

# THE UNIVERSITY CONCOURSE

*An Independent Journal of Opinion*

Volume III, Issue 2

October 28, 1997

## The merits and demerits of distance education: two views

### Editor's Note

*Thanks largely to new technologies, including the internet and satellite hook ups, the idea of "correspondence courses" has expanded into the concept of "distance education." It is no longer a question of simply giving credit for courses sent by mail, but rather of whether a person need go to college at all in order to receive a college education. It is a question currently before Franciscan University. How necessary is residence in Steubenville to an FUS education? Can modern technology provide an adequate substitute for campus life? Since this is a topic which touches so nearly on the nature of education, as well as on the mission of Franciscan University, the Concourse thought it would be good to initiate a campus-wide discussion of the pros and cons of distance education. We accordingly solicited articles from a known critic and a known advocate of DE to help us get the conversation off the ground. We welcome further written contributions for subsequent issues.*

### Doubts about distance education

by John F. Crosby

At the university's web site you can click on "distance education," where you learn that the university offers a few courses on audiotape and that you can get academic credit for them. You will also get some misinformation there, namely that Franciscan University degrees based entirely on audiotapes—no residency requirements—are "being established." The truth is

that the possibility of such degrees is being studied, and that some very serious issues have to be worked through before the University could responsibly offer them. I do not know whether I favor such degrees, but I have my doubts, and for the reasons that I will now lay out in the hope of contributing to an important discussion. It is a discussion that takes us back to the question, what does it mean to teach, what

*See Distance Doubts on page 7*

### At the threshold of a new missionary frontier: Franciscan University and distance learning

by Stephen Miletic

We stand at the threshold of a new phase of missionary activity in the Church and at this University. As the Church prepares for the twenty-first century, so to we at Franciscan University prepare for a new Evangelization.

Technology and the internet make it possible to fulfill our institutional mission of bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Offering Distance Learning\* degrees in theological studies represents an unprecedented opportunity for our University to touch of hundreds

*See New Frontier on page 10*

**INSIDE:** Continuing Conversations:  
More on Households ..... 2

## QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS



## Commendations

I would like to congratulate you on your wonderful journal. The *Concourse* is a breath of fresh air!

I have always held that the actualization of faith and spirituality in the life of a Christian demands constant self-reflection and fearless searching. Your journal highlights the fact that intellectual as well as spiritual evaluation is necessary to live our lives well. Thank you so much for your thought provoking articles and editorials.

Ruth Ann Stearns  
Senior, theology major

## About Households

I was happy to receive the latest issue of the *Concourse* in the mail recently. While attending Franciscan University of Steubenville, the *Concourse* was practically the only extra reading I allowed myself to have time for. I always found extremely insightful and truthful articles in your paper that dealt with many issues which were often overlooked or ignored by the majority of the student body and the administration.

I applaud you on your most recent article on households. I myself was part of a large household that almost fell apart because of it was trying to conform to Student Life standards. I considered dropping out when it became a regimen of commitments and formats which if not attended brought much resentment. At one point, it was causing so much stress to my academic, social and even my spiritual life that I wished I could have been counted among the proud who boasted of never succumbing to household charms. However belonging to a household was overall a beneficial experience, and I made friends I will treasure the rest of my life. Student Life might mean well, but unless it stops trying to make every household fit into its mold, it will be the end of individual household identity and healthy household simplicity.

Thank you and the *Concourse* staff for your sincerity and honesty.

Catherine Blum

*Catherine Blum (sister of '97 grads Mary and Joe Blum) received an Associates Degree in theology from FUS in 1997. She now lives with her family in Largo, Florida, where she works as a librarian. She hopes to enter the religious life next Fall.*

**Amen Sister! Thank you for your fabulous article on households.** It warms my heart to know that I am not alone in some of these sentiments.

Anyone who graduated from FUS will have to admit it is a mixed blessing. I appreciate the education and the faith lessons I learned while attending the University. Yet I was also affected by the misplaced zeal, lack of wisdom and errors of well-meaning staff and students there. And while I would surely prefer silly arguments over the morality of music, restrictions on dating, and a paternalistic SLO to the drunken brawls, sexual abandon and irreligion that punctuate the standard American campus, I can still critically reflect on the experience at FUS.

Student Life should not overly regulate the free association of students in households. The monitoring of

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### Editorial Policy

*The University Concourse* is an independent journal of opinion, published by alumni and students of Franciscan University, but not formally affiliated with the University. It is designed to encourage fruitful discourse among members of the FUS community. The views expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, nor those of the Franciscan T.O.R.s or other University officials.

We welcome submissions from faculty, students, administrators, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, benefactors and friends, on any topic of interest to a general university readership, provided they are courteously expressed and framed with a view to advancing the welfare of FUS and/or Catholic culture at large.

We recommend opinions be kept to fewer than 1,500 words.

Contributions should be submitted on a 3.5" disk, either to *The University Concourse*, Box 27, University Boulevard, Steubenville, OH 43952, or sent to e-mail address: "UConcourse@aol.com"

Please include your full name, phone-number and e-mail address, if you have one.

We will consider printing submissions anonymously or under a pen-name; however, in general we wish to encourage open, "face to face" discussion. In either case, the editors require the full name and phone-number of the author of each opinion.

students through coordinators is wrong and improper. And the current conception of the role of the RD is not fitting for a school which sees itself as an orthodox Catholic university. Such paternalism would be better suited to a Bob Jones University, or a Liberty College.

Well, enough said. I affirm your willingness to tackle these issues. Feel free to print this letter if it helps. More Alumni need to speak up.

Gregory M.A. Gronbacher  
Class of '91

*Dr. Gronbacher is now Director of Research and Academic Affairs and Director of the Center for Economic Personalism at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty in Grand Rapids, MI.*

## About Secular Vocations

I enjoyed your last issue's articles very much. I thought the article on households raised an important issue that was due to be discussed. I disagree however on the negativity toward household covenants. If it weren't for our covenant, I never would have joined household!

I most agreed, however, with Jason Negri's article on success. I have been waiting for someone to express this exact point of view! I fully respect all those at FUS who choose to major in subjects less admired at other universities (e.g. philosophy and theology), but I also have a great respect for those students who choose to major in the more "secular" fields such as politics and business. If we wish to steer this country down the straight and narrow path, we must allow ourselves to do God's will behind the steering wheel. We cannot always be in the back seat biting our nails, wondering whether our advice will be taken or not. This is not to denigrate the intercessory role of the passengers, but rather to emphasize the directing role that can be taken as driver.

Instead of deterring students from these "worldly" vocations, we should give them even more support because of the greater responsibility they will be taking on and the stronger temptations they will most likely have to face. They will need more humility and more strength from God, because they will most often be resisting the group mentality within their chosen profession.

So while we remember that we are all humble sheep of the Good Shepherd, let us not forget to show due appreciation for those who are appointed to positions of leadership in gathering our society back to our loving Lord.

Myriah Christine  
Class of '97

*Myriah Christine is living with her family in California, working to earn the money needed to pursue a graduate degree in counseling. Since graduation she has helped form an intercessory prayer group with her FUS household, Bellwether.*

## An outsider's perspective on the household problem

**Kathleen van Schaijik's recent** article provides a veritable litany of alleged problems in the household system as it now stands. She writes from the perspective of someone with experience in a household. I approach the question of households as an outsider: I have never belonged to one; my closest association with them has been through cleaning residence halls.

She relates in a footnote the experience of having her household adviser tell the group that failing to attend dorm teachings required "repentance." This is an extreme case of the common problem of absolutizing one's own experience, devotion, or style of prayer. For those who have had a profound conversion this can be especially tempting; we wish others to share in the good we

have received from God, and mistakenly suppose that if they simply have the same experience we've had "they'll get it." The end result of this can be to turn something "good" into something ugly by mandating its use. For example, praying the rosary daily can be beneficial. But if you tell me that it is *the only way* to pray, you have suggested that your preferred means of encountering the living God is normative. In a word, you have made a "counsel" into a "commandment."

Peer pressure has a way of inculcating dispositions, both healthy and harmful. Excessive peer pressure can lead a person to adopt behaviors and even spiritual disciplines in an inauthentic way—because someone I respect is doing it, not because I have discovered for myself that it is good. I'm doing the practice, but it's really Frank's or Jane's. So, what happens when I leave the City on the Hill and find myself alone among the pagans? If I have not personally appropriated the gospel of Jesus Christ and found a way of following Him that is my own, I will fall like lightning from the sky. All the pious "habits" I've acquired won't do a damn thing to help me (because these habits belong to Frank and Jane, not me); if I have not personally verified the goodness of the event of Jesus Christ, it might as well not exist.

Mrs. van Schaijik's discussion of the term "covenant" is instructive and provides at least one clue toward solving the riddle of the household question. She notes that "covenant," properly speaking, applies to (a) Christ and the Church and (b) to Christian marriage. If households are adopting improper terminology to speak of themselves, it is possible that their self-understanding is likewise erroneous. That is, they may be attempting to be something they cannot and should not be. Add to this the phenomenon that occurs when something good is institutionalized: The bureaucracy finds a way of justifying itself through expansion, and you have the defeat of the Relational by the Organizational. I don't know whether this has in fact occurred within

The *Concourse* is proud to announce the births of

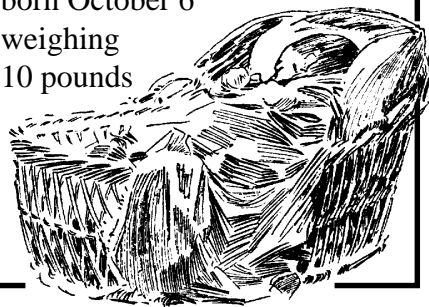
**Kateri Marie Providence Schmiesing**

born September 22 weighing 1 pound and 9 ounces

and

**Maximilian Hildebrand van Shaijik**

born October 6 weighing 10 pounds



the household system. I am, as I said, an outsider. But I have been involved in vibrant ministries which have literally died from over-organization and well-intentioned pressure “from on high” to conform to this or that admirable goal.

The alternative to this course would seem to be a recognition of what the household system legitimately can and cannot be. Something that households are not and cannot be are apostolic associations. The Catholic Church has given generous approval to a variety of movements, associations and apostolates (often international in scope) which allow the faithful to follow a rule or way of life inspired by a particular charism. My experience with movements in the Church has been with Regnum Christi and Communion and Liberation. These two movements are poles apart in their respective “styles.” Regnum Christi is very structured, while CL is organized in a decidedly un-organizational way. Despite their dissimilarities, both respect the interior freedom of the person in deciding whether or not “this particular way” of following Christ is a genuine call from God addressed to a particular person. One is not coerced, but invited to a

discovery of others, Christ and one’s own self. This is the authentically Christian approach because it is the method of Christ Himself as we find Him in the Gospels.

Households are not movements, but they can learn from these movements. In fact, there’s probably nothing impossible about a household affiliating itself with a given movement in the Church. If Mrs. van Schaijik’s facts and assertions are correct, the necessary change in households and the University’s attitude toward them will come when greater freedom is given to those involved in households. Freedom is the pre-requisite for love and friendship. In addition, perhaps greater attention could be paid to discerning the motives and needs of students who wish to join households. I assume that the majority of households are not merely fraternities and sororities with a cross tacked-on. Joining with others in following Christ, even if the form of this following is transitory, is serious and should be approached in a serious way. Like any Catholic university, the household system should have as its goal preparing the total person for the challenges and pressures of the present age in service to the Church. To do so, both University and household system must serve the person, not rule over him or her.

Postscript. Space does not permit a discussion of the following questions which should be addressed in reference to the household system and the University itself. I place these questions on the table in the hope that they might be addressed in a future issue of the *Concourse*: From where have we as Christians drawn our models for organization? Is the household system (as it presently stands) a natural outgrowth of living faith (and hence ecclesial) or does it rely upon structures which have been borrowed from the dominant (secular) culture? That is, in organizing our life together do we look to Christ and Church or corporate America?

The Church is not destroyed by this dynamic because she is protected by the

Holy Spirit. Neither households nor universities are guaranteed such protection.

Matt McGuiness  
MA theology program

## An alum’s perspective on households

**I read with interest and concern** Kathleen van Schaijik’s recent article “How not to help households.” Regarding the content of that article, in a word—Amen! However, in the true spirit of *the University Concourse*, let me expand.

From my own observations and from interaction with other alumni (including at the recent alumni reunion), it seems that the editor’s concerns are warranted. Many of the conditions she describes are not new; however, it appears that they have become incrementally more invasive and may have had the effect of stifling the individuality and creativity that used to characterize the household system.

Like the editor’s, my household experience (In His Image, 1983-87) led to life-long friendships, rooted in common faith and experiences. My fellow IHI alumni and I continue to stay very much in touch; we are regular guests in each other’s homes and part of each other’s lives. It would be a shame if well-intentioned but, perhaps, poorly executed management lead to reduced participation in this very worthwhile part of the FUS college experience.

In the mid to late-80s, Student Life exercised influence on household life by offering training, meeting with coordinators and arranging for household advisors, who were primarily members of the local covenant community. Such influence varied in degree depending on the household coordinator and advisor. Household covenants were written and entered (the original IHI covenant, almost 20 years old, could still be found in the common room as of last Fall), but the covenants were used as frameworks, not as weapons. However, the

tendency to over-manage student life was also present at that time. Who can forget the absurdity of proposed book reports and “groundings,” or the annual argument over exactly how far “open” a dorm room door had to be? (In that context, the locked common room door mentioned by the editor although inappropriate isn’t particularly shocking.)

It is not, then, necessarily the type of activity, but, rather, the tone of Student Life’s involvement with households that seems very different at present compared to what went on in the “old days”. Training, meetings, gatherings, various group activities, etc. were attended by willing participants who took advantage of what made sense and worked around what didn’t. In my own household’s history, there has been no shortage of members and coordinators who could, and did, speak out about what was best for themselves and their fellow members. Any number of other households had the same experience. The situation described by the editor seems much more intrusive.

In examining this problem, I don’t think that we should lay too much at the feet of Keith Fournier or any of his successors. In the three years that I held campus-wide office and in which he was an administrator (Asst. to the President in 84/85 and Dean of Students in 85/86 and 86/87), I had a great deal of official and personal interaction with him and his various deputies. Not all of this interaction was agreeable. However, regardless of the inherent tension one experiences when dealing as an advocate/representative with officials seeking to expand (perhaps inappropriately) the boundaries of their own authority and influence, I believe that these individuals were sincere, concerned, committed and faithful. They were, however, attempting to achieve a “grand plan” with too little staff and too much else going on. I questioned then whether the plan itself was worth reaching for; history would now suggest that it probably was not. Ultimately, however, while it did appear that there was some official movement toward viewing households as something of a

“farm system” for the local covenant community, the true cause of damage to household life can be more appropriately attributed to an attempt to establish uniformity, more likely as a means of simplifying an approach than as an attempt to co-opt student groups.

The series of “new mandates” handed down in the late 80s, and some of the current practices are all the result of a similar, well-intentioned, but flawed approach. Student Life staff observed “good ideas” and “great examples” of effectiveness in certain households, and decided to create “models” for all households (e.g. the New Model for Student Life of 1986 and the related annoying series of charts and brochures). Now, apparently, models have given way to rules—and, of course, a rule book. It doesn’t take an expert on human dynamics to understand the effect of this progression on a system—any system—and the results in this instance are not surprising.

My own view at the time, freely and frequently expressed both privately and in various official capacities, was that this “model” approach to households, while easier for administrators to explain and attempt to execute (execution

seems to have failed), short-changed the system and the participants—who were and are both adults and paying customers. My own household (and various others) may have been insulated from these ill effects because we simply wouldn’t stand for being “herded.” Rather, we chose to work with the best of what was offered (there was a great deal of valuable assistance) and go our own way when that was necessary. This occasionally opened us up to being advised that we were not “buying into the vision.” Since we knew where we stood and why we were there, we usually ignored this advice. Perhaps we should have pressed our points more often with a view toward the future. To the extent that we failed to successfully and completely challenge flawed policies, we—and those who followed us—should share some of the blame for the resulting problems.

It seems, then, from the editor’s description and my own observations, that Student Life is in a rut, and is defaulting to rules and control rather than a customized or creative approach. It also seems that students, rather than engaging authority as in the past, are now voting with their feet.

## Wondering what everyone is talking about?

If you’ve missed some of the conversation and would like back issues, contact Maria Ellis at 614-282-5239 or University Box 27 or e-mail [UConcourse@aol.com](mailto:UConcourse@aol.com)





First, let's acknowledge that something must be done. The household system had a lot to offer, and I suspect that it still does. Not that everything should always be the way it was, but it seems that, in this instance, change hasn't necessarily been good for the system. So, then, a little advice from a "thirty-something old timer."

**Student Life**—Ease up on the rules, and pitch good ideas, serving as a resource, not as a surrogate parenting organization. If flexibility, creativity and custom approaches aren't as easy as "the program", too bad—work harder! Start listening more and dictating less. These are your customers, and the outcome of your performance is much more important than in traditional customer relationships.

**Students**—Join a household, or start a new one. It can be a great experience. Engage Student Life, and whomever else you have to deal with, and do it through channels (dorm council, Student Government, committees, if these still exist). If the channels don't work, fix them. It's worth the effort, and the effort can be rewarding and good preparation for your future in and of itself.

In the final analysis, although I am grateful for the forum provided by the *Concourse*, it really doesn't much

matter what I think. I had the "full household experience," and I am glad that I did. But we alumni are on to other things now. I can read this journal, support my alma mater (I recommend the Carrigg scholarship) and enjoy the ability to hold forth on issues that seem to have changed very little, except for the outcome, in over ten years. However, if household participation is to increase and improve, it will be because current students want to join and make it work, which will only happen if the "program" is improved. Whether the dynamic leadership necessary for a change will be top-down or bottom-up remains to be seen. Nevertheless, I hope and pray that it happens soon.

Christopher P. Wright  
Class of '87

*Chris Wright, who was president of the Student Government Association (now known as FUSA) during his senior year at FUS, is a certified public accountant in New York, where he also volunteers as Treasurer of Episcopal Health Services, a hospital/nursing home system in Long Island and New York City.*

**Kathleen van Schaijik replies:**

Since my old school mate Chris Wright obviously means to corroborate the main lines of my argument, I do not intend to dispute with him over details. But I *would* like to clarify a few of the facts from my article which seem to be called into question by his.

First, about covenants: I said that the idea of having them is relatively new. I ought to have said that the idea of *needing* to have them is relatively new. I was in two households, neither of which ever had any kind of written agreement. When I first heard that some households had one, I thought it was a nice idea, but had no sense of "ought" about it, until Kieth Fournier's office made them if not mandatory then so "strongly encouraged" that they were *felt* to be mandatory by all households who hoped to remain in good standing with the Student Life Office. They are now clearly expected of households.

The number two item in a current official description of the "components of household life" says, "A household is founded on a *written* agreement..." (their emphasis) and the Student Life Office tells me that there is now not a single household without one.

To his point that an RD locking a common room door is not shocking compared with what RDs did in our day I have two comments: One, if my memory serves, there was a very great difference in the manner of disciplining residents between pre-Fournier and post-Fournier RDs. I'm pretty sure book reports and groundings were "post-Fournier"—part of his philosophy of modeling dorm life on family life (hence the paternalism). And secondly, what is striking about the example I raise of the RD locking the common room is not that it is particularly severe, as punishments go, but that it is very strange that coordinators be punished at all for not attending meetings which are ostensibly designed to "provide training, support and guidance to these leaders." Why should a coordinator not be perfectly free to say, "Thanks, but no thanks"? If the answer is that the RD needs to meet with coordinators in order to handle dorm business, then I say let such business be done—as it used to be—by elected reps. not coordinators, who have more than enough to do as it is. And let not business meetings be mixed up with training and support meetings. RDs are justified in making a minimum number of the former mandatory; the latter should be entirely optional.

Along the same lines, I did not mean to imply in my article that there was no interaction between the coordinators and Student Life in my first years at FUS, but rather that what interaction and training there was was much freer than it is today. The relevant point is that much of the interaction and training that goes on now is officially organized and *mandated*. (I was told by a student on the Household Council that even the annual retreat is mandatory: "Otherwise some coordinators might not go.") And, even more, the

impression is always “in the air” that the *more* you do in this direction—the more zealously you cooperate with every program and directive generated by Student Life or the RD or the RAs—the more exemplary and praiseworthy you are as a household. Resistance to Student Life initiatives or recommendations is generally frowned upon.

Finally, I would not lay all the blame at Keith Fournier’s feet in the

sense of assigning him sole responsibility for the evil his measures did to households. Certainly he would never have been hired if others in high places at the University did not share his covenant-community-like “vision” for households; certainly, too, his ideas were enthusiastically endorsed by many among both staff and students at the time. Nor did I mean to suggest that he was not acting in good faith. I have no

doubt whatsoever that he thought that what he was doing was a great for households, and he threw himself into it with admirable zeal. My claim is rather that his vision, and his manner of implementing it, represented a quantum leap in the degree of *control* Student Life sought to exercise over households, and that that control has proven over time to be inimical to the real genius of the household system.

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## Distance Doubts

*Continued from page 1*

does it mean to learn?

Before offering my main concerns I want to raise the question whether DE degrees could have the effect of depreciating our core curriculum. Some of the DE proposals would require only 30 credit hours of DE coursework for a BA degree, the remaining 90 needed for graduation transferring in from other institutions. The 30 hours offered by Steubenville would comprise for the most part the theology major. This means that most of the core requirements (apart from theology requirements) would have to be done elsewhere. But with this Franciscan University seems to say that it does not care too much about its core curriculum and that its main educational product is the theology major. Should we be saying such a thing? Does our Mission Statement allow us to say it?

As for my major concerns, I will group them under two headings.

1. DE degrees, at least as they are anticipated on our web site, could be earned by students who have had no direct contact, person to person, with their Steubenville teachers. In this sense the education of our DE students would be depersonalized. The great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, author of the classic, *I and Thou*, used to insist at his public lectures that the people asking questions come forward so that he could see them face to face.

It is impossible to practice this pedagogical wisdom of Buber in the setting of DE, where there is no face to face.

Let us go back to Socrates, one of the greatest educators of all time. He understood himself as an intellectual midwife in relation to his students. He would question each of them with a view to “delivering” the insights that were straining to be born in them. He did not aim at depositing information in their heads; he would not have needed his Socratic dialectic for so modest a task, which would have hardly qualified as education. He rather aimed at stimulating new understanding in them. At least some of the education we offer at Franciscan University should be based on Socratic midwifery; in seminars we can sometimes teach our students in this Socratic way. Precisely philosophy and theology would seem to require a large Socratic component. But, of course, there can be no Socratic relation to students who only listen to our voices on an audiotape and ask us questions by e-mail. We have to be together with our students, as Socrates was with his, if we are going to put probing questions to them and challenge their answers.

This calls to mind the “intellectual virtues” to which our Philosophy of the Curriculum—an important official document of the University—commits us. How can you cultivate virtue in someone whom you do not know personally, whom you cannot see face to face? Virtue is stimulated in another

by example; the Philosophy of the Curriculum recognizes this in connection with one of the intellectual virtues: “for the imparting to our students of this spirit of just judgment, nothing is as important as the personal example of the professors who practice just and balanced judgment in all their teaching, writing, and professional practice.” Doesn’t this imbibing of the personal example of a teacher require that the teacher and student know each other personally? Sometimes special relations of friendship and mentorship arise between them; this is the best possible setting in which a student might pattern himself or herself on the intellectual habits of the teacher. It is the best possible setting, and it is completely excluded in an education in which teacher and student are connected only by audiotapes and e-mail.

But teachers can be even more of an example to their students than I have indicated so far. Socrates taught his students, not just through his probing questioning, but through the force of his character and personality. The moral earnestness, the religious passion of a Plato enhanced him as teacher; he sealed his teaching with the witness of his life, and so he taught that much more convincingly. We, too, especially those of us in philosophy and theology, have to seal our teaching with the witness of our lives; our students receive vastly more from us as teachers when they see us striving to live what we teach. But this dimension of our

teaching (which extends far beyond the classroom) has no chance to unfold in the setting of DE, where students are beyond the reach of the moral personality of the teacher.

It is not surprising that the supporters of DE acknowledge in their own way the importance of the personal dimension for which I am pleading. Just ask them why they don't forget about producing audiotapes altogether and do the simpler thing of offering DE based only on reading lists, study guides, and written exams. They will answer that they want to capture something more personal through the voice of the teacher. Exactly; what they overlook is that the personal element that is thereby captured is only a small fragment of the personal element that is available to our resident students.

2. There is a further personalist loss which education suffers when it is transmitted mainly on tape. "Values are not taught but caught." You catch them by living in and breathing the atmosphere of a community that is built around the values. This supportive milieu, so important for all real learning, cannot be put on an audiotape, not even on a CD-ROM disc; you either live in the midst of it, or you do without it.

My thought here is best clarified by an analogy with the religious life of the campus. No one would say that you have only to listen to the right set of audiotapes in order to receive the same deepening in your faith that can be received by living on campus and participating in all the opportunities of

religious formation. We all understand that living in a supportive religious community is indispensable for the Steubenville faith experience. Well, then, it is not so hard to understand that living in a supportive intellectual community is just as indispensable for the Steubenville learning experience.

Cardinal Newman, perhaps the greatest authority on Catholic higher education, understood this well. In his *Idea of a University* he says that if he were asked which of these two universities would more effectively educate, either the one "which dispensed with residence and tutorial superintendence, and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination" [sound familiar?], or the one "which had no professors or examinations at all, but merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years," he would unhesitatingly choose the latter. Newman explains: "When a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant, as young men are, come together and freely mix with each other, they are sure to learn one from another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they

gain for themselves new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day." Newman thinks that the learning that will take place in this society of young students will be much greater than the learning that occurs in students who, separated from all such society, study for examinations. But this social milieu that Newman so prizes for real learning is just what gets cut

out in DE. There can be little doubt about the lack of enthusiasm that Newman, himself a great educator, would have felt towards DE.

You might at this point ask me why, if so much is lost in DE, so many people not only in our university community but also outside of it are so eager to set up DE programs. A partial answer I think is this. The devotees of DE commonly misconceive the nature of genuine education; they tend to think that it is largely a matter of transmitting information from the mind of the teacher into the mind of the student. They rightly say that such transmission does not have to occur person to person, it can as well be done electronically. You will recall how flight attendants used to explain personally the safety features on board to the passengers; now at the beginning of each flight we all watch a video that explains everything better than they did. If education is nothing but the depositing of information in the minds of students, then it can conceivably be improved by electronic delivery, thus rendering obsolete things like campuses and university communities.

But authentic education, as I have been saying, involves vastly more than information; it involves formation. It also involves intellectual virtues, as well as mentorship and discipleship; it should culminate in wisdom. It immeasurably exceeds the mere transmission of information; this is why it exceeds the capabilities of DE as envisioned here at Steubenville.

By the way, I see in my students just how deeply rooted the informational model of education has become. Most of them do not know how to talk about the content of the course except in terms of information. They cannot help so talking, even after I have warned them against it. They are bewildered when I tell them, as I do in certain courses, that I do not want to give them a single piece of information but rather to encourage them to think in a disciplined way about first things.

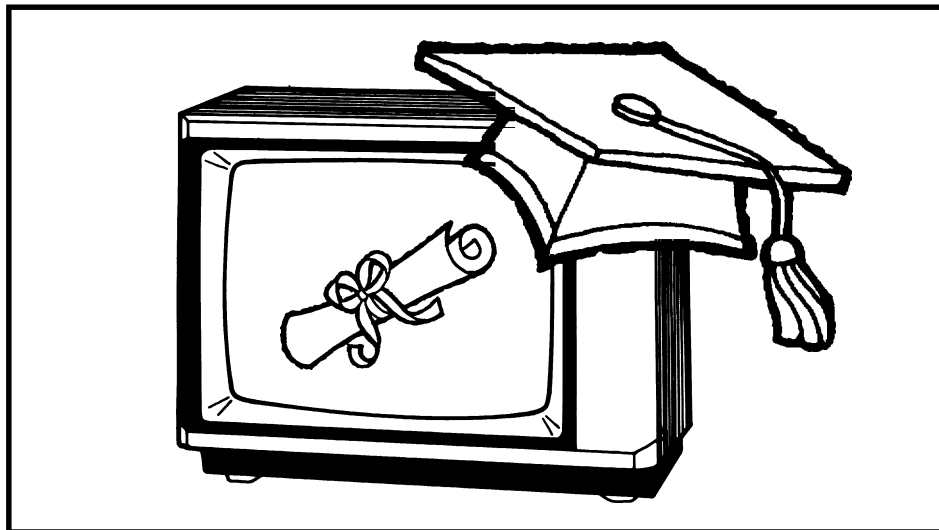
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You may want at this point to challenge me by saying that audiotapes can convey far more than information. You may remind me of the famous tapes of Scott Hahn that have reached and benefited so many people. On hearing them people often go away deeply challenged, thus showing that they have received far more than information. You may want to tell me about some great book that you “read” on a trip by listening to it on tapes. This is all true and I gratefully recognize it. But an entire education sealed with a university degree is something more. Can we dispense with all face-to-face encounter with teachers, can we dispense with community among the learners, and still claim to be imparting more or less the same education that we impart to our students in Steubenville? If you are confident that we can, and don’t really see a big problem, then you are probably thinking of education too much in terms of information transmission.

Perhaps you are also registering the fact that the education we presently offer on campus has become too heavy on information and too light on formation. There is plenty of reason to think that this is indeed the case. It is often remarked that our students sometimes concentrate too much on the “doctrinal bottom line,” very much wanting to know what the Church teaches but not being equally interested in understanding why she teaches it. The education we offer does not always empower our students to be resourceful in explaining the Christian faith to those who challenge it. It stresses content at the expense of intellectual habits. I suspect that enthusiasm for DE degrees is cut from the same cloth as this imbalance in favor of content.

There is another fundamental issue raised by the DE proposals. We human beings are not pure spirits who happen to use our bodies in an instrumental way; we rather exist as embodied persons. The closest way of encountering each other is to go as an embodied person out to meet the other as embodied person. This is why Buber wanted not



just to hear the voice but to see the face of his questioner. But in electronic communication like e-mail we meet each other in a distinctly disembodied way; the communication goes from intellect to intellect and not from one embodied human being to the other. (There is more embodiment in a handwritten letter than in an e-mail message, for here at least the characteristic handwriting of the other embodies for me something of the concrete person of the other.) This is a large subject to which I cannot do justice here; but if we are in very truth embodied persons, must not authentic education build on our embodiment? Must not DE, which disembodies teacher and learner, represent a somewhat unnatural and hence substandard form of teaching and learning?

Of course, one could try to deal with some of the concerns I have expressed as one develops a DE proposal. One could build a residency requirement into our DE program; other DE programs already have such a requirement. One could put all or part of the core curriculum on tape and require that too of the DE students. One could see to it that the professors teaching DE courses are really free to give plenty of time to telephone and e-mail contact with their students. One could develop electronic contacts among the students. One could move up from audio to video media. Could we by a combination of such measures undo some of the depersonalization that goes with DE?

Could we produce a bona fide equivalent of a university degree? I do not know; let us look at concrete proposals; perhaps I will yet be convinced. In any case, there is a fundamental issue here about what it is to teach and what it is to learn that is in danger of being neglected as we rush to get our piece of the DE market.

I hear the retort of the DE people to this last remark; they will say that they are not just interested in doing business, but also in evangelizing. They have worthy pastoral reasons for wanting to use DE to reach people who desire a Steubenville education but cannot come here to receive it. I quite recognize and respect these reasons. But I enter this caveat, much needed in Steubenville discussions: pastoral reasons do not automatically trump all other kinds of reasons; in particular, pastoral reasons for doing DE do not automatically trump educational reasons for not doing it. If the educational losses incurred in a DE program of study are such as to make it substantially inferior to our degree programs, there is simply no pastoral justification for crowning it with a degree. You have to practice truth in advertising when you are working for the kingdom of God no less than when you are selling earthly commodities. ■

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## New Frontier

*Continued from page 1*

upon hundreds of adult learners scattered across the world with the gospel. So great is the potential that one is tempted to imagine the shades of green envy in the souls of such very great missionaries as Saints Paul, Boniface, Ignatius, Francis, Cyril and Methodius!

This missionary opportunity has raised many questions among faculty, administration and staff. Can we do it? Ought we to do it? Do we have the resources? Who's taking these courses? Why? Other questions present themselves. What technologies do we have at our disposal? What are the differences and similarities between learning through a Distance Learning program and learning on campus? What are the pros and cons of each delivery system? Is communication through DL technology vastly inferior, utterly impersonal, in comparison with a lecture hall of forty-plus students, a seminar with ten students, a directed study with one student? Do we learn all the same way: in a class room, in conversation, through correspondence, video, receiving lectures, reading books and articles, watching TV, listening to the radio? Are values transmitted only face to face? Do adults learn differently at different stages in life? Are there different reasons for adult learning?

These questions raise more fundamental questions. What is teaching and learning? How are they related? How is learning related to education? How are learning and education related to earning a degree? I will focus my reflections on three themes: Catholic Tradition and Distance Education, The "Typical" Adult Learner, and Teaching, Learning and Degree Programs.

### **Catholic tradition and distance education**

If anything is characteristic of Catholic faith, theology and pastoral life it would be its mediate contact with God through the sacraments. Grace, divine life and Trinitarian life are all mediated to us through material means. Just as God mediates his divine life—his personal presence—through such simple material as bread and wine, water, oil, human language, so also the professor/mentor mediates his or her values, beliefs, convictions and knowledge—that is, the elements of his inner life and external witness—through the medium of the lecture, delivered in person or through audio tape, print materials, phone conversations and written correspondence. This fundamental principle—the material mediation of divine life—is the prime analogate for understanding the Catholic or incarnational quality of Distance Learning.

The Church in no stranger to

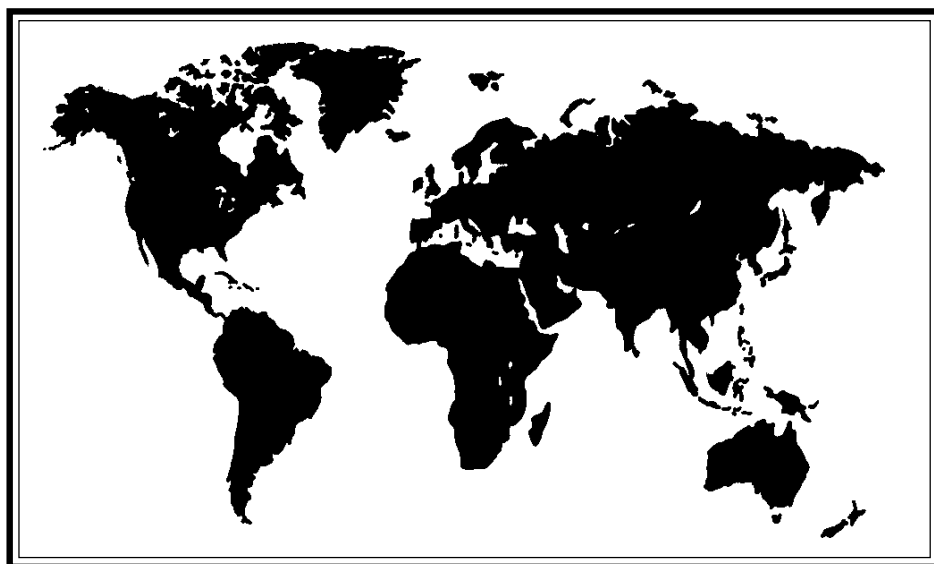
Distance Learning technology. It has promoted one of the most effective DL technologies ever developed—the written word! We learn of the great Patriarchs, Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, the Apostles from the Scripture, the written word. We learn of the Fathers of the Church, the Doctors of the Church, the lives of the saints, the teachings of the great Councils through the written word. The Catholic Church preserved the intellectual heritage of the West through the written word. During the dark ages monks copied Scripture, science manuals, Hebrew, Greek and Latin grammars, prayers etc. They preserved knowledge and values for future generations. It strikes me that this publication is itself a form of Distance Education; it transmits certain information and (in this case) the values and opinions of two professors to readers dispersed across the globe who might read this text long after we have gone on to the Lord.

Lest I be misunderstood, I do not wish to raise audio tapes and the Internet to the level of sacramental mediation! Clearly not every form of Distance Education technology is necessarily appropriate for the transmission of Revelation, Catholic culture, values and mores. Learning strategies and delivery systems which re-configure truth to the point of obscurity or depersonalize the mediation process by making less evident the professor/mentor's values are unacceptable. Any technology in which "glitz" impedes communication or makes high technological skill a prerequisite for communication seriously inhibits the authentic interpersonal exchange of goods like friendship, happiness, love and truth. We shall return to this point below.

### **The "typical" adult learner**

The magnitude and depth of the missionary opportunity before us is very difficult to assess with any definitiveness. We can catch a glimpse of it by means of developing a profile of the typical kind of Distance Learning student.

Research generated by numerous



institutions as well as by our own Distance Learning Office indicate that the typical DL students are “adult learners;” they are cloistered nuns, hermits, mothers raising their children at home, professionals, teachers, catechists, Directors of Religious Education—that is, people who wish either to complete their education or earn undergraduate or graduate degrees for personal or professional reasons, but are not able to go to college. They are from all over the world. No matter their continent, domicile or profession, the message is virtually the same, “I can’t get to you, even for three short weeks of summer school! Can I learn from your faculty and earn a degree through Distance Learning?”

These people are not disembodied e-mail addresses; they are real people with real problems and real needs. They have social and spiritual communities through their families, parishes, Marian or charismatic prayer groups, lay movements, third order communities. They are busy with full-time jobs; they care for real families which make real demands, they offer real apostolic services to the Church; and yet, they are so motivated as to sacrifice two very precious resources, their time and money. They come to us because we offer something real for the Church. We cannot touch their lives, families, jobs and world except through Distance Learning programs. They need a real, substantial, high quality education which will deepen their spiritual and professional lives. They seek a share in our cherished values: academic integrity and excellence, moral and spiritual growth, and prudential judgment.

### Teaching, learning and degree programs

Teaching is distinct from learning. Teaching transmits understanding, learning interprets and inculcates it. A teacher transmits information, that is, value laden data. A learner receives information, interprets it and inculcates its inherent values. These are the fundamental principles of the educational process.

Teaching is a form of interpersonal

communication of “information.” I understand interpersonal communication to mean the embodied communication of values, person to person. By “information” I understand that data which has been organized, processed and structured by the values and perceptions of the communicator. Under these terms, the communication and reception of intelligible, value laden data constitutes interpersonal communication. The question is: are there different modes of interpersonal and embodied forms of communication? Yes.

For example, it is possible to communicate to a person face to face, via telephone, by letter and through satellite. In these instances the communication is synchronic and lives in that sense. But there are other forms of interpersonal communication. For example, if I read Josephus’ *Jewish Wars* I still would be engaged in interpersonal communication, but now asynchronously. Let’s look at this issue from the perspective of reading Augustine’s *Confessions* and, say, a computer printout of random numbers, examples of information (i.e., value laden data) and data.

Augustine’s *Confessions* engage the late twentieth-century reader at the most profound levels of reflection and Catholic life. When we read him, we, in a sense communicate with him personally. How? Because through reading his words, we encounter something of Augustine’s person, his hierarchy of values, his perceptions of reality and morals—those elements of his personal, interior and intellectual life. And they challenge us! We the readers connect

with something of his person—his inner and external life—through the medium of the written word. That book is not a disembodied e-mail note from cyberspace; it was created by a person intended to be received by many other people. We can “catch” Augustine’s values by reading his thought life, even in translation and in print.

Another example, taken from another medium, might be helpful. When I take long-distance calls from people all across the nation and from Europe, that communication is personal, embodied, material. Both my body and person is involved in the act of communication, just like writing a book. I am able to overcome the problem of distance via the mediation of fiber optics. A lack of physical or temporal proximity does not necessarily imply a lack of interpersonal contact.

Technology has the potential of drawing together the contemporary human community through making possible inter-locale and intergenerational learning. As the Holy Father has said of the amazing power of contemporary means of social communication: they “...undoubtedly facilitate relations between people, making the world a ‘global village,’ and therefore posing the urgent need for Evangelization in new terms” (Address to the Central Committee for the year 2000, February 16, 1996).

Not all information promotes interpersonal communication. When we read random numbers generated by a computer driven by a computer programmer, that form of communication would not qualify as interpersonal

No matter  
their continent,  
domicile or  
profession,  
the message  
is virtually  
the same,  
“I can’t get to  
you, even  
for three  
short weeks  
of summer  
school!  
Can I learn  
from your  
faculty and  
earn a degree  
through  
Distance  
Learning?”

communication. The random numbers do not mediate or communicate any of the programmer's hierarchy of values, perceptions of reality, orality—in short, nothing of the programmer's inner and external life. The numbers provide no access into the “personality” of the programmer.

Notice how time has only a minimal effect on the interpersonal character of these two very different types of communication. In the case of the phone calls, distance is overcome. In the case of Augustine, the interpersonal communication is asynchronous, it takes place across several centuries, and yet it can be designated as interpersonal. In the case of the generation of random numbers, the programmer could compose the program, run it, generate random numbers in the presence of the recipient and those numbers still would still not constitute interpersonal communication. That is, the significant difference between the two examples is not the asynchronous dimension of the communication, but its interpersonal qualities. The reception of Augustine's value laden data is no less personal or powerful today than when it was originally written.

There are great differences and similarities between the kind of learning that takes place on campus and Distance Learning. Let me briefly outline

some of the issues. The Socratic method of teaching and Newman's idea of the university both reflect one mode of learning. Are they ideal? It is difficult to say. Are they excellent? Yes. Do we practice them at Franciscan University of Steubenville? Not to my knowledge; not with classes which often exceed forty students.

As one who has engaged in adult learning via electronic media, I can safely say that I would prefer to meet my students face to face. However, I know many many scholars and other adult learners who prefer reading books, writing papers and making phone calls to the conventional classroom mode of learning. They never go to professional seminars and yet they stay in touch with their colleagues, learn and lead productive lives. Older adults typically learn differently from college-age students. Their basic values have already been formed or are in the process of being reformed, thus they have less need for the environment of campus life. Such is the nature of adult learning. The technology proposed by the current Distance Learning program is quite well suited to the needs of those who are asking for it.

Do adult learners actually “catch” and retain values. The two hundred and forty-eight studies showing no significant differences in learning outcomes

through Distance Learning and the traditional classroom setting indicate the affirmative. Why? They take tests, quizzes, write mid-terms, research and reflection papers just as the undergraduate young adult does at the university. If these elements of performance evaluation signal levels of learning effectiveness on the campus, they certainly do so off-campus.

A final reflection about Distance Learning and the scholarly community. University culture has extended itself irreversibly to the remote regions of the world. By inviting the remote adult learner to participate in the mission of our small University, we embody the learning process, set guidelines and expectations of academic quality and behavior and discourse within a framework of morality, truth and love. This invitation to the remote adult learner, with all of its attendant values, requires both leadership and risk-taking work, requiring Socratic reasoning both on and off campus. ■

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\* For reasons I hope will emerge as I proceed, I prefer the term Distance Learning to the more standard Distance Education.

## “This is Good Stuff!”

If you know someone who would enjoy reading the *Concourse* as much as this man does, send their name and address to:

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