Learning Online
Canada’s Athabasca University offers college courses at the click of a mouse

By Kay Mills
Athabasca, Alberta Province, Canada

G raduation Day at Athabasca University in Alberta last June looked like any graduation at countless Canadian and American universities—a sunny day, students wearing caps and gowns, proud family members snapping photographs, the university president awarding degrees. But many of the graduates who attended the convocation had never been to Athabasca before because it offers its classes entirely at a distance, mostly online.

The university held its convocation in a tent in the parking lot because it has no gym or stadium—not even a campus, if you get right down to it. Without a university band, Athabasca’s academic procession features a bagpiper. Athabasca holds a convocation because, as its president Dominique Abrioux said, “Traditions are important”—even for online learners. “It’s the only time we meet our students.”

From the outside, Athabasca University’s offices resemble a small liberal arts college. But inside, there are no classrooms. The modern building is set in a wooded area, and deer are often seen on the grounds. Once in awhile, a bear may amble along to peer into the registrar’s window.

From the outside, the offices resemble a small liberal arts college. But inside, there are no classrooms.

We want to leave them with a lasting impression.”

Athabasca University, which is 30 years old, is located in the small town of the same name (Cree for “land of whispering reeds and hills”) 84 miles north of Edmonton. The university is the town’s largest employer with about 300 people on staff.

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Kathy Elliot earned an online master’s degree in education from Athabasca University while working as a wilderness guide in Canada’s Yukon Territory.

SAT Summer Camp
Parents and students hope for a score-raising experience

By Kathy Witkowsky
Milton, Massachusetts

A ll her life, Tiffany Madsen wanted to go to summer camp. But the 17-year-old honor student and athlete from Everett, Massachusetts, was always too busy working and playing sports. When she finally got her chance this year, she happily packed her swimsuit and basketball, her cell phone and CDs. And of course, her number-two pencils.

That’s right: her number-two pencils. That’s because Tiffany had chosen to attend Whitman Enrichment Programs, a ten-day residential camp devoted to SAT preparation.

That also was the message delivered at an introductory orientation session by camp director Bill Dorfman, an affable New Yorker and former private school headmaster. “We want to make sure that everyone here—I hate to put it so crassly—gets what they paid for,” Dorfman told the campers, who came from nine states and half a dozen foreign countries.

Most of the 22 campers—eight boys, 14 girls—attend private schools, many of which are boarding schools. “We have all of these different backgrounds,” Dorfman noted, “but we’re all here for the same reason: to get the best SAT score we can.”

SAT preparatory courses have been around for decades. But the only thing summer had in common with the SATs was the letter “S.” No more. Now summer camps, as well as academically oriented summer schools, have begun to incorporate SAT preparation into their curriculum.

“Kids are so busy that they can’t fit in SAT prep except in the summer,” said Chad Schaedler, executive director of pre-college programs for Kaplan, Inc., the test-prep company that teamed up with Dorfman to offer the summer camp. “And a lot of these kids go away to camp in the summer and so they want to prepare in that type of environment.” Kaplan also has partnered with a tennis camp, and plans to enter into more such arrangements in the future. But the 17-year-old honor student and athlete from Everett, Massachusetts, was always too busy working and playing sports. When she finally got her chance this year, she happily packed her swimsuit and basketball, her cell phone and CDs. And of course, her number-two pencils.

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Teenagers from nine states and several foreign countries gathered for a ten-day “SAT summer camp,” in an effort to improve their scores on the crucial college admissions test.

In This Issue

Jaap Tuinman is president of the Open Learning Agency, one of the many British Columbia institutions that cooperate to bring distance learning opportunities to thousands of students. (See page 3.)
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

“Mr. Marcus’ assertion is simply untrue”

Editor—I always enjoy your informative publication, and this latest issue was no exception, especially since it featured a wide-ranging article by Jon Marcus about the politics of higher education in New York State.

Mr. Marcus is, of course, entitled to his opinions. But your readers need to know there is at least one factual error in his report that reflects a certain lack of knowledge about New York politics. Marcus writes that last year Governor Pataki “cut [the State Education Department’s] staff, stripped it of oversight of private and public colleges, and transferred its library and archives to his control.”

Mr. Marcus’ assertion is simply untrue. Those were the governor’s proposals, to be sure, but the legislature rejected them. That should come as no surprise since it is the legislature, after all, that appoints the regents, who in turn oversee the State Education Department. Historically, governors have tried to transfer some aspect of Regents authority to their control. Few have succeeded in any significant way.

Donald J. Nolan
Former New York State SPEEO
(State Higher Education Officer)
1982–1996

An attack on Giuliani

Editor—There are genuine disagreements about higher education, and it is invaluable whenever they are discussed on their merits. The article by Jon Marcus, “Politicalizing University Governance,” however, is little more than an extended ad hominem attack.

The suggestion seems to be that if these people are for a core curriculum, then requiring students to study history, English, math and science must be a terrible thing. If Giuliani—a, gasp, elected official—wants to move remediation out of the senior colleges and into the community colleges and summer programs, it must be a sinister proposal. All this may be welcome reading to partisans or defensive administrators or people who just enjoy a good smear, but it poisons the well of thoughtful discourse, preventing a serious dialogue about what is the best education for college students, how much remediation is too much, and the other very real issues facing higher education.

Jerry L. Martin, President
American Council of Trustees and Alumni
Washington, D.C.

New York State Board of Regents still in control

Editor—I am writing to point out inaccuracies in Jon Marcus’ article in the Summer 2001 issue of National CrossTalk. This article incorrectly reported that the Regents were stripped last year of oversight of private and public colleges. That is not true.

The New York State Board of Regents continues to be responsible for approving the long-range master plans of the State University of New York and The City University of New York. It continues to be responsible for chartering independent colleges and universities, for authorizing degree powers for SUNY and CUNY campuses and for proprietary colleges, and for approving all degree programs at public and private colleges and universities, according to our quality standards.

The article also is wrong in saying that the governor transferred control of the New York State Library and State Museum from the Regents to himself. That did not happen.

The article gives the impression that there was no oversight or review by the Regents of the CUNY ‘trustees’ decision to change their policy on admission to baccalaureate programs and to phase out the offering of remedial courses at CUNY’s senior colleges. That decision was subject to the Regents approval as an amendment to CUNY’s long-range plan.

The Education Department conducted an exhaustive review of the proposal, including a site visit to CUNY by a team of eminent out-of-state consultants, and the Regents held several public hearings on it. In November 1999, the board declined to approve the change that the Trustees proposed without condition. CUNY made several modifications and the Regents approved the modified policy only through the end of 2002.

The article also states that “CUNY’s board is now considering a core curriculum.” As far as we know, that is not the case. Last summer, as required by New York law, the CUNY Trustees adopted a new long-range master plan and submitted it to the Regents and the governor for approval. As approved by the Regents, the CUNY plan calls on each college to establish its own core curriculum or curricula, a different approach from the university-wide core requirements the SUNY Trustees adopted.

The Regents approved the CUNY long-range plan, with condition, and the governor subsequently did so as well. The analysis of the CUNY plan that the Department prepared for the Regents is a public document.

Gerald W. Patton
Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education
New York State Education Department

Jon Marcus Replies

Nolan and Patton are correct that the legislature stopped Pataki from cutting the staff of the State Education Department, transferring its library and archives, and taking away its oversight of private and public colleges.

The point is that Pataki did, in fact, try to do this—and tried again this year to put the library, archives and museum under a new Office of Cultural Resources—making little secret of the reason: He is dissatisfied with the education department. Even though the legislature has so far thwarted these attempts, Pataki cut much of the funding for the museum, although he did support an allocation for an exhibit about New York State governors.

Patton speaks about “impressions” he believes the story gave. Among them: that the regents did not review the CUNY trustees’ decision to eliminate remedial courses, which the story did not say. What the story said was that the Trustees and the Regents by that time (and, in the case of the Trustees, in the nick of time) were firmly in the control of Giuliani and Pataki. ◆

NEWS FROM THE CENTER

National Center’s New Senior Fellow

MICHAEL D. USDAN, former president of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), has joined the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education as a Senior Fellow, working on the National Center’s projects in Washington, D.C.

Usdan is also a Senior Fellow at IEL, where he served as president from 1981 until 2002. Before that, he was Connecticut’s Commissioner of Higher Education, from 1978 until 1981.

Usdan has written many books and articles on education, particularly about urban schools, the relationship between government, politics and education and, recently, the growing movement to forge closer ties between higher education and the nation’s elementary and secondary schools.

“The Learning Connection”—a collection of articles about K–16 partnerships around the country, edited by Usdan; Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education; and Gene I. Maeroff, director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, at Teachers College, Columbia University—was published last year.

In his role as a senior fellow at the Center, Usdan said he hopes to “push the K–16 agenda,” in such areas as teacher education, remedial education and preparation for college. ◆
By Kay Mills

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

GEOGRAPHY HAS LONG challenged Canada’s vast provinces to come up with creative ways to educate far-flung populations. Long before computers and the Internet, schools and universities created the common bond in online learning. British Columbia, government and other organizations in British Columbia were combining to produce innovative distance education programs. Now they have developed a synergy among their efforts that is leading to development of new programs and companies.

For example, the University of British Columbia, which offers 100 distance education courses, spawned the software WebCT that gives universities and professors the tools to develop online courses, without extensive programming ability and great expense. Just last spring, the instructor whose work led to WebCT, Murray Goldberg, started a new company called Silicon Chalk. Goldberg, who said he remains fully involved with WebCT, is working with Silicon Chalk to produce a “fairly comprehensive set of tools” to enhance wireless technology in the classroom, for example, by allowing students to work collaboratively through their laptops.

British Columbia is also home to extensive distance learning efforts at Simon Fraser University, Royal Roads University, the University of Victoria and the new Technological University of British Columbia. The Open Learning Agency, based east of Vancouver in Burnaby, offers the fully accredited BC Open University as well as courses for the fishing and marine technology Resources Agency for delivery of distance education courses in the 2000-'01 school year. Enrollments have increased by 54 percent in the last four years. The university does not allow students to earn a degree entirely at a distance, and most of its faculties limit the courses undergraduates may take at a distance.

The University of British Columbia offered its first four correspondence courses for credit in 1949. Since 1997, the Internet has been the primary means of delivery for the new courses that UBC’s distance education and technology division has developed. More than 5,600 students, most of them undergraduates, took its distance education courses in the 2000-'01 school year. Enrollments have increased by 54 percent in the last four years. The university does not allow students to earn a degree entirely at a distance, and most of its faculties limit the courses undergraduates may take at a distance.

Tony Bates pointed out that the vast majority of UBC distance education students are not truly distant. Almost half live within Vancouver and another 39.5 percent are also on the lower mainland of the province. When asked in a UBC survey last year why they had enrolled in distance education courses, only 17 percent of the students said that they lived to far from campus or would have difficulty getting to class. Most distance education students are working, so the flexibility distance education offers appealed to them.

Distance education moved more easily into the Internet age with the help of WebCT, the software product that emerged from the efforts of Murray Goldberg, the University of British Columbia senior instructor in computer sciences who was exploring ways to enhance learning through technology. Using money from several UBC course development and teaching enhancement funds, Goldberg wrote a program to put a class online. The second time he prepared an online course, he decided to build the tools so that others could develop such courses.

People at other universities wanted the tools, too, and for a while Goldberg gave the software away as a service to colleagues, said Angus Livingstone, UBC’s managing director of the university-industry liaison office. Goldberg later decided to go commercial with WebCT, to provide support for its users and to develop the software further. In May 1999, Universal Learning Technologies in Boston bought WebCT, which now has a staff of 350, about half of whom work in Vancouver.

“It’s a good place to do research,” Livingstone added. “You don’t have to sell anybody here on distance education. We’re just trying to figure out how to do it better.”

Simon Fraser University, established in 1965, is another major player in the province’s distance education efforts. SFU opened its doors during a period of some ferment in higher education, in Canada as in the United States, and SFU “wanted to break new ground, be an innovative place that sponsors research about online learning, is headquartered in Vancouver.

“The geography of the province forced British Columbia universities to look beyond their campuses,” said Tony Bates, University of British Columbia’s director of distance education and technology and one of the leaders in the field. “There has been political pressure to ensure that students not on the lower mainland have access to courses” Bates said the synergy among the various distance education programs that have developed in the province is “probably one of the best kept secrets. There’s a long history of collaboration here.”

Serendipity created some of this cooperation, said Walter Uegama, UBC’s former associate vice president for continuing education, “but a lot of it was planned.” He credited Patrick McGeer, a former senior education minister in the provincial government who had been a UBC faculty member, and his UBC colleague Walter Hardwick, with being the architects for the system in the 1970s.

“We had the grand ideas. There was a vision.”

These planners also saw to it that the three universities involved in distance education at the time (UBC, Simon Fraser and the University of Victoria) had funds to develop courses and create a consortium to plan complementary—and not duplicative—programs. “There was a great spirit of the thing among the people at the table,” Uegama said.

The coordination group still exists but on a loose voluntary basis. “The boom (in distance education) happened here quite a lot earlier before it happened elsewhere,” Uegama added. It was driven more by geography and holistic ideas about education than by the online technology fueling the current growth in the field.

Many other Canadian universities have major distance/online education programs, including the Téléuniversité du Québec, serving French-speakers, and the largest, Athabasca University in Alberta.

Other provinces have some of the same cooperative action found in British Columbia. In Newfoundland, for example, distance education received a major boost in the 1970s when Memorial University started offering courses for medical staffs in remote areas. That led to formation of the Telemedicine and Educational Technology Resources Agency for delivery of health and education services, and then the Marine Institute, to offer a range of courses for the fishing and marine transportation industries so key to Newfoundland.

Making sure that people in rural areas as well as the cities could get the training and the information they needed was the spur to what Erinn Keough, director of the Open Learning and Information Network in St. John’s, Newfoundland, called “a real Canadian way of doing things.”

Early distance education efforts were basically correspondence courses. Students typically would receive a box of books and other course materials, send the assignments, and wait for a response from the instructor. Using the postal service didn’t allow swift exchanges. Eventually, more media were used: audiotapes, videotapes and now the Internet, which allows interaction among students and between student and professor.

Distance education moved more easily into the Internet age with the help of WebCT, the software product that emerged from the efforts of Murray Goldberg, the University of British Columbia senior instructor in computer sciences who...
The British Columbia government created the Open Learning Institute in 1978 to try to provide greater access to higher education for people living in the province's rural areas.

The British Columbia government created the Open Learning Institute in 1978 to try to provide greater access to higher education for people living in the province's rural areas. Resistance to the "open university" concept was fierce from some academic quarters at first, with more traditional universities feeling OLI would waste money on a suspect delivery system. Some of the same institutional criticisms are now firmly in line, online. The institute merged in 1988 with the province's public educational television system, the Knowledge Network, to become the Open Learning Agency.

One-third of the agency's university-level students are enrolled at traditional universities, said Tuinman. "For example, they're in a UBC program but the course they want is not offered for another year, or it's full or it's offered at conflicting hours so they can't graduate." OLA enrolls 14,251 university-level students and has 250 courses of its own and another 300 from other British Columbia universities. Students can register for all of these courses through OLA.

Surveying the distance education scene in British Columbia, Tuinman believes it benefits students because it provides them with a lot more options. Community college students can move more easily into universities. There's no residency requirement. And because there's so much distance education going on, he said, students can manage their time better. "It's heaven for part-time students in comparison with other (geographic) areas."

A former military college, Royal Roads University was established in 1995 as what Canada calls a special-purpose university and has embraced distance education and online learning. It is located in a scenic spot—Hatley Park, a national heritage site on Juan de Fuca strait in Victoria, British Columbia. Royal Roads considers its "client market" to be primarily mid-career professionals who wish to advance and need to schedule their education around work and family. Most courses combine short stays on campus with Internet-based distance learning. Last year the university served 2,028 people—with an average age of 36—and plans to grow to 3,475 by 2004-05.

The University of Victoria, located on Vancouver Island, enrolls about 17,000 undergraduate and graduate students and 13,000 continuing education students. As a distance education provider, the university's division of continuing studies specializes in developing and delivering diploma and certificate programs for professionals in such fields as adult education, business and management, cultural resource management, environmental and occupational health, English as a second language, and information systems management. It also seeks to aid the professional development of teachers.

Adding to this mix are the Tele-Learning Network of Centres of Excellence. In Canada, the federal government has established a number of networks of people working in various fields nationwide. This one, focused on telelearning and based in Vancouver, was established in 1995. A network of universities, its principal mission is research about effective telelearning approaches for kindergarten through high school, within postsecondary education, in the workplace and for teachers. In the postsecondary field, for example, Linda Harasim of Simon Fraser University has led a team exploring how people learn best online.

Tom Calvert, who is active in the Tele-Learning Network, is also vice president for research and external affairs at a relatively new institution, the Technical University of British Columbia. Established in 1997, the university enrolled its first students in 1999 and should double its enrollment to 400 students this fall.

While its campus is under construction, the university is temporarily located in Surrey, south of Vancouver, and it offers courses in such fields as information technology and interactive arts. All of its
Virtual learning agreements agree that simply posting lecture notes on the Internet does not constitute an effective online course. A hot topic now and hasn’t peaked yet. You’re going to see places all over the world where innovation is occurring—hotbeds of activity. BC happens to be one. The (San Francisco) Bay Area is another. I look forward to BC being a leader in lifelong learning,” he added.

How effective is distance education? To find out, the TeleLearning Network has been supporting Tony Bates’ research on potential benefits and limitations of investing in online learning. In a 1999 article published in the Canadian Journal of Communication, Bates and associate Silvia Bartolic-Zlomislic concluded that “under the right conditions, online learning can be cost effective and even profit-making. However, financial management, technical support for faculty, allocation of revenues to those units that take the risk, professionalism, and a team approach to course development and delivery are all critical factors for success.”

The researchers looked at three institutions—University of British Columbia, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and a two-year community college. Kwantlen University College in British Columbia. Kwantlen found that it was able to continue offering a creative writing program that otherwise would have been dropped because it did not draw enough on-campus enrollment. It “tapped into a whole new market—single mothers, people with disabilities who were unable to get to campus,” Bates said in an interview about the study.

As for UBC, the research indicated that there had been a number of startup costs, some of them unanticipated. The bookstore, for example, had to figure out how to handle international orders, Bates said. The finance office wasn’t equipped to do international funds transfers. The university had difficulty registering graduate students online, although it could do so for undergraduates. The university staff spent a great deal of time, which translated into money, sorting out these glitches. Now students can register, order books, take courses and pay for them, all online.

Virtually everyone associated with online learning agrees that simply transferring face-to-face lecture notes onto a computer and posting these on the Internet does not constitute an effective online course. The instructor for the Kwantlen creative writing class found that much of the course content came from online discussions and student writing samples that could be shared easily among class participants.

The research found several educational benefits to online learning. The quality of writing improved, and students reported that their computer and time-management skills also improved. In addition, shy students participated more in the classes. “The lack of visual cues allowed the instructor to treat all students in the same manner,” the researchers wrote, and that led to greater participation by all students. Most of all, online discussion allowed students an interaction that they had not had in print-based distance learning.

In summary, this study found that online learning provides the opportunity to reach new markets, particularly lifelong learners; it can be of great value to mature adults trying to balance work, family and study requirements; it allows students to work collaboratively with colleagues across the world; and it gives small-enrollment programs a chance to attract more students.

Bates and Bartolic-Zlomislic cautioned that institutions might need substantial startup funds and should develop new administrative procedures to meet the needs of online students; their faculty members will need time to learn how to use the technology; and their students have to be psychologically and financially able to embrace this method of taking courses.

If an organization “values collaborative learning, increased access for lifelong learners, and the internationalization of the curriculum, then an online program may be of value, even if the costs are the same or slightly more than those for a conventional course,” the researchers concluded. They also warned that “young students without good independent study habits” would find an online course particularly challenging.

Distance education is not universally beloved. It raises the often-debated questions: Who owns the courses—the professors who help create them or the universities for which they are created? Are professors fairly compensated for extra workloads created by the increased pace that the Internet allows? Underlying these questions are concerns about how best to educate people.

One of the most outspoken critics of distance education is David F. Noble, history professor at York University in Toronto. In a series of articles about what he calls “digital diploma mills,” Noble has blasted distance education as “the commodification of higher education,” almost entirely profit-driven in his eyes.

Noble’s articles are posted online at www.communication.ucsd.edu/dl/. In one of them, Noble reminded readers that whenever people recall their educational experiences, “they tend to remember above all not courses or subjects or the information imparted but people, people who changed their minds or their lives, people who made a difference in their developing sense of themselves.” The relationship between people, he wrote, “is central to the educational experience.”

Distance educators, Noble added, “have always insisted that they offer a kind of intimate and individualized instruction not possible in the crowded, competitive environment of the campus...To make their enterprise profitable, however, they have been compelled to reduce their instructional costs to a minimum, thereby undermining their pedagogical promise.”

Noble recently has been involved in a dispute with Simon Fraser University, which recently declined to hire him because its officials said that he provided insufficient references and that there were flaws in the hiring process. Noble has said...
A Town and Gown Library
City joins San Jose State University in collaborative arrangement

By Carl Irving

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

SIX YEARS AFTER San Jose State University President Robert Caret and former San Jose Mayor Susan Hammer first discussed the possibility, an elegant new eight-story library, for both city and campus use, is being built in this city of almost one million people.

The collaborative venture, unprecedented in the United States, is to open in 2003, and 93 percent of the projected $177.5 million cost is already in the bank. Campus and city leaders say most of the barriers and doubts between town and gown have been removed. They speak proudly of a new model for the nation.

“Down the road, this will be a huge national story, about how a city and a major university can come together and create a resource, one that’s open and airy and accessible,” said former Mayor Hammer, who helped to negotiate the deal with San Jose State, a downtown campus with an enrollment of 27,000.

“Lots of people around the country are watching us, to see how it works,” said President Caret. “Professional librarians all over the country think it’s a great idea.”

City and state bond issues will pay most of the cost. San Jose State, oldest of the 23 campuses in the California State University system, is contributing $5 million, and a campus-based campaign hopes to raise another $16.5 million in private donations.

“Susan and I had the right moment in time,” Caret said. “A year earlier or later, and it never would have happened.”

The library is to be a “gateway” between the campus and a future civic center. It will house 1.4 million books, 80 percent of them from the university’s collections. There will be more than 3,000 spaces for computer plug-ins, which will employ the latest technology. These will be designed and installed by experts from Silicon Valley high-tech firms such as Adobe and Cisco.

A distinctive feature will be what Caret called a “tower of light,” a solid wall of glass permitting sunlight throughout each floor, including the basement.

City Librarian Jane Light said sharing its books between two buildings.

“Lots of people around the country are watching us, to see how it works. Professional librarians all over the country think it’s a great idea.”

—San Jose State University President
Robert Caret

Former San Jose Mayor Susan Hammer and San Jose State University President Robert Caret were instrumental in bringing about the new jointly operated library, now under construction. San Jose’s current mayor, Ron Gonzales, is at right.

The facility will mean significant savings, because student and public use are expected to overlap. University students generally go to the campus library between 9 AM and 4 PM, Monday through Thursday, while use of the public library is heaviest after 4 PM and on weekends.

Savings estimates under joint management range as high as 30 percent, as the partners have agreed to share everything from heating and air conditioning costs to staffing and some book and periodical purchases.

Joint operation should be a convenience for San Jose State students, most of whom are commuters and three-quarters of whom work at least part-time. They no longer will have to go to the downtown campus for books they have ordered but can pick them up instead at one of 17 city branch libraries. (There are plans for six more branches.)

The path to construction has not been smooth.

After passage of state and city bond issues, in November and December 1998, it took heavy lobbying by Mayor Hammer and local legislators to secure $86 million from the state, and $70 million from the city for the library. Ever since Hammer and Caret announced the joint project in February 1996, they have had to quell doubts and fears about how this change would affect lives and careers.

City residents worried that burly students would elbow them aside and that a campus sometimes seen as arrogant and aloof might clamp down on public access. Users of the branch libraries had to be reassured repeatedly that the project would not deprive their neighborhoods of books and services.

However, most of the opposition came from San Jose State faculty members. Few doubted the need for new library facilities—but 1994, San Jose’s population had tripled since the opening of the city’s main library, which is squeezed between a large hotel and a convention center. The campus expanded at a similarly rapid rate and, for the past 20 years, has had to divide its books between two buildings.

But the 1996 announcement “caught the faculty by surprise,” said Kenneth Peter, a political science professor who was chairman of the faculty Academic Senate in 1997 and 1998. Opposition began to “solidify” amid concerns that the academic and public missions were irreconcilable.

“Right away it was clear there had to be some separation, and not total merger.”

Many faculty members, especially in the humanities and social sciences, had serious reservations about security and access, fearing theft and carelessness that might threaten collections of irreplaceable books.

Some faculty argued that security gates and inspections were needed, but most ultimately conceded these would be contrary to the nature of public libraries. Faculty proposals for a “duplex” library, with two separate wings, were discouraged by both campus and city officials.

Plans finally moved along with an understanding that the campus collections would be housed on the upper four floors and the city’s on the lower four, but with free public access (with purchase of a $5 city library card) on all floors.

Professor Peter still sees risks in the project but supports it because “a new library was desperately needed. It was quite clear at that time that the (California State University) system was not going to

Patricia Breivik, San Jose State’s library dean, will co-manage the new library with City Librarian Jane Light. Breivik believes the new facility could become a national model of library efficiency.
fund it unless there was some kind of creative arrangement.”

The Academic Senate has been involved in the planning most of the way and has voted approval three times: for planning, for a written joint agreement and for construction.

Peter believes the final agreement contains “measures to safeguard the mission...The university retains control of its

E. Bruce Reynolds, another historian, has fought a losing battle against the project since its inception. “What we’ve done in this deal is effectively give away our library collection,” Reynolds said. “Everybody has access to the same books. I’m very concerned.”

Reynolds thinks a joint reference desk will hinder student and faculty studies and research. But James Schmidt, professor of library science, said such fears should have been laid to rest by surveys which found that librarians for the two systems can work together compatibly.

“The issue isn’t public library users are blue and university library reference users are green,” Schmidt said. “The issue is how to best accommodate the wide variety of queries which all reference users—blue and green—pose. How better than with a large staff and a larger collection?”

Schmidt said students in San Jose’s heavily minority middle schools and high schools “will be introduced to a richer and deeper resource, thus vastly improving their performance and prospects for getting into college.” The campus reflects this population—more than 70 percent of San Jose State students are non-white, and a high percentage are the first in their families to attend college.

Faculty opposition has dwindled to a few in the history and political science departments, President Caret said, because the history department and a member of the joint faculty, said Allison Heisch, who runs the university’s history department, worries that valuable books might be lost as a result of the joint city-campus agreement.

San Jose State faculty member James Schmidt thinks the new library will improve the performance of the city’s middle schools and high schools.

The most important is how, or if, the university will share its vital and irreplaceable books with the public. Another is how much access the public will have to the internet system that now links San Jose State with libraries on some other California campuses.

But campus and city officials are confident these questions will be answered and that the experiment in joint library operation will be successful.

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security and ambience have been assured. He foresees voluntary segregation, with the general public mostly using the lower floors, where recent fiction will be stored.

“We’re not even going to know we’re in the same building,” the president said. The lower floors will have escalators but the top four, where the university books will be shelved, will only have elevators. “As you go up, it becomes more academic,” he said.

The dean of the university library, Patricia Breivik, who will co-manage the operations with city librarian Jane Light, looks forward to generating new and more effective ways of transmitting information, providing what could become a national model of library efficiency.

“When we went to school, we went to the library to find topics the teacher wanted,” said Breivik, who received her doctorate from Columbia University and came to San Jose in 1999 from Wayne State University, in Detroit. “Now students type in a few words and get 300 citations...There’s so much junk out there...We’ve not done a good job at becoming information literates, even though we may be computer literate.”

Some problems still must be resolved. The most important is how, or if, the university will share its valuable and irreplaceable books with the public.

Critics and misgivings notwithstanding, distance/online education doubtless will be a factor in higher education for years to come. Has it peaked? What lies ahead?

Early distance education efforts were basically correspondence courses. Students typically would receive a box of books and other class materials, read the assignments, send in their work and wait for a response from the instructor.

“It’s a ten-year process of change,” Tony Bates said. “The technology changes faster than individuals are able to adapt, and individuals change faster than institutions do.” Universities must respond to change more quickly than they have in the past, he added, noting that their program/approval processes do not move quickly.

Some businesses are competing with universities in the field of for-profit online learning. “The university’s edge over business is its accreditation—its quality control,” Bates said. “If you don’t maintain that, you shoot yourself in the foot. You lose your reputation. Yes, the faculty has to agree to what is asked to do. The senate needs to look at how it’s being done. You have to be true to the process, but you have to find better, slimmer ways” of accomplishing those tasks.

There are some real blocks to development of sound online learning programs at universities, Bates admitted. “When you have a rewards system that focuses more on research than on teaching, why should someone want to innovate in teaching when it’s not rewarded?” he asked. “It will be interesting to see what happens as we lose the older staff. They are the ones that we’ve used to develop

BRITISH COLUMBIA
from page 5

that he was denied a humanities professorship, for which he had been recommended by a faculty committee, because of his anti-technology views.

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Simon Fraser University, founded in 1965, embraced distance learning as part of an effort “to break new ground,” says Joan Collinge, who runs the university’s Centre for Distance Education.

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would be lucrative, Bates said.

Businesses are especially interested in competing to provide corporate training and to sell courses to people interested in lifelong learning. “One of the big areas for universities to look at is continuing professional education,” Bates said. “I think universities will be very foolish to leave that to commercial companies. If they don’t serve that market, they will lose faculty who’ve developed the research for higher salaries to those companies.”

Enough money will flow into this field, Bates believes, and sooner or later big companies will get it right. He predicted that universities have about three or four years before successful businesses develop the quality control necessary to capture the big potential market. “Then I think universities do have to worry,” he said. State universities may feel more pressure than research universities because the latter have the brand name, the expertise to sell, he added. “If your big item is English 100, I would be worried. If you can go to Oxford (online), why take it (from a state university)?”

Freelance writer Carl Irving lives in the San Francisco Bay area.
SAT CAMP
from page 1

future, Schaedler said.

The Whitman camp was unique in that it was solely designed around SAT preparation, a kind of SAT prep course on steroids: three hours or more of instruction each day, plus two or more hours of supervised study. The idea, said Dorfman, was to allow kids to focus exclusively on the SAT for a short period of time, while still leaving most of the summer open for travel or other academic or camping opportunities. Many of the campers already had been abroad or attended other specialty camps before coming to this session at the end of July.

Tiffany, self-assured blond, and one of the few campers in her session who attended public school, understandably was even more excited about the idea of meeting new friends and experiencing dorm life than about enduring five or more hours of SAT instruction and supervised study each day, plus tours of half a dozen nearby colleges. Still, said Tiffany, who had earned a combined score of 940 out of a possible 1600 when she took the test during the day, plus tours of half a dozen nearby

SAT preparatory courses have been around for decades. But now summer camps as well as academically oriented summer schools have begun to incorporate SAT preparation into their curriculum.

camp director Dorfman. “No one is happy

“Competition’s fierce. That’s what it

camps as well as academically oriented summer schools have begun to incorporate SAT preparation into their curriculum.

into the hearts of ambitious teenagers and their parents as S-A-T. (Alternatively, college applicants can elect to take the curricu-

The SAT summer camp, Dorfman said, helps relieve some of that pressure by allowing students to focus exclusively on SAT preparation without having to balance it with academics or extracurricular activities. Kaplan reports that, on average, its students increase their scores by 120 points, and that 28 percent go up 170 points or more.

But you don’t have to have earned a perfect 1600 on your SATs to figure out that until and unless colleges stop using the SAT as part of their application process—and 83 percent of four-year colleges do—the Sheenas of the world will do whatever they can to get a leg up.

“I think this camp is a good thing,” said

“We want to make sure that everyone here—I hate to put it so crassly—gets what they paid for,” said Bill Dorfman, director of the “SAT camp,” which cost $2,500 for ten days.

Reid Sacco, 17, of Lynnfield, Massachu-

revenue has increased more than 85 percent during the past decade. He believes that increase is a direct result of the record-high number of college applicants.

“We don’t want to get ahead of ourselves,” Schaedler said of Kaplan’s college enrollment numbers. But Kaplan’s Chad Schaedler said his company’s pre-college enrollment, which includes SAT and ACT prep, has increased more than 85 percent since 1995-96. “Competition’s fierce. That’s what it comes down to. It’s very difficult to get in to school now,” said Schaedler. “Families are looking for any advantages they can get.”

That may not be fair for low-income kids who can’t afford expensive prep classes, Schaedler acknowledged. But he does not consider that to be his problem or his fault. “I didn’t create the tests. The tests are used for admissions which I have nothing to do with,” he said.
And the disparity goes far beyond who gets to learn a few test-taking strategies. Schaedler said. “If Kaplan were to go away, a child from Scarsdale is, for the most part, still going to get a better education than a kid from a New York City public school.”

Through charitable foundations, Kaplan does offer some classes for economically disadvantaged students and also contracts with public school districts in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Oakland, Los Angeles and Atlanta, among others, that want to offer test-prep classes to their students, Schaedler said.

Test-prep company revenues top $300 million annually, and are growing at an eight to ten percent annual rate.

Such government-sponsored contracts are the best way to try to level out the SAT playing field, said Rebecca Zwick, a professor of education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She would like to see more programs like California’s College Preparation Partnership Program, which provides SAT and ACT coaching to low-income public-school students. The 20-hour course costs a maximum of five dollars, and have dramatically increased the number of vocabulary words students are exposed to and their SAT scores. Tiffany Madsen, an honors student and basketball player, hopes “SAT camp” will help her get into an Ivy League university.

Although most of their time was spent preparing for the SAT, campers did visit several Boston area colleges and universities.

But several campers who were contacted after the camp ended did indeed raise their scores from the first practice test to the third and final one—in one case by 200 points. And, they said, they began to get a sense of what types of college—urban or rural, big or small, high-powered or not—they might be interested in attending.

Was it worth the money? “Hard to judge,” said Dan Tevet, whose score went up 60 points over the course of the ten-day camp. Still, he said, “It was a lot of fun.”

In fact, campers bonded so closely that, with typical teenaged dramatics, several cried when the camp ended, and a number of the campers have stayed in touch via phone and e-mail. Some of them are trying to plan a reunion. “It was an excellent experience,” enthused Tiffany Madsen, whose score increased by 120 points. “I’d do it again in a heartbeat.”

Back home in Everett, Tiffany’s friends had a hard time believing that she’d enjoyed SAT camp. But even if she hadn’t told them about her experiences there, they might have been able to guess that Tiffany hadn’t gone to any ordinary camp when she started sprinkling words like “amicable” and “winsome” into her conversations.

“They were like, ‘What?’” Tiffany said. “I would say a word and tell them what it meant.” The pedantry didn’t go over so well, though. Tiffany has relegated her new vocabulary to her school papers. “I’m not sure my teacher wants me to plan a reunion. ‘It was an excellent experience,’” enthused Tiffany Madsen, whose score increased by 120 points. “I’d do it again in a heartbeat.”

But if she’s still not satisfied with her scores, Tiffany can always sign up for more instruction at a Kaplan, Inc. center or through the company’s online SAT courses—provided, of course, that she can come up with several hundred dollars to pay for it.

Kathy Witkowski is a freelance reporter in Missoula, Montana, and a frequent contributor to National Public Radio.
By Rae Lee Siporin

LOOKING AT THE ISSUE of access to higher education in selective California public institutions over the past few years is a depressing experience. The number of enrolled low-income students has decreased, and all indicators seem to suggest that the situation could even be worsening.

The first point that must be understood is that while institutional size has remained fairly constant, and freshman classes in the most selective institutions have not increased appreciably, the number of high school graduates in California has grown dramatically. This growth, labeled Tidal Wave II, in turn has led to an increased demand for enrollment at all selective campuses, with spillover demand at those campuses which in the past had been able to accommodate all who met published minimums for admission.

As a result, campuses have had to turn away more and more applicants relative to the size of the demand. The impact of this on the lower-income student will become apparent as we look at more of the elements at work in this complex interplay of variables such as demand, preparation, income, quality of performance and institutional size.

As the number of applicants has risen, so too has the desirability of certain campuses. Hence, with a higher percentage of admitted students going on to enroll, many campuses have been able to reduce the number of students they admit in order to achieve their desired enrollment. This situation is especially true at the most selective institutions.

In those cases where institutions want to increase enrollments, the number of admitted students has indeed increased. With higher yields, however, that number has grown less than would be needed to admit all of those interested in attending.

It is important to take into consideration the relationship between the issues of selectivity and access. During the admissions review process, most institutions look carefully at the quality of a student’s academic preparation. This is as it should be; the better the student performs, the more likely it is that the student will be admitted in a high-demand situation.

We know that student performance is correlated highly with the quality of high school preparation. The tenth and 11th grades form the core of colleges’ admissions decisions. In those institutions where the demand is extreme, the academic work undertaken in the senior year is considered also. The better the curriculum in the high school, the better the student’s course choices will be.

Students do not spring full-blown in the tenth grade ready for college preparatory courses. Preparation begins well before the sophomore year in high school. Excellent students come from a long line of good curricular choices and a readiness for college preparation. These are definitely related to parental expectations, which guide and pressure schools into offering the courses that best prepare students for college.

Of course, it also is true that the teachers in high schools with enriched curricula tend to be among the best available. Here again we find the self-fulfilling prophecy: Good teachers and good curricula are the most significant factors in generating well-prepared students.

It does not take a great leap of imagination to realize that where the parental pressure for college preparatory curricula is absent, or where resources are low, or where the problems of gangs and criminal elements exist, or where overcrowding creates multiple tracks or year-round school calendars, proportionately fewer outstanding teachers can be found, less college preparation is available, and greater educational disadvantage reigns. Fewer students from these high schools go on to college at all, let alone to selective institutions where the academic competitiveness of applicants drives up the quality of preparation required for students to be admitted.

A correlation between family income and quality of curricular choices is apparent. A second correlation—between income and scores on standardized admissions tests, most significantly the SAT—is also closely related. The obvious connection between the two is income.

Statistics released by College Board and Educational Testing Service, the author and administrator of the SAT exams, illustrate this correlation in devastating ways. When the element of the student’s ethnicity or race is added, the results are even more disturbing. At highly selective campuses, on average, African American students who come from families with the highest income score below white students from families with the lowest income. The two most critical indicators of a student’s potentiality for success in college—performance on a quality curriculum and standardized test scores—are, on average, going to be lower for the economically disadvantaged student.

When all of this is put together, it should come as no surprise that the number of low-income students in selective institutions is dropping. Further, as costs go up in the selective private schools, those flagship public institutions with lower fees become far more attractive to students who are most likely to be going on to graduate and professional degrees and are facing years of educational bills. This is causing a great shift in the demand at these schools. As a result, the average income of all students seems to be increasing, even in selective public institutions.

Determining the average income of newly enrolled students is difficult, if not impossible. Because students generally are asked to provide family income only when they apply for financial aid, any figures have to come from that group and not the entire class. However, it is reasonably safe to assume that most students who do not apply for aid come from families that are financially better off than those who ask for aid.

Given this assumption, data from just one campus, UCLA, reveals some interesting facts. Comparing figures from 1996-'97—when California voters approved Proposition 209, ending affirmative action in public university admissions—to those from 2000-'01 shows that, while fewer students applied for financial aid, the average annual income of those applying rose well over $15,000 in four years (from $56,350 to $72,100).

Thus, slightly fewer low-income students are being admitted, and those who do gain access come from relatively wealthier families than those who were admitted just four years ago.
years ago. Regardless of whether this represents the normal increase of income over this period or is reflective of the connection between family income and academic quality, the result is the same: a less diverse, and wealthier, student body.

The most economically disadvantaged students in California are finding it more and more necessary to begin their education in the community college system, where fees are considerably lower. However, experience has shown that these students transfer to baccalaureate institutions for completion of their degrees at an infinitesimally low rate.

While financial aid is available at the four year colleges and universities, the competition for places and increases in yield have effectively reduced the number of low-income students who obtain admission. While the rise in income of all students and their families could be at play here, enrollments seem to indicate that the absolute numbers of the lowest-income students—often correlated with underrepresented minorities and students of color—are less than they have been in the recent past. Enlightened colleges and universities do look beyond the numbers in their admissions procedures. They include elements of disadvantage, personal circumstances, hardships, special talents and responses to adversity as part of the review and decision-making process. But while considering these factors is important in helping to diversify the student body, many white or Asian students also have a claim for admissions on the basis of having overcome adversity or having special talents to offer.

In the days of affirmative action in California, it was possible to be sure that most underrepresented students with excellent preparation were admitted. Now, with increased demand and increased quality of preparation from most applicants, that is no longer possible. At the other end of the spectrum, lower-income students who offer lower academic strengths but still meet basic minimums have begun to present somewhat higher incomes in recent years and, in the case of California, large numbers of recent immigrant Asian American students with outstanding academic records.

No amount of expanding criteria can ensure diversity if the applicant pool does not reflect that diversity in all aspects. The total number of very able Asian and white students far exceeds the number of underrepresented minority applicants. For example, enrollments for the University of California system in fall 1999 were 29.2 percent Asian American, second only to whites (43.95 percent). UCLA figures for fall 2000 show an increase in Asian American enrollment to more than 36 percent: There were 9,780 white students, 8,064 Asian American students but only 4,472 total underrepresented students.

The number of middle- to high-income applicants is much larger than the number of low-income applicants. The performance of higher-income students outstrips that of lower-income students. The desire to attend is no more or less among any category of race, income level or ethnicity. Regardless of how much an institution wishes to ensure diversity of representation in all categories of interest, unless it is possible to give more weight to those categories, only a limited range of diversity will be achieved.

Rae Lee Siporin was director of undergraduate admissions and relations with schools at UCLA from 1979 to August 2001. She is now director emerita.

A recent report by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, “AASCU Special Report: State Fiscal Conditions,” warned that:

A number of indicators reveal that while residents are more affluent than ever before and state governments are spending more than ever before, the portion of state funds allocated to colleges and universities has not recovered the levels posted before the recession of 1990–92. The question of fiscal priority is an increasingly important one, given that institutions in many states will face unprecedented demands for higher education access at the same time that demands in other areas, especially those related to health care, are likely to grow. As the competition for state resources intensifies, the pressure on institutions to raise revenues via tuition and other means will undoubtedly mount, raising a number of difficult questions for state policymakers.

A recent survey conducted by the National Governors Association and National Association of State Budget Officers found that the budgets proposed by governors nationwide for the 2001–02 fiscal year included increases in spending of only 3.6 percent, less than half of the increase proposed the previous year. Another survey conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures found that a third of the states had budget deficits in 2001, and appropriations in the 2002 fiscal year are expected to grow only 2.3 percent, less than the expected rate of inflation.

The National Governors Association report also indicated that eleven states were forced to enact mid-year budget cuts in fiscal 2001 (only one state had done so the previous year). These cuts had a direct impact on higher education in at least two states. Governor Ronnie Musgrove of Mississippi announced in February that he was reducing the state’s spending on higher education by five percent, or $35 million, through the end of the state’s...
There is a very strong relationship between states’ willingness to appropriate funds for higher education and the rate at which public colleges and universities increase their tuition rates. From 1991 to 1994, when states cut real spending on higher education during the last recession, the average annual increase in tuition averaged more than eight percent nationally (adjusted for inflation) in both public four-year institutions and community colleges. Since 1994, when state expenditures have recovered, tuition increases in both sectors have averaged less than 2.5 percent annually. Over the last decade, there is a very strong negative correlation between these two measures—the higher the rate of increase in appropriations for higher education each year, the lower is the average tuition increase.

The budget cuts in 2001 and slower growth of 2002 state budgets have forced higher education institutions to respond in a predictable manner. Tuition increases for the 2001-2002 academic year at many institutions have returned to the double-digit levels last experienced in the early 1990s. Institutions such as the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), University of Minnesota (Twin Cities) and University of Mississippi all implemented increases in excess of ten percent this year. Clemson University increased tuition 25 percent this year; trustees defended the decision in part by citing tuition levels that historically had been lower than those in neighboring states.

Michigan presents one interesting case study. The state has a tuition tax credit which allows parents or independent students to claim a credit against state income taxes of eight percent of tuition and fees, up to a maximum of $375. However, to be eligible for the credit, students have to attend a public or private institution in the state that agrees to increase tuition the next year at no more than the rate of inflation. In 1996, students at ten of the state’s 15 public four-year institutions were eligible for the tuition tax credits; by 2001 only one of these institutions met the maximum tuition increase requirement.

Michigan State University, the state’s largest institution, implemented a well-publicized “tuition guarantee” in 1994 to hold the annual tuition increase to the rate of inflation or less. Since then, tuition increases at Michigan State averaged 2.8 percent annually, compared to 4.6 percent at the other four-year institutions in the state. This year, however, Michigan State’s guarantee was abandoned, as tuition increased nine percent. Other tuition increases in the state this year included 12 percent at Eastern Michigan University, 20 percent at Michigan Technological University, and 6.5 percent at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Overall, the average tuition increase in the state among its four-year institutions was in excess of ten percent.

The major explanation for the large increases provided by the colleges and universities was the small expected increase in Michigan’s higher education appropriation for the year (as of the early fall, the higher education budget had not yet been set for the fiscal year beginning October 1). Indications were that the higher education budget would be only 1.5 percent above the previous year’s level, down from an average increase of approximately five percent annually over the previous three years. Michigan State Trustee Donald Nugent said, “Raising tuition is the only way to make up for low increases from the state.” Paul Courant, associate provost at the University of Michigan, said, “We have worked hard to restrain our tuition increase despite the difficult state funding environment and rapidly rising costs of things such as utilities, employee benefits and information technology.”

Michigan and other states have experienced large tuition increases, there are some silver linings. In California, which has the country’s largest public higher education system, spending on higher education will increase six percent this year (following a 12 percent boost last year). Included in this amount is an increase of almost 28 percent in student aid spending in support of last year’s large expansion of the CalGrant program.

The state’s commitment to higher education is especially noteworthy given that total state expenditures are expected to increase only 1.7 percent this fiscal year. California’s commitment to continue to increase funding for the state’s systems of higher education, which suffered unprecedented cuts in the recession of the early 1990s, has allowed the University of California and California State University systems to keep student fees the same, or cut them, every year since 1994.

Are the trends in Michigan and other states an indication that we are returning to conditions we experienced a decade ago? Or is the good news out of California this year an indication that there may be at least some parts of the country that will weather an economic downturn? Only time will tell for sure. But Mr. Berra provides sage advice in the form of the title of his recent book: “When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take it!” State policymakers face such a fork, and have a choice to make. One option is to slash state support for higher education, leading us back to an era of large tuition increases, cuts in services and constraints on enrollment at a time when demand for higher education will be increasing. The other option is to maintain the state’s commitment to public colleges and universities, recognizing the potential for higher education to contribute to economic growth and recovery. It is up to those policymakers—governors and legislators alike—to choose the right path.

__Donald E. Heller is an assistant professor of education at the University of Michigan.__

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From Atkinson’s point of view, the SAT II “begins to approximate…an appropriate test for UC applicants who want to eliminate the use of the SAT I: Reasoning Test—the test we used to know as the Scholastic Aptitude Test—in UC admissions. He recommended that tests be developed which are directly tied to the college prep courses required of UC applicants. In the short term, he proposed an increased role for the SAT II in admissions decisions.

While the SAT I focuses on general verbal and mathematical skills, the SAT II: Subject Tests (formerly the College Board Achievement Tests) are intended to assess high school students’ knowledge in particular areas. More than 20 SAT II tests are available, including writing, American History, math, physics, Spanish and Chinese. Like the SAT I, the SAT II exams are primarily multiple-choice, although the writing test does include an essay.

UC applicants must take the SAT II math and writing tests, as well as a third test of their own choosing. Currently, these three SAT II scores combined count twice as much as the SAT I in determining eligibility for admission to the UC system. (Each UC campus imposes its own individual admissions criteria as well.) From Atkinson’s point of view, the SAT II “begins to approximate...an appropriate test for UC and other American universities since it tests students on specific subject areas that are well defined and readily described.” A preliminary report from the UC Office of the President labels the SAT II “a fairer test for use in UC admissions than the SAT I.”

Any mechanism for sorting individuals inevitably attracts criticism, however, and now that an expansion of its role is being considered, the SAT II is drawing fire. SAT II scores, like SAT I results, show large gaps among ethnic groups, and critics point out that performance on subject-area tests may be especially vulnerable to differences in educational quality.

But it is the SAT II language tests that are drawing the most attention. Native speakers of the languages included in the SAT II program have an opportunity to boost their chances of admission by choosing a language test as their third SAT II. This could benefit Latinos, a severely underrepresented group in academia, as well as Asian Americans. But what about African Americans, who often attend poor schools and typically can not reap the second-language advantage? UC Regent Ward Connerly, best known as father of
California’s Proposition 209, which banned public-sector affirmative action, told the San Francisco Chronicle recently that putting a heavy emphasis on the SAT II disadvantages black students. “It seems to me that we really have built in a cultural bias,” he said.

Before UC decides whether to eliminate the SAT I and grant a correspondingly larger role to the SAT II, it may be useful to take a closer look at two key issues. First, what would be the effect of such a move on the composition of the freshman class? Second, what are the implications of using a (non-English) language test in admissions decisions? How would a greater role for the SAT II affect freshman class composition?

Fortunately, we can do more than conjecture about the relationship between the SAT I and the SAT II. Two recent analyses—one by the UC Office of the President and one by the College Board—found a very strong association (a correlation of .84) between the SAT I (verbal and math combined) and the SAT II (a composite of all SAT IIs taken by the applicant).

The College Board study, by Brent Bridgeman, Nancy Burton and Frederick Cline, used data from 14,000 students at ten colleges, including four UC campuses, to compare the effects of implementing various admissions criteria. High school grades were used in combination with either SAT I or SAT II scores to select the top two-thirds of candidates, who constituted the hypothetical freshman classes. (Although the admissions criteria were applied to students who were, in fact, already enrolled in college, the analyses are nevertheless informative about the effects of alternative screening processes.)

An admissions model that used SAT I scores was compared to a model that used scores on all SAT IIs taken by each candidate. (Both models also included high school grades. All test scores received equal weight, and grades received as much weight as all test scores combined.) For 86 percent of the students, admissions decisions were determined by either SAT I or SAT II scores. Among these students, there was little difference in the matching classes, they could have an advantage from a public-relations standpoint. After all, UC President Atkinson opposes the SAT I partly because it is perceived as unfair and is viewed as being “akin to an IQ test.” On the down side, the SAT II exams are not tailored to the curriculum of any particular school district and will inevitably include material that is not taught—or is poorly taught—in some schools. This potential source of inequity is sure to draw more attention if the prominence of the SAT II is increased.

... should language tests be used in admissions decisions?

In the College Board study using the SAT II Spanish test in admissions decisions was found to increase the percentage of Latinos in the freshman class. (No parallel effect occurred for Asian Americans, but only eight percent took Asian language tests, not surprisingly, the overlapping “freshman classes” produced by each model were very similar in terms of average freshman grades and ethnic composition. The SAT II model yielded a class with a slightly greater percentage of Latino students (eight percent versus 6.3 percent), and a slightly smaller percentage of Asian American and white students, than the SAT I model. The percentage of African American students was the same for both models (1.6 percent).)

The finding that the SAT I and SAT II produce similar freshman classes is not without precedent. In their 1988 book, The Case Against the SAT, James Crouse and Dale Trusheim compared admissions models involving the SAT I and the SAT II (under its earlier name), and concluded that “in most colleges, scores on ETS’s achievement tests are viewed as being “akin to an IQ test.” On the down side, the SAT II exams are not tailored to the curriculum of any particular school district and will inevitably include material that is not taught—or is poorly taught—in some schools. This potential source of inequity is sure to draw more attention if the prominence of the SAT II is increased.

... SAT II Pros and Cons

Let’s consider what we know about the pros and cons of eliminating the SAT I in favor of a greater role for the SAT II.

• First, because the tests are closely related, a heavier reliance on the SAT II is unlikely to have much impact on the academic competence and diversity of the freshman class, or on the score disparities among ethnic groups.

• Second, exams that have demonstrable ties to school learning are often considered more equitable than “aptitude” tests, so even if they don’t help colleges to pick better entering classes, they could have an advantage from a public-relations standpoint. After all, UC President Atkinson opposes the SAT I partly because it is perceived as unfair and is viewed as being “akin to an IQ test.” On the down side, the SAT II exams are not tailored to the curriculum of any particular school district and will inevitably include material that is not taught—or is poorly taught—in some schools. This potential source of inequity is sure to draw more attention if the prominence of the SAT II is increased.

• Third, the inclusion of language tests in admissions criteria needs to be evaluated carefully. Critics have suggested that this strategy is intended as a backdoor affirmative action measure; its fairness and effectiveness for this purpose are doubtful. But if UC considers the recruitment of a bilingual freshman class to be valuable in itself, then including these tests is justifiable.

• Finally, another rationale for relying on subject-based admissions tests is that it may improve classroom teaching. Ideally, if admissions tests focused on course content, the much-deplored practice of “teaching to the test” could become indistinguishable from just plain teaching. This is perhaps the most compelling argument in favor of tests like the SAT II.

... What does the College Board study say about the academic success of Latino students selected with and without using Spanish test scores?

An analysis that focused on Latino students who took the Spanish test revealed that those selected using the “SAT II with Spanish test” model were less likely to receive freshman GPAs of at least 2.5 (the researchers’ definition of academic success) than those selected using the SAT I model (71 percent versus 82 percent). The “SAT II without Spanish test” model yielded an intermediate success rate of 76 percent. (This figure was derived by combining the authors’ results for Mexican American and “Other Latino” students.)

Why would inclusion of the Spanish test in the screening criteria yield a lower success rate for the admitted students? The likely reason is that most Latino students who took the Spanish test learned Spanish at home, rather than through formal academic training. Skills acquired at home, obviously, are no less valuable than skills acquired at school. But when a language is learned in the natural course of family interaction, skill in that language is less informative about students’ academic skills and therefore less useful in predicting subsequent academic success.

An interesting irony emerges in considering the role of language tests in the Atkinson proposal. On one hand, the SAT II is described as more equitable than the SAT I because it focuses on content that is learned in school. On the other hand, students who take tests in their native languages are rewarded for knowing material that they did not learn in the classroom, material that is instead a part of their culture. This situation is oddly reminiscent of the familiar claim that white middle-class students have a built-in advantage on standardized tests because their own culture is ingrained in the tests.

Of course, using language tests in admissions may nevertheless be a good thing. First of all, many SAT I takers have learned second languages in the classroom. In any case, maximization of the expected grades of the freshman class should certainly not be the sole purpose of an admissions policy. According to UC Provost King, “UC faculty has deemed mastery of a second language to be an important skill for college-bound students.” Indeed, bilingual students can enrich the college environment, and a policy that rewards bilingualism can encourage second-language learning, which is useful in many careers and in community service.

The SAT II model yielded a class with a slightly greater percentage of Latino students, and a slightly smaller percentage of Asian American and white students, than the SAT I model.

When a language is learned in the natural course of family interaction, skill in that language is less informative about students’ academic skills and therefore less useful in predicting subsequent academic success.

Rebecca Zwick is a professor of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
their courses on campus and at a distance, so they compete with Athabasca, whose mandate is limited to distance education. Most of those who do offer distance education, Abrioux said, tend to focus on what they consider profit-making subjects such as business and health.

This year about 250 of the 529 people receiving Athabasca degrees attended the convocation. It is not uncommon for a distance-education graduate to have taken six to ten years to finish a degree.

**Athabasca students can communicate with their tutors by e-mail, attaching their assignments and having them returned through the Internet.**

One of those finishing in considerably less time—two and a half years—was 31-year-old Weby Mograhbi of Lac La Biche, Alberta. She attended the convocation with her husband, Kamel, three children (aged four to eight) and her sister, a high school teacher who constantly prodded her to stay on schedule with her coursework. Mograhbi fits one of the classic profiles of a distance learning student: a mom who wants to be at home with a young family and wants to earn a degree at the same time. Two-thirds of Athabasca’s undergraduates are women.

A psychology major who received her bachelor’s degree in June, Mograhbi liked working at her own pace. She could be with her children during the day, taking them to ballet class or wherever else they needed to go, doing the laundry, making lunches, then complete her classwork every night from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. “I never allowed this to take away from my family,” she said. “If this didn’t work for my family, it didn’t work for me.”

Mograhbi works part-time at a residential treatment center for troubled teenagers and also has helped with remedial reading at a local elementary school. “I didn’t sit in a bubble for years and never look up,” she said of the period during which she earned her degree. She did, however, make a big push at the end, finishing ten courses in the last eight weeks of the spring semester, six of which were already in progress. She completed her last course needed to graduate in 12 days.

Mograhbi wants to be a high school counselor, and this fall she starts work on education courses toward that goal—again online, this time through the University of Alberta. Her husband, who owns a Tire Craft shop, bought her a new computer when she started, and she never has had a problem with it. “That’s my best friend,” Weby said of the machine through which she would receive her assignments, turn them in and learn how she fared.

Distance education isn’t for everyone. More mature students, people with jobs or families, see the advantage. But people who need face-to-face contact and deadlines may not do as well. As hap Tuenman, president of the Open Learning Agency, said, “Distance education is not the ideal way to educate an 18-year-old. They need to go to a campus.” There is, after all, more to a college than its courses.

Anyone 18 or older can take courses at Athabasca, with or without a high school diploma. Students can take either individualized “home-study” courses, or group classes, sometimes referred to as “paced study.” A typical home-study course package might include a student manual, study guide (which is required reading), textbooks, CD-ROMs, audiocassettes or videotapes, and home-lab kits where relevant. Paced study classes, which may be preferred by students who like the discipline of a schedule, include some business courses in which students do group assignments and engage in online discussion forums, with a set time table.

The important thing to remember, most distance learning providers agree, is that it is not sufficient for a professor simply to put lecture notes online; such courses are not very good.

Generally speaking, each Athabasca student has a tutor for each class and can contact him or her by e-mail or by toll-free phone line if they live in Canada or the United States. For example, at any one time President Dominique Abrioux tutors fifteen students who are enrolled in an introductory French course, and he does that no matter where he is traveling. One Monday last spring, Abrioux conducted an exam on language proficiency by telephone from his hotel room in Vancouver, where he was attending the World Education Market exhibition. Some of the students he tutors know Abrioux is the university president; some do not.

The university has about 400 tutors and more than 100 tenured faculty members. The tutors live in Alberta, but graduate tutors (usually called adjunct faculty or mentors) are more dispersed across Canada. Athabasca draws on professors at other universities as well as its own faculty to design the courses.

Some courses require participation in online conferences with other students. Students also can communicate with their tutors by e-mail, attaching their assignments and having them returned through the Internet. There may be online quizzes as well. Students can check their grades, use the library and find help with problems from the student support system—all online.

That support system offers a primer, for example, on “mastering exam anxiety.” Students can choose whether to take courses by mail and telephone or online. “We consciously took the position that we were not going to disenfranchise people because they didn’t have the technology,” said Judith Hughes, Athabasca’s vice president for student services. About 15 percent of Athabasca’s students do not have Internet access.

Almost all of the individualized courses have midterm and final examinations. Students usually take the exams at a nearby community college or other educational center so that they can be supervised. Although there are some online exams, most must be proctored. Students who are not near any college nominate someone, with the approval of the university, to monitor the exam. The university tries to ensure that students need drive no more than 100 kilometers—or 60 miles—to an exam site.

Athabasca also has learning centers in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta’s largest cities, where many of the group-study courses are offered for students who want the discipline of a schedule. Students also can take these courses through collaborating institutions across Canada. If they are not able to attend the classroom physically, the students may be able to participate through teleconferencing or videoconferencing. These classes usually begin in September and January and last 13 or 26 weeks with one three-hour session per week. Many of the higher enrollment classes, such as introductory statistics and introduction to accounting, are offered in this fashion.

Some subjects are harder to handle online than others. The sciences are more difficult and more costly to offer,
especially lab sciences. Athabasca’s science faculty enables students to do physics experiments in their own homes by using a combination of commercial equipment and some developed by the university. Students borrow from the distance education library a small kit containing almost everything needed to set up an experiment, do measurements and analyze the data. The faculty also are working on simulated and digital video experiments to help students set up the experiments and understand the concepts.

Since 1975 Athabasca has offered classes on First Nations reserves (which in the United States would be called Indian reservations). All the courses needed for a bachelor’s degree can be taken from instructors who travel to the reserves. The Blue Quills First Nations College, located about 220 miles from Athabasca, is on a Cree reserve with no nearby university. Twelve students received degrees there in June. Athabasca operates this portion of its distance education program because it feels it has “a mandate to serve people typically underrepresented in higher education,” said Judith Hughes.

Athabasca’s catalog lists 460 undergraduate courses for credit, ranging from Accounting to Women’s Studies. Four out of five undergraduates take their courses on an individualized basis. There are also several master’s degree programs, including business administration, health studies, and counseling. In 1994 Athabasca started offering a master’s degree in distance education because a number of teachers wanted to move into this field and needed instruction about how to do it.

Kathy Elliot, who lives in the Yukon Territory, was among the first group of students to enroll in the distance education masters’ program. She completed her degree in seven years, working on it part time while leading wilderness trips in the summer and training park rangers in emergency care in remote areas in the other months. Elliot wanted to learn more about distance education because the Yukon is planning and deploying information technology now, and she would like to work as a consultant to help ensure that it is planned well and that people who already might have difficulty gaining access to education and technology aren’t left even further behind.

Distance education also allowed Elliot to “fit study into my life rather than change my life to study,” she said. She enjoyed her classes’ asynchronous conferences—that is, online conferences in which students could post their questions, responses and other comments within a particular time period but on their own schedule within that period. In contrast to what might happen in a traditional classroom, these online conferences “equalized the playing field. There wasn’t the opportunity for one person to dominate the conversation,” Elliot said. With an online course, she found that people pondered what they were going to write and gave more considered responses than they would in a traditional classroom. “It’s less off-the-cuff,” she said.

Claire Young of Cochrane, Alberta, who received a bachelor’s degree in June, has been a student long enough to see the major shift in distance learning delivery from mail and the telephone to the Internet. She started working on her degree in the 1980s. (She also raised her two teenagers and helped 25 foster children in the meantime.) In those earlier days, the university would mail out a box with all the classroom material, assignments included, and students would work through it at their own pace but within an overall time frame. They had to rely on mail service to submit assignments and receive corrections.

“You’d send the material in and it would be several weeks before you knew how you’d done,” Young said. “By the time you got the results back, you’d forgotten what you’d done. The Internet is fabulous, how fast it is. You can find out that day what you did wrong and then work on it.”

“You have to maintain student interest,” said Dominique Abrioux, “and it was hard in the old mode.” Offering distance education online eliminates that downtime. It also provides better access to resources such as the library. “You used to have to phone the library, and the librarian would find your materials. The Internet is allowing the learner to develop the skills to search for information,” Abrioux added. “In the old way, they weren’t getting the full learning experience. Part of learning is learning how to learn.”

Using the Internet also has allowed distance learning institutions to produce “learner-centric activities” that require students to work together, something that the older methods of distance education did not facilitate. The masters of business administration programs, for example, all have modules requiring group projects. Students who may be working together on a company’s marketing plan or some other business project make their contributions online—in comparison to a more traditional MBA program, in which they might get together at a campus coffee shop or in a study alcove.

Debby Carlson of Edmonton, who also earned an MBA in June, found that the level of debate online with her fellow students was excellent. “People think about what they say before they write it down. Often you don’t get real Triple-A people in some traditional classes but everyone in this program was ‘a real keen-er,’” she said. (A “keener” is sharp, aggressive and goal-driven.)

Carlson was no exception. She is a member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and its official opposition leader, as well as the mother of two teenagers. When the legislature is in session, it’s an 80- to 90-hour-a-week job. “It was a challenge,” she said about the process of earning her degree. She remembered once doing her homework on the assembly floor during an historic debate on privatizing the province’s health care.

Formerly a business and financial planning consultant, Carlson had taken night courses in accounting at the University of Alberta. Asked the difference between that somewhat traditional setting and online learning, she said, “Having a set classroom time doesn’t necessarily mean you’re making the best use of the time. A lot of time gets wasted in idle chat. There are some people who take over the conversation. And sometimes you have a professor who veers off the course material.”

As for the drawbacks of taking courses online, Carlson said that “you miss the strong ties you might gain in another program, contacts that are stepladders to future ties, the networking…Being in politics, I know how important these networks are. So I may have missed that, but the benefits at my age and at my stage far outweighed that.”

At least half the undergraduates who register for Athabasca courses are “visiting students,” that is, they are taking just a few courses or filling in courses they need at other universities but cannot conveniently obtain. These students like the flexibility of taking courses through Athabasca. President Abrioux said. “If the course is full at their university, ours never is.”

Weby Mograhbi was able to earn a psychology degree from Athabasca over the Internet, while staying home with her husband, Kamel, and their three children (left to right), Muhammad, Manal and Eman.

“The Internet is allowing the learner to develop the skills to search for information.
Part of learning is learning how to learn.”
—ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT DOMINIQUE ABIROUX

Traditional universities must spend money on bricks and mortar, but Athabasca’s budget is heavy on student support services.

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Credit for all Athabasca courses is fully transferable. All of the university’s graduate students, however, are seeking Athabasca degrees. A three-credit course costs $476 for Albertans and $546 for out-of-province students. Half of Athabasca students live in Alberta, with seven percent from outside Canada.

Sixty percent of those who start courses complete them successfully, a rate that Judith Hughes considers high for distance education students. “That’s because of the course design,” she said. “The materials are well designed.” Athabasca also prides itself on its counseling and advising and study skills assistance. “Up front we encourage prospective students to go through a readiness check” to see if distance learning would work for them, Hughes explained.

Granting students extensions to complete course work also helps. Students have six months to finish individualized courses, but may apply for several extensions. Many do just that. “Most of the students are adults, and we know life happens!” Hughes said. “They have a baby, somebody dies, they move or are posted somewhere new. We try to provide as much opportunity to succeed as possible.”

In surveys to determine why people didn’t finish a course, she said, Athabasca has learned that “it almost always has nothing to do with us.”

Despite its surging growth—enrollment has more than doubled since 1993-’94—Athabasca is receiving only about 30 percent of its annual budget from the provincial government now, contrasted with 50 percent then. In an effort to balance its budget several years ago, the government cut spending on postsecondary education 21 percent over three years.

While some universities raised tuition to offset the loss of funds, Athabasca froze its tuition for three years, resulting in a real.

explanation, the people enrolled in it are already in the workforce and are comparatively well off. That is not necessarily the case with undergraduates, and the university is wrestling with how to meet the demand without substantially raising tuition. It’s considered an open university, Abrioux added, and “being open means not refusing entry.”

Traditional universities must spend money on bricks and mortar, but Athabasca’s budget is heavy on student support services. “The expectation is for ‘24-7’ (around-the-clock) service,” Abrioux said. “We have to adapt to the commercial idea of service. This is our only business.”

That in turn puts more pressure on tutors to be responsive. Some have dropped by the wayside. In general, though, tutors seem remarkably loyal to Athabasca, averaging 13 years with the university. “They were hired in a different work environment,” the president said. “Part-timers were quite happy to be available for two hours once a week and do the grading. That’s not what we need now.”

Kathy Williams, an Athabasca tutor in literature and German courses since 1976, said that tutors are expected to set aside three hours of contact time a week for each group of 36 students. “I get a lot more e-mail correspondence than I do telephone calls,” she said. Williams has regular times during each week in which she handles calls and e-mails—the distance education version of on-campus office hours. Tutors also are expected to respond to students’ inquiries within two working days.

Williams has a master’s degree in German from the University of Calgary and runs a pottery with her husband when she isn’t tutoring. She also co-chairs local 3911 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents the tutors and has a collective bargaining agreement with the university (although under Alberta law the union cannot strike). She said that as tutors’ workload shifted, the university at first “did not have a very good record of consulting with us.” It’s getting better now, she said, as everyone wrestles with the effects of technological change.

Athabasca University soon will seek American accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, hoping to sign up more students from the United States. “Toward this end, the university is making many more global ties.”

One of its most strategic partnerships is with the University of Monterrey in Mexico. Monterrey wants to ensure that its students develop online skills, perfect their English and gain international experience. It is steering its business students to e-learning courses. Abrioux said that the partnership also “helps us build international experience for our own students” because they take group classes with the Monterrey students. Athabasca also has a partnership with a program in Jamaica through which practicing teachers who have two-year certificates enroll in the university’s distance education courses to help them receive their undergraduate degrees. That way, they don’t have to leave their homes or jobs to complete a degree.

Abrioux said that unless a university like Athabasca globalizes its programs, “ten years down the road, your domestic market is at risk.” Learners can choose from a wide range of options, he said, and enrollment will flow toward an institution that has a global brand. If the best in traditional higher education—Harvard, for example—went fully online as Athabasca has done, “who would come to Athabasca?” he asked rhetorically.

“In online education, you are much more vulnerable because you don’t have a protected region that you serve,” Abrioux said, referring to an area in which, say, 60 or 70 percent of students live and attend a traditional campus because they can’t or won’t go farther from home. “Everybody who comes to us could go anywhere,” he added. “Leadership on a global scale is important for us.”

Online educators also face the challenge of changing expectations. Historically, Abrioux said, there was no expectation in distance education that there would be significant communication between the learners and the staff. With the introduction of computers and the Internet, students now expect such interaction, and fairly so, Abrioux said. “So the pedagogy has to change. That costs money. Interactions are only useful if they are well designed and moderated,” he added. How universities and professors manage these changes, especially as enrollments increase, will determine who prospers and who does not, who fulfills the mission of access and who does not.

For a long time, distance educators were defensive and did not like to be.

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