Nothing is permanent. Everything seems to change. And nothing changes quite like technology—and everything technology touches.

Higher education has been no exception: the academic landscape is changing rapidly, with much of the change a direct consequence of the impact of information technology. University presidents like myself, along with our faculty colleagues and administrative staff, recognize more than ever that unique synergy that results from the potential of information technology to engage students, stimulate faculty, and move our institutions ahead. And increasingly, we realize that students are seeking out colleges and universities offering more technology-enabled teaching and learning options.

Many institutions see themselves as homes for the mind and the heart. Here at Seton Hall, as a Catholic university, we add a values-centered, ethical dimension. We strive to be a home for the mind and the heart—and a home for the spirit too.

But though our values are rooted in ancient traditions, our technology is (almost) up-to-the-minute.

Seton Hall knows that technology is a critical component in fulfilling our mission of developing students as “servant leaders in a global society.”

Since July 1995, Seton Hall has been integrating information technology into the teaching and learning environment of the 145-year-old Catholic diocesan institution. Our goal has been: “To develop a student-centered, network-centered, mobile computing environment with a digital library as the core of universal and ubiquitous network services.” As we look ahead to the next five years, we are evaluating “lessons learned.” And we are recommitting ourselves to the challenging process of a technologically enabled transformation.

All around campus we see clear evidence of possibilities realized. Our online university, SetonWorldWide, is flourishing. It supports a growing number of graduate degree programs, from health care administration to strategic communication and leadership, and offers a striking example of the astonishing potential of mediated online communication between faculty and students.

At the undergraduate level, we have implemented a mobile computing program that provides laptop computers to all students. This initiative involves much more than distributing hardware, however. We also provide our students with a rich array of communication options and support services to help them achieve their academic goals. For example, the English Department uses this fertile environment to give students access to online mentoring and other technology-enabled writing resources—both inside and outside the classroom. And students in our College of Education and Human Services are building online portfolios of their undergraduate work to demonstrate their mastery of core concepts and to serve as an online résumé of their competencies.

As we look to the next five years, I am confident that Seton Hall will continue to make impressive progress—both with computer-mediated communication at the undergraduate level and with online educational programs at the graduate level. What we see developing is an educational model with a wide range of convenient, online options.

Higher education is becoming increasingly computer-mediated: even our more traditional faculty are recognizing the compatibility of technology with their own core values and the potential for this medium to richly supplement face-to-face teaching.

Projecting forward, we are keenly sensitive to the lessons we have learned in the past five years. Information technology requires a tremendous investment—and not just in terms of dollars. Even more significant is the investment of people’s time, talent, and energy—from both faculty and administration.
commitment is considerable, what we have found to be even more significant is the investment of people's time, talent, and energy—from both faculty and administration.

When Seton Hall began the implementation of its strategic technology plan, we looked at all these investments in information technology. We made a carefully-thought-out decision to focus the bulk of our investment on teaching and learning. Except for such necessities as making our administrative systems Web-enabled, we decided to defer major upgrades to our administrative systems. Now, over the next five years, we will concentrate on bringing together the administrative systems and the teaching and learning systems. For example, we want to take every class online and put together a course-delivery system as part of our campus-wide system.

A key factor has been the willingness of the whole spectrum of the Seton Hall community—faculty, students, and administrative staff—to take risks. I often use the analogy of our being like those nineteenth-century American pioneers who opened up the entire western United States in that great migration along the Oregon Trail. We too are entering a vast and unexplored territory with amazing potential—and many risks. But we are setting out on this new frontier with confidence and with a willingness to support experimentation, because both faculty and technologists have seen the extraordinary increase in the capabilities of students who take advantage of these technological tools.

Of course, there have been obstacles. For example, three years ago we experienced snags in attempting to pilot a wireless technology program with the nascent applications then available. But as the technology matures, we are recognizing the amazing potential for exploration, and we are continuing to move forward. This year, we successfully piloted a new wireless mobile computing program with 350 students and 20 faculty, and we will be rolling out wireless computing for our entire freshman class in the fall.

We are finding that the risks undertaken and the investments made to meet these challenges are yielding rich dividends. Ongoing surveys and assessments of student learning at Seton Hall indicate that students are more engaged with their professors and with their coursework than ever before. Faculty who have invested their time and energy in using the technology report that this environment has opened up new models of teaching, making them better educators and their students better learners. And faculty are becoming increasingly engaged in a university-wide teaching and learning dialogue that has been given new life by the pervasiveness of this technology, a technology that has proven its value as a collaborative catalyst across the curriculum.

Much like those pioneers of old, we have found strength in numbers and have banded together to make our way through the wild terrain. For example, Seton Hall is collaborating with colleagues at Wake Forest University, Drexel University, and the University of North Carolina to create a national network of pioneer schools to chart this exciting journey. Providing consultation and assessment support, Seton Hall's Institute of Technology Development is spearheading a national initiative to build an assessment data repository where today's pioneers on the information technology trail can explore and discuss this exciting realm and push forward on their historic mission of enriching both teaching and learning.

We will continue to move forward, though we will do so with care. We will not allow our fascination with technology to steer us off our course. First and last, what we are all about is educating our students and preparing them for leadership. To this end, technology is only an instrument. But it is proving to be an extraordinarily powerful tool, helping us to prepare our students to take their place as learners and leaders in the world—today and tomorrow.

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