsored by the Executive Forum in Information Technology of Virginia Tech

Computer and communications technologies have created new expectations for both improving the quality and controlling the cost of learning. This seminar will present examples of technology- enhanced learning environments that have achieved both goals. The seminar format is designed to provide time for a significant amount of audience interaction.

Join discussions on RPI's "studio model," Virginia Tech's Math Emporium, lessons from the Pew Grant Program in Course Redesign, and more.

Topics and speakers include:

- * Technology Implications for the Future of Higher Education - Robert C. Heterick, Jr., Executive Forum
- * Lessons from The Pew Grant Program in Course Redesign - Carol A. Twigg, Center for Academic Transformation
- * The Math Emporium - Bob Olin, Virginia Tech
- * The Studio Model - Jack Wilson, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- * Cost Savings through Course Redesign - Linda Thor, Rio Salado College
- * Outsourcing - Bill Graves, eduprise.com

If you are involved in decisions regarding the design or development of new learning strategies, you can't afford to miss this workshop!

***** HOLD THE DATE! *****

THE LEARNING MARKETPLACE: NEW RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

April 18, 2000, San Diego, California

June 15, 2000, Chicago, Illinois

Moderators: Bob Heterick and Carol Twigg

An increasing number of companies are entering the higher education market, offering a growing variety of commercial products and services to support network-based teaching and learning. At this workshop, the leading providers of such products and services will participate in a moderated discussion. If you are involved in decisions regarding expenditure of funds for teaching/learning services and products, you can't afford to miss this workshop!

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