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TAKING JESUIT EDUCATION THE DISTANCE

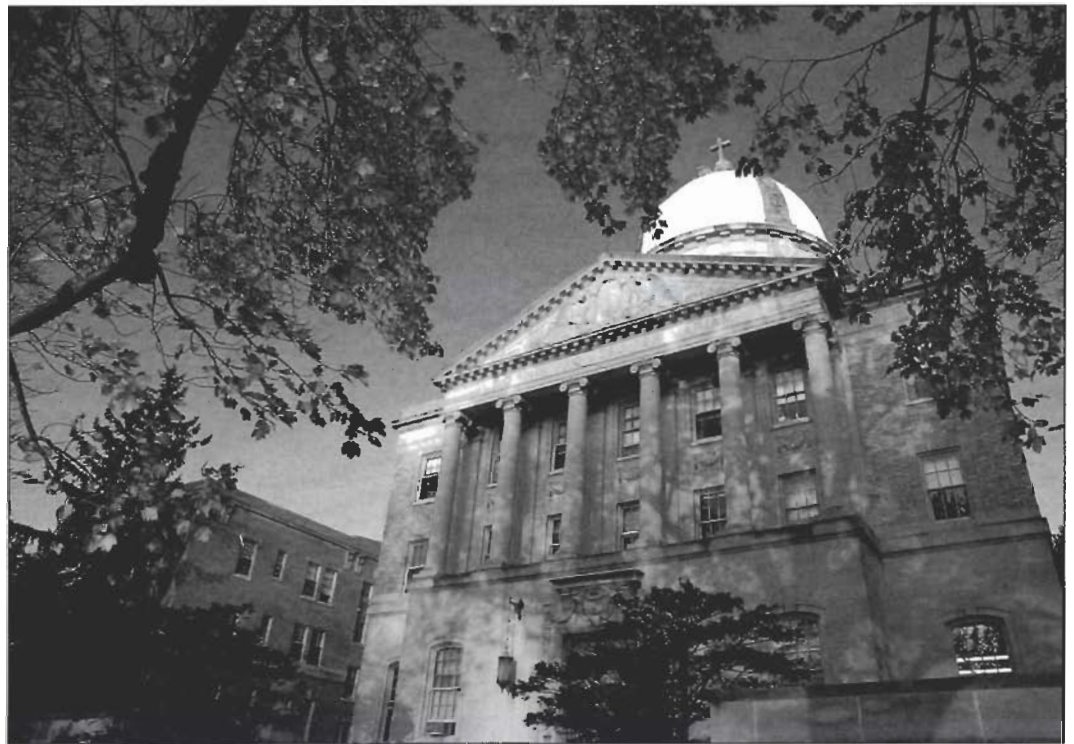
What's happening out there in ejutechnoland?

By Richard Vigilante

In the cities they come by bus or train, pushing against the continuous stream of homebound commuters. In the suburbs they come by car, driving into darkened parking lots in search of the precious spaces close to their building. Entering familiar classrooms, they settle into still-warm seats recently vacated by younger scholars. Acknowledging their classmates on either side, they look around the room and wonder what work, travel, or family problems necessitated the frequent empty seats. As the instructor speaks, they begin yet another two-hour session—taking hasty notes, straining to hear others' remarks, occasionally volunteering their own. And finally they end the evening with tired trips back to the lot, stop or station and an always too-long ride home.

They are the 51,000 part-time students who often repeat this experience each week in Jesuit colleges and universities. Eighty percent of these students are adults aged 25 and over, and sixty percent are women. These large numbers mask even more adults who would like to attend Jesuit institutions but cannot. Despite decades of higher education growth and change, adult learners continue to face many boundaries towards quality educational access—campus inaccessibility, child or elderly care, business travel, and physical disabilities.

This spring thousands of other students in many of the



Butler Hall, the signature building of Marymount College of Fordham University.

28 U.S. Jesuit Institutions have returned to class. But, unlike their 195,000 fellow students at Jesuit schools, they are not going to classrooms. Rather, they are receiving instruction, discussing issues, asking questions, and completing assignments over the Internet — all largely at their own convenience and from practically anywhere. Some of these online

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dent progress in the nation's colleges and universities. The credit-hour has defined both the extent of and the venue for teaching and learning (e.g., a three-credit course consisting of thirty hours of classroom-based instruction and sixty hours of out-of-classroom instruction). Recognition has been increasing, however, of the inherent problem with the credit-hour measure—that the number of hours spent on a course gives little indication of the real learning that might have occurred.

In its new report *Student Learning as Academic Currency*, the American Council on Education states that making student learning the basis of a new academic currency—moving from time-based to achievement-based descriptions of learning—will require identification of specific amounts of what students should know and be able to do (competencies) and specific ways to determine levels of student knowledge and achievement (assessments).

Many college-level courses are developed with the primary emphasis on creating instructional tasks or activities, without an explicit emphasis on assessment or a clear sense of learning goals. The flow of the CADE design approach from competencies to evidence to tasks, however, makes the assessment of student competency within instructional tasks an explicit requirement of course development. A Middle States Commission on Higher Education report on the project stated that CADE “could produce outcomes of a profoundly important nature to the growth of distance learning.”

Over 100 online courses and three degree programs are being developed using the CADE process. David Robinson, S.J., Director of Educational Mission and Spirituality of Learning at the University of San Francisco, is an active proponent and practitioner of online learning. Working with faculty members designing online courses through the CADE process, he offers the following observations:

Jesuit education has always maintained a constant focus on the realization of excellence in intellectual and academic pursuits, since well-formed thinkers can serve the greater good more creatively and effectively. “Doing good” also requires doing well in the training and transformation of the mind. A Jesuit classroom has always been typified by an emphasis on interaction, dialogic exploration, ethical focus, and excellent communication skills. These values are not suddenly to be put to the side because we migrate the classroom ‘venue’ online. They simply require different strategies for implementation and development. As with most human

enterprises, learning in an Ignatian context has succeeded best through the emulation of exemplars. Values must be modeled as well as discussed. Online geography does not remove that model for success. CADE can help to provide a framework for realizing the Ignatian intentions within our learning communities.

How might these Ignatian values be incorporated into online instruction? Prof. Michael Carey’s Organizational Leadership course is one of eight in Gonzaga University’s new online master’s degree that were created through the CADE design/production process. As students read course texts, absorb multimedia faculty presentations, and engage the ideas of leadership practitioners and theorists showcased in an innovative digital *Mentor Gallery*, they are continuously posting and answering questions from Prof. Carey and classmates. Each question builds upon the answers to the previous one to lead toward the transformation of the students—a key to their being fully actualized humans, whether the particular focus is spiritual, emotional, or intellectual. Through this process, Prof. Carey develops the internal skills of students as leaders, and makes them aware of their own and others’ motivations for creating dialogic organizations where all perspectives can be integrated.

Going Online for a New Generation

While online courses have historically focused on the part-time adult learner, full-time traditional age students are increasingly in cyber-attendance. Last summer, for example, Fairfield University offered thirty online, undergraduate courses in a broad range of liberal arts and science disciplines. While intended for adult students at Fairfield’s University College, 70 percent of enrollments — 280 students — were full-time Fairfield undergraduates. Many of these students ordinarily take and transfer summer courses from schools local to their homes. Both the students and faculty involved were enthusiastic about its success.

Thanks to these and many other innovative distance programs, Jesuit higher education today may truly be defined as “Learning without Boundaries”—learning that takes place *Here* (on campuses), *There* (study abroad programs) and *Everywhere* (online offerings).