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Technology and the NCHC

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Technology and the NCHC

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As an acknowledged “techno-peasant” (as my wife calls both of us), it is more than a little surprising to be thought of as a “techno-guru” (Ada Long’s terminology) within NCHC. Still, I have been around long enough to participate in a number of the technological advances that have been made by our organization.

SATELLITE TELECONFERENCING AND THE SATELLITE SEMINAR

Satellite video teleconferencing marked one of NCHC’s earliest ventures into the use of technology. Thanks to Bill Monroe (University of Houston, five-year chair of the NCHC Portz Fund Committee) and his colleagues on the committee, I received a Portz Fund grant to help underwrite NCHC’s first venture into teleconferencing. Anne Ponder, then NCHC President, and I hosted “The College Honors Program Opportunity” in 1989. Our goal was to increase awareness of the many opportunities available in college honors programs and to allay some of the fears about honors that often are based on incomplete or inaccurate information. Incorporating video clips from several NCHC institutions and a toll-free telephone number for interaction during the teleconference, we reached 274 sites (primarily high schools) in 41 states with this free broadcast.

In 1993 NCHC President Ron Link (Miami-Dade Community College) appointed a Teleconferencing and Distance Learning Technology Task Force that organized NCHC’s next effort with this technology. With NCHC Portz Fund grants assisting the honors programs at Southeast Missouri State University (Larry Clark) and Southwest Texas State University (Ronald Brown and Naymond Thomas), the “Innovations in Honors Programs” national video teleconference was broadcast in 1994. Receiving sites were arranged by 234 colleges, universities, and public school districts in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico for this teleconference that was jointly sponsored by the Great Plains Honors Council and the NCHC Task Force on Teleconferencing and Distance Learning Technology. Once again we included video clips from a number of NCHC institutions, and we featured a 1993 NCHC Portz Scholar (Susan Browning, Utah State University) in one of the “live” portions of the teleconference. Honors student video competition winners’ work also was included. We concluded the broadcast with an invitation from NCHC President-Elect Ada Long (University of Alabama at Birmingham) to the NCHC conference in San Antonio (a bit of “NCHC advertising”). In addition to the Portz Fund grants, funding was provided by NCHC, the Great Plains Honors Council, Southeast Missouri State

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University, and Oklahoma State University—an early example of a cooperative venture to produce a teleconference.

Oklahoma State University hosted the NCHC Summer Honors Forum (“Moving into the 21st Century”) in 1994, out of which came an issue of *Forum for Honors* (the predecessor of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*). The Summer Forum was attended by thirty-five participants eager to discover what the future might hold in terms of technology and honors. In addition to several presenters from Oklahoma State, sessions were presented by Elizabeth Anne Viau, California State University-Los Angeles (“Technology and Education: The Future is Now”); Bill Robinson, University of Nevada-Las Vegas (“Enhancing Honors Learning with Computers: From Novices to Network Surfers”); and John Splaine, University of Maryland-College Park (“Critical Viewing—Stimulant to Critical Thinking”). Splaine also presented information on the “C-SPAN in the Classroom” program that allows educators to use off-the-air videotapes of C-SPAN broadcasts as well as providing access to the extensive C-SPAN video archives. This Summer Forum allowed participants to explore ways in which technology could be used in honors programs, and it also gave an opportunity to brainstorm about the possibility of a “satellite seminar” as an NCHC event.

NCHC’s first Satellite Seminar, “Resolving Disputes in a Contentious World,” was broadcast in the 1995 fall semester. This NCHC project involved a total of twenty-seven colleges and universities that paid a subscription fee (to underwrite the production costs) and developed their own honors courses or other activities around the theme. E-mail communication among participants was encouraged, and once again live interaction with the on-camera presenters was provided via a toll-free telephone number. The Satellite Seminar was rated as a great success by the participants, and it was decided that NCHC should move ahead to make it an annual event.

Also in 1995 the Task Force became the Technology and Honors Committee (a standing committee), demonstrating NCHC’s willingness to embrace the use of technology in the honors experience. This committee currently is designated the Technology and Distance Learning Committee (chaired by Jon Schlenker, University of Maine at Augusta).

In 1996 NCHC was joined by Phi Theta Kappa (Billy Wilson) as a co-sponsor of the Satellite Seminar at the suggestion of Ann Dempsey (St. Louis Community College, Florissant Valley) who also was an on-camera presenter that year, and in 1997-1999 Celeste Campbell (Oklahoma State) took over from me as coordinator of NCHC’s Satellite Seminar efforts. There was a one-year “vacation” in 2000 when OSU determined that we could no longer handle the responsibility of coordinating the Satellite Seminar and no other institution came forward to take on the role. In 2001 NCHC and Phi Theta Kappa agreed on an arrangement by which Phi Theta Kappa would take over the management of the Satellite Seminar as a joint venture with NCHC. The Satellite Seminar has continued to be a success—with more than 200 participating institutions in the each of the last two years. By way of chronology, the topics covered by the Satellite Seminar have been:

1995 - Resolving Disputes in a Contentious World

1996 - The Arts: Landscape of Our Times

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1997 - Family: Myth, Metaphor, and Reality

1998 - The Pursuit of Happiness: Conflicting Visions and Values

1999 - The New Millennium: The Past as Prologue

2001 - Customs, Traditions, and Celebrations: The Human Drive for Community

2002 - The Dimensions and Directions of Health: Choices in the Maze

In addition to Billy Wilson, thanks go to Rod Risley, Mike Watson, Nell Ewing, and Jennifer Dockstader at the national headquarters of Phi Theta Kappa for their efforts that make the Satellite Seminar an ongoing venture.

One technological step that NCHC has not yet been able to take was suggested in the 1990 winter issue of *The National Honors Report*. A live satellite transmission of portions of our national conference to those who cannot attend in any given year could make it possible for almost all members of our organization to participate in at least a part of the largest undertaking of NCHC.

THE NCHC “ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARD” <LISTSERV>

Another technology employed by NCHC was the “electronic bulletin board,” or listserv, housed at George Washington University that was announced in the 1992 fall issue of *The National Honors Report* by David Grier (George Washington University), Bill Mech (then NCHC Executive Secretary/Treasurer and honors director at Boise State University), and David Mowry (State University of New York at Plattsburgh). Starting small at a time when not many honors directors had e-mail access, the list has grown to 539 members—and it has become an indispensable tool for communication among honors professionals. By way of additional institutional history, the 1993 fall issue of *The National Honors Report* contained a suggestion by Len Zane (University of Nevada-Las Vegas) that a directory of e-mail addresses be compiled, and the 1994 winter issue included a list of 19 e-mail addresses. The 1994 spring issue appears to have been the first to include an e-mail address along with an author’s name.

Recent examples of the utility of the listserv include queries and spirited responses on ways to compensate honors faculty and the impact of Advanced Placement and concurrent-enrollment college classes on honors programs and colleges. Rather than being isolated at our respective colleges and universities, we can obtain instant assistance from our colleagues across the nation when an honors issue arises. Interestingly enough, both “old timers” and relative novices in honors education post both questions and responses—to the benefit of all of their colleagues.

In addition to the posting of queries on specific topics, the listserv also is used for NCHC business. National conference program chairs solicit members’ opinions about the shape of the conference, volunteers for “Developing in Honors” workshop panels are sought each year, and information about conference events is provided. This issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is in part the result of Editor Ada Long’s use of the listserv to solicit brief descriptions about how technology is being used in honors education.

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If you do not already subscribe to the NCHC listserv, let me encourage you to do so. To subscribe to the honors listserv, send an e-mail message to <listserv@hermes.circ.gwu.edu>. The command to subscribe is: "SUB HONORS your name". Replace "your name" with your actual name. E-mail this command to <listserv@hermes.circ.gwu.edu>. You should receive a prompt e-mail response that includes instructions about posting items to the list and other list-related matters.

Let it appear that everything on the listserv is of a serious nature, I must confess to having once posted a message directing colleagues to <<http://perp.com/whale/>> to view the "infamous exploding whale" web site. (You have to see it to believe it.) Reference to this site (still in existence) brings me to discussion of the technology of the World Wide Web.

NCHC AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The advent of the World Wide Web provided another technological venue for NCHC. Susanna Finnell (NCHC conference program chair and then honors director at Texas A&M University) announced a web site for the upcoming San Francisco conference in the 1996 spring issue of *The National Honors Report*. In the same issue Chris Dent and Ed Gubar drew attention to the fact that the Indiana University Honors Division was hosting a web server with an NCHC home page.

Thanks to Gayle Barksdale at the NCHC Headquarters, then located at Radford University, the NCHC web site at <<http://www.nchchonors.org>> has expanded and improved over the intervening years. The 2003 version of the NCHC home page on the Web contains information about NCHC's mission statement and benefits of membership, rosters of NCHC committees, a calendar of events, national conference information (including on-line registrations for some conference events), a link to the Honors Semesters and another link to the Satellite Seminar, information about the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* and *The National Honors Report* (including a link to its archives at Tennessee Technological University (where Connie Hood is honors director), a link to the NCHC Student Concerns web site (created by Morgan Goot, State University of New York at Pottsdam), job listings in honors, and links to the web sites of member institutions and regional honors councils as well as links to major scholarships' web sites.

At the time I am writing this article the NCHC web page includes an announcement of the winners in the 2002 elections and address information for the new NCHC Headquarters at Iowa State University. There also is a link that allows members to purchase the third edition of *Peterson's Honors Programs and Colleges* edited by Joan Digby (Long Island University – C. W. Post Campus) and recognition of President Constantine Papadakis of Drexel University as the recipient of the second annual NCHC Presidential Leadership Award.

At the 1998 NCHC conference (also in Chicago) we employed for the first time a live computer connection to the World Wide Web as part of several sessions in which presenters demonstrated the use of computer technology in their honors programs and colleges. Numerous other sessions, before and since 1998, have used personal computers in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, the costs for computer

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equipment at conference hotels have become astronomical, and the desire for such equipment frequently exceeds the parameters of the conference budget. As more faculty and students become adept with computer technology, it would seem that this will continue to be a challenge for conference program chairs well into the future.

LOOKING AHEAD

Just as one may assume that Gutenberg's contemporaries did not completely anticipate the changes his printing innovations would bring to the world, it seems reasonable to speculate that we will continue to see exciting and unanticipated ways in which technology and honors can advance together. Honors faculty and administrators espouse the goal of helping their students prepare to be "lifelong learners" to adapt to an ever-changing world. To heed our own advice we must be willing to be the "learners" when it comes to new technologies and new applications of existing ones—lest we become this century's "academic dinosaurs" who cling to the old way of doing things until we become extinct. The challenge, of course, is to retain the crucial aspects of an honors education while embracing the technology available to us. As the articles and brief summaries of technology utilization in this issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* demonstrate, honors programs and colleges are making extensive use of technology to advance the honors endeavor. The 21st Century is upon us, and clearly many of our honors colleagues are willing to lead us into what promises to be an exciting millennium.

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