As the world during the late 1980s and early 1990s stood poised on the brink of the Information Age, speculation ran rampant about the impact that the new and emerging information and communication technologies would have on business, on government, on social relationships, on defense policy, and yes, on education as well. Optimists argued that because of the new and emerging information and communication technologies, humankind was on the verge of entering a new golden age in which constraints imposed by time, distance, and location would be overcome and fall by the wayside. Conversely, pessimists asserted that at best, the world would continue on as before, and that at worst, new and emerging information technologies would help the rich become richer and make the poor poorer, would make bad information indistinguishable from good information, and spawn new generations of humans so dependent on the new technologies that they could accomplish little on their own.

We are now some two decades into the Information Age, and reality has proven more complex than either the optimists or the pessimists predicted.

This is nowhere more true than in higher education, where optimistic early assumptions that new information and communication technologies would make classrooms irrelevant, drive the cost of higher education down, and enable faculty to teach greater numbers of students more effectively proved unfounded, and where pessimistic earlier assumptions that higher education would continue on as in earlier eras proved wrong.

Rather, the Information Age has brought a much more complex higher education environment. Traditional classrooms remain but are increasingly becoming “bricks and clicks” wired classrooms. Many campuses are now partially or fully enclosed in wireless clouds that enable students to access the Internet from within the cloud. And hundreds of thousands, even millions, of students never set foot within a classroom. Some faculty have extensively incorporated the new technologies into their teaching and learned new teaching methodologies. Others have utilized the new technologies and methodologies more cautiously. Still others remain wedded to traditional ways of teaching.

As for students, distance learning technologies based on the new and emerging information technologies have proven to be a godsend to many. For other students, the new and emerging technologies are a helpful addition to traditional ways of learning. And in still other instances, Information Age technologies have been irrelevant or even detrimental to the educational process.

The purpose of this book and the authors who have contributed to it is to present a broad sampling of the efforts that college and university faculty members have initiated to take advantage of the capabilities that Information Age technologies provide to higher education, to assess what has worked and what has not worked, and to better fit the needs of students and faculty to the educational process. For anyone interested in how the Information Age has impacted higher education, this book is valuable reading.

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REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 Many technologies led to the rise of the Information Age, but eight stand out. They are: (1) advanced semiconductors, (2) advanced computers, (3) fiber optics, (4) cellular technology, (5) satellite technology, (6) advanced networking, (7) improved human-computer interaction, and (8) digital transmission and digital compression.

2 For discussions of the impact of the new and emerging information and communication technologies on a broad array of human activities, refer to Alberts and Papp (1997).

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