



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Using Media to Deliver the Message*

Distance learning instruction is routinely delivered via Internet, cable TV, multi-media, CD-ROM, fiber optics, loaned audio cassettes, and ITFS, to name but a few methods. Speculation about future delivery mechanisms sounds like science fiction. We are witnessing a revolution in teaching and learning.

Yet when we look beyond the curriculum, when we examine the ways in which we communicate with our staff and students on a daily basis, we often are decidedly low-tech. We are still comfortable with writing a memo, printing and mailing a class schedule, sticking a post-it note on a flier, or calling a meeting. We readily associate innovation and technology with instruction but manage our own administrative affairs in a more conventional fashion.

If we have the technology to make instruction more exciting and meaningful, should we not use the same technology to make our professional development activities and daily communication tasks easier and more enjoyable? Many colleges do, and we offer some examples here.

### **Communicating with Adjunct or Part-Time Faculty**

There are more than 200,000 adjuncts nationwide. Almost two-thirds of all community college classes are taught by adjuncts, representing 30% of all credit instruction and nearly 100% of non-credit classes. In California, we often call them "freeway fliers," educators who teach part-time at one or more community colleges, often logging 100+ miles a day to teach classes at several locations for different employers.

Often (and unfortunately) they are hired at the last minute; given a syllabus and a cursory orientation to the college, division, or department; and told not to worry. Professionals such as lawyers, accountants, and managers, brought on board to teach because of their discipline expertise, can only shake their heads when given such poor preparation for their first teaching assignment. When this situation occurs, college statements about educational excellence, caring attitudes, and valuing staff contributions are hollow and self-serving.

Nor should we become smug just because we have developed a thick adjunct faculty manual. It will

probably be reviewed in haste by the harried adjunct, who gets no better sense of his new job or employer. Burying the adjunct in a mound of policies and procedures will not cause learning to take place in either teacher or student.

One innovative attempt to reach and orient this often underserved but vital contributor to our educational efforts is a recent video package from St. Petersburg Junior College, entitled "Excellence in Adjunct Instruction." The program offers three video components on teaching in a community college, preparing for successful teaching and learning, and responding to diversity. Augmenting the videos are printed guides for both the prospective adjunct and the institution.

The videos touch all the important points without making them location-specific, thus allowing individual colleges to fine-tune their orientation activities around the St. Petersburg tapes. Issues such as ADA legislation, ethics, sexual harassment, standards of professional conduct, college support services, and ethnic and cultural diversity are handled in a professional manner. The real-life situations and scenarios allow the viewer to relate immediately to the issue at hand, and the printed adjunct guide augments the visual presentation in an effective way.

Many college orientation programs for adjuncts decentralize the process, making it a departmental challenge (or problem). Incorporating this video package into the local orientation process ensures that each adjunct will undergo a uniform experience, and the burden of repeating materials each time a new adjunct is hired is greatly reduced.

### **Developing Faculty and Staff**

In a recent keynote address before the annual conference of the Association of California Community College Administrators, President Steve Mittelstet used examples of videos produced at Richland College (Texas) to illustrate their approach and commitment to staff development. The excerpts were informative and humorous, and they gave the impression that the college was a caring and fun place to be.

In one videotaped sequence, administrators partici-



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pated in a demonstration of how campus e-mail worked. Slowly but surely, they mastered the nuances of logging in, sending messages, and replying to others. By the end of the sequence, they agreed that this was an efficient and effective way to communicate. But as the camera panned back in the final shot, while the administrators were agreeing that it was a good exchange of electronic information, they were revealed to be in the same room—all the computers were located on one table.

This use of television as an orientation tool did more than address policies, procedures, or how to "do it." It gave the viewer a sense of the culture of the organization, how employees felt about working there, and how they did not take themselves too seriously.

### **Reaching Out to Students and Staff**

When Maricopa Community College District implemented interactive television for distance learning, a coordinating committee was created to schedule use of the system among the colleges. To reduce travel time, the committee meets electronically on the very network it manages. The Maricopa Electronic Forum is a computer-based, asynchronous bulletin board open to students and staff. Recently, students throughout the district electronically debated the pros and cons of an upcoming bond election. Phi Theta Kappa chapters at the various campus locations communicate on-line. Currently there are 80,000 accounts throughout the district, all linked to Internet.

At Palomar College, technology is used to communicate with students on the PASS (Palomar Automated Self Service) system. At various locations throughout the district, students can swipe a Personal Identification Card through a card reader to gain information about the college, student activities and services, the current semester schedule, their prior academic history, and information on eligibility for grants and financial aid. Interactive laser disk technology, combined with main-frame access, has eased the burden of front-line student services personnel who formerly performed these tasks.

Palomar's Educational Television Department also produces documentaries and "infomercials" for academic departments and services offered to the community. These electronic brochures serve as broadcast "commercials" for our academic programs and are used with traveling VCR's in outreach efforts in malls, shopping centers, and community locations. Local municipal governments and school districts also have availed themselves of the college's TV production capabilities.

### **Summary**

We have become a nation of television watchers. Declining newspaper circulation rates prove it. If TV is the way in which we absorb information, then using video as an instructional delivery mechanism, as a communication tool for our professional and staff development activities, and as a tool for administrative transactions and student information access, makes good sense.

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