

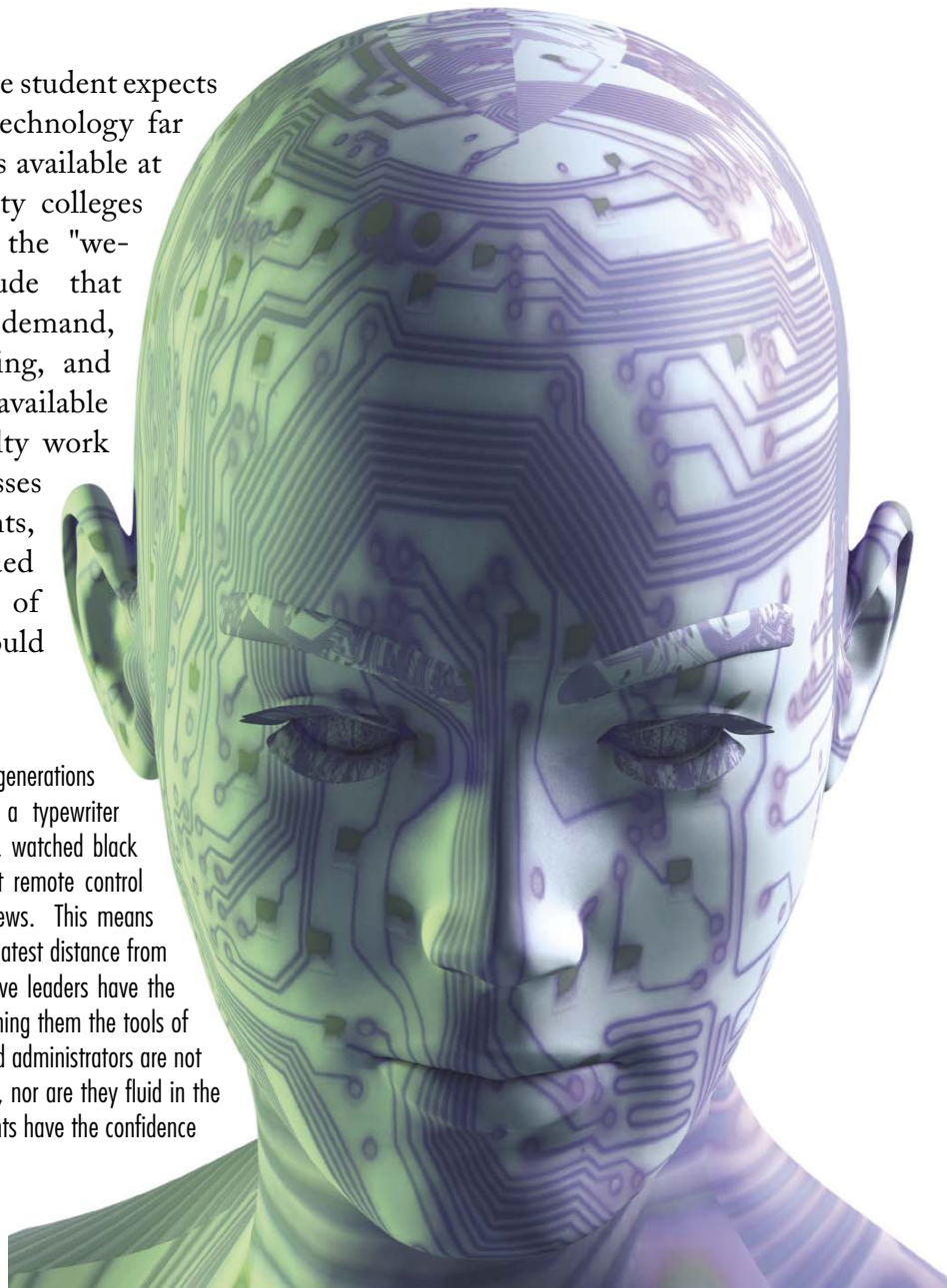
Crossing the Digital Divide – Understanding and Engaging 21st Century Students

an article by Rachel Winston

The 21st Century college student expects innovative approaches to technology far more advanced than what is available at many California community colleges in 2007. Surprising is the "we-want-it-all NOW" attitude that technology should be on demand, powerful, always functioning, and seamless, with lectures available online. While many faculty work hard to make their classes readily accessible for students, there remains the continued notion that, with the use of technology, education should be made easier.

Faculty, two and sometimes three generations away from their students, tapped on a typewriter (some of which were not even electric), watched black and white television sets (often without remote control access), and listened to the radio for news. This means that senior decision-makers are at the greatest distance from the students of today. Few administrative leaders have the "luxury" of having a child at home, teaching them the tools of this new age. Many faculty members and administrators are not fluent in the lexicon of digital technology, nor are they fluid in the utilization of digital tools, yet their students have the confidence of a native in this environment.

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Taken from the students themselves through conversation, blog submissions and articles, here are just a few of their requests of colleges and faculty members. Where does *your* college stand on this generation's desires, and which ones are reasonable?

Professors should be computer and technology literate. Blogs are riddled with comments about professors who are not aware of current technology and cannot use the available resources.

Attending class should be optional. Students should be able to attend if they feel that they can get something valuable from the lecture, and not attend if they have conflicts, appointments, or think the professor is uninteresting. Professors could easily post their lecture, handouts, slides, or video of the class on their website to be viewed later for students who do not attend class, or viewed again before an exam as a refresher.

All campuses should be wireless. Students who have laptops should be able to bring them to class to take notes if there is something important to record, send e-mails if there is an urgent reply requested, or do homework or play interactive games if the professor is boring.

Data should be backed up by the college. If information is stored on the college server in a college account, students would like to retrieve their work at any time without the worry of loss of information, viruses, or corruption.

Design, music, computation, and interactive learning software should be provided on the college server. Since the software is costly, students feel that they should not be required to purchase their own.

Computer shut downs or access problems should be fixed immediately.

If employers want students capable of using multimedia, Palm Pilots, computer software, and creating Web sites, then classes should be offered in each of these areas.

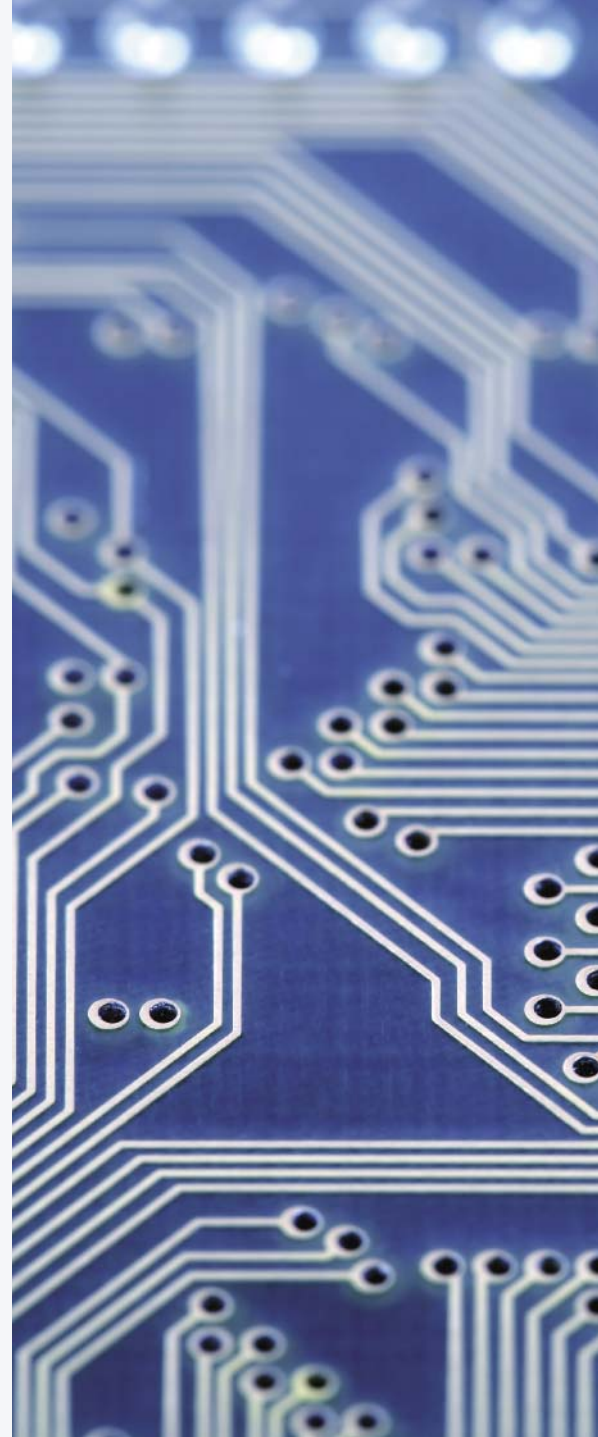
Colleges should have a rating system for professors so that students can learn more about the teachers rather than relying on the random comments put on RateMyProfessors.com. Evaluations, syllabi, or other information should be available to students before they register for class.

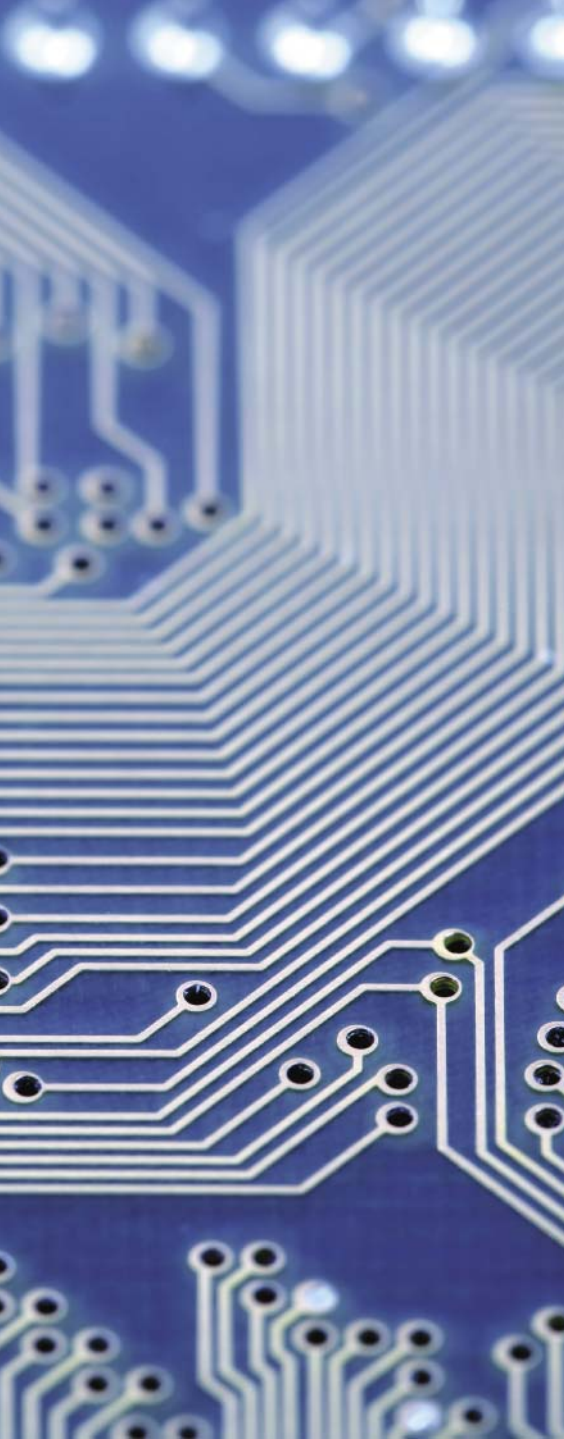
FaceBook/MySpace type networking communities should be established so that students can post their profile, picture, and classes, and communicate between one another. In this way, students can have access to e-mail and instant messenger (IM) accounts of other students in their classes, so they can work together on projects, get handouts, or lecture notes from a class they missed.

Text messages should be sent to each student from the college or professor when a class is cancelled. Text message reminders should be provided for assignments, papers, quizzes, or exams. Also, in large lecture halls, students want to text questions to the professor and have them respond during class.

Student expectations are high. This trend is not likely to subside. We should consider what is reasonable for each college, while also discussing the student responsibilities. Furthermore, technology is not a panacea. In fact, without support staff in the classroom, technology often interferes with the dynamic, interactive classroom environment, resulting in more time spent manipulating or adjusting the technology and less actual lecture time. Support staff is one option, but not one readily accepted by college funding allocations.

Another avenue is for the Legislature to provide sustained Professional Development funds to train faculty who want to learn podcasting, vodcasting, MySpace, FaceBook, YouTube,





none of our faculty attended college when there was an Internet.

Some faculty members consider making a slide and putting it on screen, or putting up a PowerPoint lecture an indication that they are using technology; they then read from the slides rather than communicating directly with the class. According to Marc Prensky in the article, "Digital Natives Digital Immigrants," "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach." He makes a strong case that most of our faculty are digital immigrants, yet our students are digital natives who have lived their life surrounded by file sharing, text messaging, music exchanging, and a complete digital immersion. Digital immigrants manage in the world and have adapted to the environment but are likely to have a digital "accent, that is, their foot in the past." Marc Prensky explains, "our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language."

Digital natives have different thinking patterns. They pursue education with different needs than those who were college educated in the 60s and 70s. Many of our incoming students gather random information, multitask on various levels, and often have trouble in the step-by-step methodological approaches of the past. No wonder those of us who are children of Depression era parents and Korean/World War II veterans, with a vastly different work ethic, find today's students counter to their mindset. Faculty appear to them as foreigners in this new high speed, fast-communicating world. Those faculty who choose to migrate into this digital generation must start by playing with digital toys and learning how to use the tools of the 21st Century. Professional development funds will allow faculty to slowly lose their accent, adapt technology to support student needs, and become legitimate citizens in the digital arena. ■

Faculty do not need to succumb to the whims of all student desires, but we must have access to adequate training for those who are willing to bridge the gap between their education and the needs of this century.

BreezeLive, Tegrity, digital blackboards, blogging, text messaging, creating Web sites, uploading audio lectures, and posting materials on college servers. Faculty do not need to succumb to the whims of all student desires, but we must have access to adequate training for those who are willing to bridge the gap between their education and the needs of this century.

Here is a statistic that emphasizes the point. The average FACCC member is 53 years old. While this does not represent all California community college faculty, it does represent a significant number. Most members attended college before there were scientific calculators and home computers. Almost



Rachel Winston is a member of the FACCC Board of Governors. As a member of the Executive Committee, she serves as the liaison to Communications Committee, Professional Development Committee, and the Political Action Committee. She holds graduate degrees in mathematics and computers, and teaches full-time at Cerro Coso College, where she is Academic Senate vice president, and part-time at Orange Coast College. Rachel will be giving a presentation on this topic at the Teaching and Learning Colloquium, March 2 - 3 at DeAnza College. For more information and to register, please visit www.faccc.org.