

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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E D I T O R ' S M E M O

Some skepticism seemed in order as we began planning for this issue of CONNECTION's "Cover Stories." If the telecommunications industry was such hot stuff, why were telephone companies churning out pink slips as fast as monthly bills? Wasn't the growing interest in on-line discussion groups a bit reminiscent of the CB radio craze? Were cellular pagers anything more than high-tech leashes for errant employees? And didn't detractors of "distance learning" have a valid argument that education was one of those fields where the human touch was absolutely essential?

As our distinguished contributors began sending in their manuscripts, however, much of the skepticism dissipated. Taken together, their essays paint the picture of a telecommunications revolution promising to liberate students, workers and others from the constraints of time and space, while permitting unprecedented interconnection and collaboration.

Congressman Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts writes of a world "where we will be able to work at home or at the beach or on the road, using super-intelligent videoconferencing equipment; where our kids will be able to tap into a world of knowledge available at their fingertips; where our doctors can make housecalls without ever leaving the office; where space and time cease to be deterrents to doing business or earning a degree or even 'visiting' loved ones."

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop recounts how a wounded American soldier in Somalia received triage treatment from an expert doctor thousands of miles away in the United States, thanks to a sophisticated camera in the helmet of a medical corpsman at the soldier's side.

Nathan Felde, executive director of video information service development at NYNEX, explores how networks can deliver the benefits of "being there" without the costs. Felde writes that telecommunications technologies can "reduce the occurrence and cost of ineffective teaching minutes and redundancies" and more efficiently deliver "the experiences of epiphany and enlightenment that last a lifetime."

To be sure, our commentators are not Pollyannas. Markey warns against the creation of "information apartheid — a nation of information haves and have-nots." Robert F. Tinker, chief science officer at TERC, a Cambridge, Mass., nonprofit educational research outfit, compares today's approaches to educational computer networking to the early view of steam engines merely as instruments to help sailing ships move out of calm seas. "The cutting-edge inventors of the time could not see that steam would lead to larger, all-steel boats that would not need sails," writes Tinker. "Many uses of computer networking are steam sailboats — slightly better ways of doing what educators have always done, but within the old paradigm, in which an authority conveys knowledge and students passively take it in."

All in all, our "Cover Stories" offer an even-handed look at New England's vibrant telecommunications industry and the critical role of telecommunications technologies in education and regional commerce.

A short piece in the July/August 1994 issue of *Trusteeship*, the journal of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, praised the lineup of articles in the recent Spring 1994 issue of CONNECTION, focusing on higher education finance, as "practical, impressive and worth reading." We hope the same can be said of this issue.

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CONNECTION, itself, recently took a few baby steps into the telecommunications age. With the Spring 1994 issue, we began making short abstracts of articles available on the Internet. Bates College Admissions Dean William C. Hiss's exploration of financial aid and Associate Editor Julie Lanza's examination of the federal government's direct lending program were disseminated in full on the Internet by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. We reached a lot of new readers and helped save a few trees.

John O. Harney is the editor of CONNECTION.