An old Chinese proverb says, “Be careful what you wish for, as it may come true.” Academe’s great wishes for the past 30 years—increased access, lifelong learning, and information technology—are indeed coming true. However, students, faculty, administrators, and IT personnel across all sectors of the academic community experience daily and often painful lessons about just how ill-prepared the campus community is for the convergence of these forces as higher education begins the 21st century. Kenneth Green, visiting scholar at Claremont Graduate University, discusses various dilemmas raised by the evolutionary changes occurring in higher education.
Cosmopolitans and Locals in Cyberspace

In the late 1950s, Alvin Goulder’s work analyzing organizations led him to describe two latent organizational identities. First are cosmopolitans, who “are low on loyalty to the employing organization, high on commitment to specialized roles, and likely to use an outer reference group orientation.” Second are locals, individuals “whose loyalty to the employing organization is high, have a low commitment to specialized roles, and are likely to use an inner reference group orientation.”

Goulder’s work is readily extended to academe, as it describes well various aspects of academic culture and personalities. For example, in campus communities, cosmopolitans identify with their disciplines over their institutions. While they may work at Acme College, they are, first and foremost, biologists, Chaucer scholars, economists, and so forth. In contrast, while locals may teach these subjects, they identify themselves as Acme faculty ahead of their disciplinary affiliation. Cosmopolitans are more likely to work in universities and other elite institutions. In contrast, locals may be employed in teaching institutions, including community colleges. Cosmopolitans are more interested in research than locals, who focus their energy more on teaching, student contact, and committee work.

The division between cosmopolitans and locals historically has been quite distinct. True to form, however, the Internet may change this campus dynamic, as it changes our notions of collegiality and the dissemination of work and ideas across academe. Collegiality is a core value in academe. It is a building block of the academic enterprise, and dissemination—sharing ideas and scholarship—is a key tenant of collegiality. How does the Internet affect collegiality? The growing literature on academic libraries and digital information resources typically focuses on the challenges of digital dissemination, yet often seems to miss (or perhaps ignore) the link between dissemination and collegiality, the link between content and community.

It is apparent that today’s young locals have options and opportunities in academe that were not available to an earlier generation of academics. While perhaps unsatisfied with their employment options, today’s locals have access to a wide range of scholarly content not available to their peers as recently as five, let alone 15, years ago. Clearly, the Internet has important consequences for collegiality and dissemination that warrant our attention.

Virtual Visitors

The old, pre-Internet era collegiality had strict if informal rules governing how and when faculty might visit their colleagues’ classrooms. Indeed, despite the continuing discussion about the importance of improving undergraduate instruction across all institutional sectors, the fact remains that few faculty ever observe their colleagues as teachers. The Internet, however, now makes part of my classroom readily accessible to my peers by allowing virtual visitors to my classroom. My departmental colleagues can visit the course syllabus posted on my Web site anytime—and without my knowledge. Moreover, faculty from other institutions can also visit my Web site and, perhaps, clone my syllabus.

Is this uninvited viewing a benefit? Do I want my colleagues visiting my Web page and reviewing my syllabus? Or is this a violation of the unspoken détente in which we each get our classroom space and privacy? And what
about faculty from other institutions who clone my syllabus? Is the professor at a comprehensive institution or community college who “borrows” some ideas for restructuring a course from a cosmopolitan at a research university obligated to acknowledge the source? Should the university restrict access to the syllabus posted on a campus server to prevent this from happening? These are important and difficult questions, likely to become more pressing as we move onward into the digital age.

Intellectual Property: Mine, Yours, and Ours

The intellectual property issue in the Internet age must be addressed on many levels. My concern here is simply with copying. Across all levels of education, teachers routinely caution students not to copy content, regardless of the source: the World Book at home, journal articles from the library, or digital books from the Internet. Without question, copying other people’s work and claiming it as your own is the original sin in academe.

Does the Web unintentionally foster this kind of behavior? My own experience suggests that the Web may foster a new kind of plagiarism—part sin of omission, part sin of commission. The ease with which content can be clipped and transferred from one Web page to another, from a Web site to a PowerPoint presentation, or from one digital document to another, inevitably will create problems for some academics at some point in their careers.

The Productivity Conundrum

Ambiguous notions of quality and productivity often cast a long shadow over discussions about the role of information technology in education. While most college professors prefer not to think of their work in economic terms, in the emerging new world order of higher education it is increasingly clear that costs—college costs, operating costs, and production costs—really do matter.

The relationships between costs, quality, and productivity, however, are unclear and debatable. Often, greater use of technology is linked with improved productivity, which in traditional economic models means that quality goes up and costs come down. In terms of access, we assume that technology will increase the reach of education while reducing costs. State initiatives such as the Michigan Virtual University and the Western Governor’s University reflect this approach, as state officials hope to offer more opportunities for more learners by investing in content and technology—rather than in bricks and mortar—as a new form of infrastructure for higher education.

The debate about the appropriate role of technology in higher education pivots to a large degree on the productivity issue. The conundrum lies in how productivity is defined—namely, whether the focus is on reducing costs while, ideally, increasing access, or on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Whether we must choose between one or the other, between definitions of productivity that focus exclusively on costs as opposed to those that focus on quality, remains to be seen.

Distance and Distributed Learning

Technology has transformed traditional notions of distance education into various formats for distributed learning. The tension lies in the burgeoning market for both, and the “easy money” mentality on many campuses and among Internet start-ups. The potential for profits excites some and concerns others. The dilemma stems from the historic instructional mission of higher education centering on content, context, and certification. Today, many in the campus community are concerned
that convenience will supplant context in the expanding world of distance and distributed learning.

Concerns about context are also colored by what some view as the uninformed assumptions of many public officials that online education will add sufficient and inexpensive capacity to serve the growing demand for higher education. Stated simply, additional capacity, on campus or in cyberspace, will not come easily, nor will it come cheap. In the Internet economy, both clicks and bricks require significant capital investments.

**Changing Terrain**

For all practical purposes the current terrain of American higher education was defined by the 1960 California Master Plan for Higher Education, which identified three public sectors, each with a distinct mission: universities with a mandate on research and graduate education, state colleges focused on undergraduate teaching, and community colleges in service to broad definitions of access. Private colleges and universities, as a fourth sector, help fill some of the gaps and serve specialized clientele.

A growing and vital for-profit sector has emerged over the past two decades. Many believe (and some fear) the Internet will be a catalyst for rapid expansion of these new, for-profit postsecondary providers. What seems lost in the discussion, however, is recognition that over the past three centuries, each new form of American college experienced resistance from those who represented the status quo. In this context, the emerging for-profit sector represents yet another form of American higher education, one that enfranchises and serves a clientele that has not been well-served by traditional providers.

**Conclusion**

The evolution of American higher education has been an organic process. Over time, new institutions have emerged to assume new roles and functions, reflecting the changing nature of American society and the nation's changing demands for higher education. As we enter the 21st century, we are witnessing a significant evolutionary event in American higher education—namely, the emergence of distance learning and distributed education.

What consequences will the Internet and other technologies have on institutional missions, mandates, and market opportunities across the many sectors of higher education? Predictions about the future of higher education range the spectrum of possibilities, but nothing is certain other than that we are witnessing the emergence of a new world order of higher education. We must act thoughtfully and decisively to address the many and varied dilemmas that accompany such fundamental change.

Kenneth Green is a visiting scholar at Claremont Graduate University. He is the founder and director of The Campus Computing Project, the largest continuing study of the role of information technology in U.S. colleges and universities. Green is the author, co-author, or editor of a dozen books and has published research reports and some three dozen articles in academic journals and professional publications.