A short history of the telephone:

- “The general store has a telephone. What’s the emergency? Can I help?”
- “I will notify Uncle John today, but Cousin Sam doesn’t have a phone.”
- “Two short rings, one long. That’s for us.”
- “Yes, operator, please get me CH6-0415.”
- “Dial the number, please.”
- “I’ll wait by the phone.”
- “Sorry about the crackle. I’m on the cordless phone.”
- “Press 3 for automated flight information.”
- “Sorry about the crackle. I’m on my cell phone.”
- “I don’t know where I’ll be then. Here’s my cell number.”

At first, the telephone was an awkward luxury. Now, it is a convenient necessity. People once had to travel to a phone. Now, they take a phone wherever they go. When I started serving two universities eight years ago and someone would ask for my phone number, I had to choose from four business numbers, two fax numbers, and three home numbers. People stopped calling me because they almost never knew which phone or fax machine I’d be near. Now, my cell phone number does the job for most purposes. Likewise, a short history of the computer would have similar themes. Yet we remain a long way from universal personal computers, particularly in higher education—despite the proliferation of digital devices and despite the fact that computers seem to be everywhere in colleges and universities today.

The telephone sold itself to anyone who could afford it. The computer now sells itself as well. But in some circumstances, both have become necessities—to the point that organizations provide them for employees. To gain productivity, businesses supply computers and expect workers to use them. Similarly, colleges and universities started by buying computers for office productivity and then began to provide them for faculty as well. However, higher education institutions do not normally offer universal access to computers for classroom instruction, the college or university’s core function. Classes may meet occasionally in a computer lab, but widespread, ongoing use is not feasible because students do not necessarily have computers and because classrooms have only one network connection, if any.

But is it truly important for all faculty and students to have a personal computer? According to three thoughtful leaders and a national higher education association, the answer to this question is “yes.” In their 1995 report for the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) organization, Mark Resmer, Diana Oblinger, and James R. Mingle strongly recommended that personal computers be made available for all students as a strategy for universal access to information resources. They said universal access would maximize the learning productivity of students, increase the relevance of higher education to students and society, and enhance equity of access to information and education. They also said it would represent a major shift in the way an institution operates.

Yet six years after the call to action, less than 1 percent of higher education institutions provide computers for all students, and perhaps another 1 or 2 percent require them. The report did not make a ripple on the sea of national attention. Of course, far more students own computers, and probably 99 percent of all institutions provide computer laboratories, often with very generous access hours. But if sheer numbers of computer owners or computer labs could increase learning productivity, relevance, and equity, this would occur on only an ad hoc basis at best. The numbers of computers and labs are not the rising tide that lifts all ships.

Valley City State University (VCSU) and Mayville State University (MSU) paid attention to the 1995 report because it came out just as we had decided to “go laptop.” Our observation of nearby University of Minnesota–Crookston, which had required laptops in 1993, and our assessment of our own student and institutional needs converged with the conclusions of the 1995 report. VCSU is now completing its fifth year of universal access and MSU its fourth.

Before 1996, we were proud that every faculty member had a desktop computer. Overall, about 60 percent of our faculty and staff had access about 70 percent of the time to machines that were from one to ten years old. Few, if any, students brought computers to campus, and neither the university nor the private sector provided off-campus Internet access in these rural communities on the other side of the digital di-
At Valley City State University and Mayville State University, our mission is to provide excellent education to students through innovative and flexible delivery methods. We offer a wide range of courses, from traditional classroom lectures to hybrid online courses, to meet the diverse needs of our students. Our faculty are skilled and knowledgeable, and they are dedicated to providing high-quality education to all students.

The advent of technology has transformed the way we teach and learn. With the rise of online learning platforms, we can now offer courses anytime, anywhere, providing students with greater flexibility and access to education. We are committed to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

We started by implementing a laptop strategy, providing students with laptops to assist them in their coursework. However, the need for universal access to technology became clear. We needed to ensure that every student had the tools they needed to succeed, regardless of their economic status.

This led us to recognize the importance of providing access to technology to all students, regardless of their location or circumstances. We believe that everyone should have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background. This is why we are committed to providing universal access to information technology, and why we are working to ensure that all students have the tools they need to succeed.

Where's the looming menace, the bear, that is scaring away other institutions and preventing them from implementing the same laptop strategy? It's the fear of change and the potential for failure. As university administrators, we are often cautious about making changes, particularly when it comes to technology. We fear that students might not be ready for the shift to online learning, and that they might not succeed.

In the face of these challenges, we must remember that the future of education is changing, and we need to be ready to adapt. The immediate response from both the students and the university staff was, “Of course—how could they not?” This is the knowledge age, and we must be ready to adapt to the changing landscape of education.

Where's the bear? Where's the looming menace that is scaring away other institutions and preventing them from implementing the same strategy? In 1995–96, there was a great deal of fear about integrating technology into the classroom. The immediate response from both students and faculty was, “How could they not?” This is the knowledge age, and we must be ready to adapt to the changing landscape of education.

The education industry is in a state of flux, and we must be ready to adapt to the changing landscape of education. The two largest changes over the past year are the realization that technology is the key to improving education, and the recognition that we must be ready to adapt to the changing landscape of education.

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