Since computer-based learning can involve partnerships with for-profit organizations, be viewed as a route to increased revenue, and potentially be used to reduce labor expenses, it is naturally tied to what is often described as the commercialization of higher education, or what Slaughter and Leslie (1997) term “academic capitalism.”

Generally, commentators on the commercialization of higher education point to the following issues: technology used for exploitation and profit (personal and institutional), business-university partnerships, the rise of for-profit institutions, and a corporate administrative approach. One of the most visible critics of distance learning is David Noble, and his arguments are typical of critics of distance learning in America. In a broad sense, Noble (1997) sees the current fascination with distance learning as rooted in a belief in the “religion of technology.” He claims that university administrators are motivated to use distance learning in order to gain revenue for their institutions, and in some instances, for themselves.

Noble’s work is connected to a Marxist class analysis that views technology as a tool of dominance by the advantaged class over others. This viewpoint applied to distance learning leads to an understanding of technology use in higher education as a means toward the end of oppressing faculty and students. In *Technics and Civilization*, one of the first books to make this analysis, Mumford (1934) argues that the motivation for the use of machines is a compulsive urge toward mechanical development without regard to the outcome. Harold Innis (1972), a leading figure in the analysis of the political and historical impact of communication forms on civilization, argues that studying forms of communication offers possibilities to understand government and the rise and fall of empires in Western civilization. He sees changes in political forms coinciding with the adoption of new media.

Business-university partnerships are an obvious target for this kind of analysis, although the focus is usually on research in the sciences rather
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