The "Sage on the Stage"—A New Design
By Lance Query, Dean

A centuries-old institution is at a crossroads. Our most important resources, our faculty, our "sages" have not brought about the predicted transformation of higher education by the application of instructional or educational technology. Despite a decade of experimentation, with innovative and exciting results in certain areas, colleges and universities have failed to take advantage of a communication technology that is powerful and provocative. By using the technology of contemporary instructional design, the culture of the classroom and the relationship between students and the teacher can produce greater individualization of instruction, can support collaborative learning, and can provide effective distance education. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that most colleges and universities have not fundamentally changed their curricula, or instructional priorities, or, indeed, the historical structures of the institution itself to respond to educational needs of the students who currently attend classes. We have failed to meet the needs of the majority of our students whose characteristics match the model of the non-traditional student and who find that the traditional classroom-based approach to instruction is neither educational nor acceptable.

Ironically, the major institutions of post-secondary education are the very ones which have managed to overlook the economic and demographic realities that exist. A few, the Harvards of the world, will survive regardless of these factors, because there will always be a market for their elitist and old-fashioned modes of education. On the other hand, most academic institutions, of which Western Michigan University is one, ignore contemporary warnings and face a growing challenge of serving more individuals with less money. A major competitor, the community college, is clearly focusing on teaching and cost effectiveness. These colleges, along with some rapidly evolving private firms, are leaders in innovative applications of instructional technology. Equally responsive to the times, the private sector is offering a highly viable alternative to the long monopoly that colleges and universities have held. For example, Jostens Learning Corporation now has 700 highly skilled and credentialed content specialists and instructional designers writing curricula that represent an entire range of general education skills from elementary to post-secondary education. Before long, it will be feasible to provide these curricula directly to consumers, bypassing colleges and universities. Another organization, Communication Curriculum Corporation, which began as an entrepreneurial enterprise of Stanford University, is now part of Paramount Communications and stands ready to deliver education directly to the mass market. The venerable sage on his or her stage is no competition for what is offered by either the community colleges or the private sector. It's time for a new design that will incorporate all of the available technology in its new instructional delivery systems—in fact, the stage needs replacement with the virtual reality of a learning environment that can reach throughout the world as we know it today.

In its broadest configuration, current educational technology is not simply computers and video discs, but an instructional design that extends the technology of machines. Such technology enhances the presentation of content and stimulates the information-processing capabilities of every student—regardless of his or her learning behavior. Moreover, instructors learn alongside their students with an effective integration of an automated, mediated expert, an interactive, realistic, complementary, and context-based computerized application. Needless to say, our "sages" are not necessarily comfortable with this brave new world. Faculty need expert support and the right equipment. In the beginning, a considerable investment of time and resources is essential. A new division of the University Libraries, Instructional Technology, is now available to offer support to faculty in the development and implementation of selective phases of classroom technological design. In addition, the University Libraries offer the latest forms of visual and verbal information with computer, CD-ROM, online, and print resources that enable students to access information on specific topics rapidly. Other units in the University, including the University Computing Services, also are standing ready to assist in responding to equipment, training, and classroom/laboratory needs. Moreover, for those who dare to walk from the circumscribed and old-fashioned stage with the lecturer's podium to the world of technical instructional enhancement, there must be recognition and continued advocacy. These are the faculty who have seen the future of effective instruction and know that future is here and now; it is their future as well as the future of our colleges and universities.

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lower level of Waldo and reference materials in the same range are included in the general science reference collection also located on the lower level. (2) Two science reference librarians, Michael Buckner and Linda Rolls, have assumed service responsibilities to students and faculty in the areas previously handled by the Physical Sciences Library staff including bibliographic instruction, database searching, faculty presentations, etc. (3) The general periodical collection, classified in the "A" category is found on the first floor; selected titles have volumes prior to 1970 placed in storage with retrieval possible through a special request. (4) A periodical/microform service desk has been added to the science reference area to handle the particular demands of the patrons for these resources.

Alphonse Karr, writing in 1849, said "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" ("The more things change, the more they are the same.") Such is not true when speaking of many things; the integration of an entire library collection within another collection does make a difference. However, the transfer of the Physical Sciences collection and services to Waldo has been a positive experience that is expected to expand services to previous patrons and to increase use of the entire library system. Or, as Edmund Burke has said, "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." (Reflections on the Revolution...1790).

L.R.

God forbid that any book should be banned. The practice is as indefensible as infanticide.

Rebecca West