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HOW WILL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY EVOLVE AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE?

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Media Technology (MT) has the potential to become the most important and pervasive professional and academic discipline of the 21st century. Predecessors of MT (the commercial digital media: publishing-radio-TV-movies, information technology, electronic commerce) are already significant employers in the national and global economies. Information technology and related areas are significant players, as well.

Media Technology, an emerging field that represents the dramatic maturation of computer multimedia, is a new, multidisciplinary field that marries the knowledge, expertise, resources, and creativity of diverse, established, fertile artistic disciplines with dynamic new technological disciplines through rapidly-evolving technologies. This marriage is already occurring in the entertainment industries with special effects in motion pictures, games, simulations, and experimental interfaces and is now rapidly infusing into the mainstream commercial media. It is evolving in the business environment from the simple paradigm of the web page and its application in electronic commerce into what will be a full synthesis of information technology and interaction, made possible by infinite approaches to presenting and exchanging information visually, aurally--and eventually in combination with all of the senses. It is only the beginning, but MT is beginning to change business, education, and even life as we currently know them.

MT is deeply rooted in the arts, information systems, communication, but also in the computer and human sciences. It is as eclectic and pervasive as Information Technology (IT), simply because it is an expansion of IT into the sensory world. Now, it spans the fields of Arts Technology, Music Technology, Communications Technology, Information Systems, and Computer Science. Soon, MT will completely integrate with IT to permeate all disciplines, businesses, communities, environments, and educational venues. The diverse areas of MT will enrich the university environment as it enables the cross-pollination of new ideas from faculty and students. Programs in MT can and will be based in any or all of these areas, as students and researchers emphasize one or more areas of the integrated whole.

What, then, will be the role of the MT and its relationship to IT and media programs in this new millennium? How can we enhance the university as a fertile environment for thought and innovation? Can we provide a nexus across the university? Can we create a new breed of multi-disciplined faculty and graduates? In response to these questions, some universities have introduced a variety of new academic architectures by affiliating, combining, or overlapping diverse programs.

This panel will discuss the role of MT programs, the creation of MT programs by combining specialized traditional and new disciplines within the university environment, anticipating and meeting the demand for graduates in MT, and other issues. Each member will describe their involvement in MT and MT-related programs that are being developed at his/her own university and explain the motivating forces behind the change. Then, the panel discussion will center on two main issues

The first issue is: how will universities anticipate the demand for MT in the industry environment? How will the future platforms and uses of technology evolve—not just in industry, but in education, entertainment, and the home.

The second issue is: for university programs that focus on Media Technology, what kinds of synergies are appropriate and meaningful today? What are effective strategies for creating synergies? What programs complement each other? What problems are likely and how can they be overcome?

The third issue is: how do faculty, students, and industry solve the problems that result from restructuring university programs and disciplines? Will programs and disciplines lose their identities? If the boundaries of standard disciplines become unclear, how will students select degree programs and how will their future employers recognize employees across many universities and many programs? What are the impacts on faculty and their research?