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LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY, C. W. POST CAMPUS

JOAN DIGBY

At this point I think it is quite fair to say that technology is simply the machinery of our daily lives, in honors programs as in every other sphere of activity. For that reason the impact of technology on honors in particular is extremely difficult to assess. Of course, we keep our records on computers, contact students through e-mail and listservs, and utilize media of all kinds.

For a while—a short while—I attempted to use WebCT to keep track of my class assignments and generate threaded discussions with my students. In the end I simply quit because the tedium of setting up all the records and inventing reasons to continue class on a twenty-four hour basis wore me out. I could never find that threaded discussions were any more useful than our class discussions. They were certainly not any deeper, and they chewed up too much time.

Both my time and student time could be much better spent going deeper into texts. Oddly enough, I have found the Internet particularly useful in that regard. I can expand reading lists at no additional book costs by assigning works that are on line. Some works are linked to a vast network of web sites that lead the students on great adventures into culture, geography, philosophy, bibliography, etc. It is not easy to make freshmen feel right at home in the world of Ishtar and Gilgamesh. But finding ancient Mesopotamian artifacts, examples of cuneiform tablets, and virtual trips around Uruk on line makes the text tangible and real. (All too tangible when they happen on Uruk, the exotic dancer!) You would think that students living 25 miles from the Metropolitan Museum would want to visit the Near East Collection and see artifacts at first hand. But the truth is that they love these Internet searches and feel more like archeologists handing in their own treasure "finds." That suits me fine because I am able to teach them how to cite and use Internet materials, and so the process of doing a certain kind of basic research moves forward. Getting first-year students to do some intellectual "travel" on line also seems to generate some interest in actually going places, which I hope will pay off when I start to talk to them about study abroad later on.

In some departments the use of technology has been transforming. The evolution of Computer Graphics has given my Art majors a positive focus on professional careers that was not common among Fine Arts majors in the past. Traditional Art majors tended to shy away from business or regard it with contempt. Now students well-trained both in Fine Arts and Computer Graphics are doing honors thesis work in graphic and product design, book illustration, and public relations that are both extremely original and pragmatic.

My honors program happens to be situated around the corner from Computer Graphics and other artistic technologies: the Computer Music Composition Laboratory and Television Studio. The attraction of these media fields is undeniable. They are among the most popular majors among honors students as well as among the rest of the undergraduate population.

In my own mind it is impossible to separate technology from learning in any age or culture. In thinking about what we mean by the "new" technologies our universities have invested in, we must face the truth that one important difference between pens and computers or slide shows and power point is cost. Technology drives up the cost of learning, the cost of tuition or of running an honors program. And that's before we consider all the broken and discarded machines that fill up our closets.

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