Learning Supported by Technology (Substituting Network-Based Presentation and Exchange for Classroom Time)

I. Your assignment if you accept it (and why)

II. Mapping net-based applications against the principal components of classroom anchored instruction

III. Copyright and Digital Works - One evolving set of answers

IV. Gains and losses - A partial inventory

V. Why implementation on any serious scale is so difficult

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I. Your assignment, if you accept it, and why

The thought experiment - readings, syllabus, exam (and any other form of evaluated performance you ordinarily employ) but no classroom meetings

A softer variant - only one meeting a week or the equivalent, bunched together

The challenge - the same level of student mastery or greater, along with any other educational outputs you customarily aim for and achieve

Why a law school dean might make such an assignment

The technology predicate is established and U.S. law students are increasingly comfortable with digital work spaces

Huge costs are inherent in having to assemble faculty and students in one place at regularly scheduled times (potential cost savings)

Additional students and additional categories of students might be reached (possible additional revenue)

Current educational practices leave substantial room for improvement

II. Mapping net-based applications against the principal components of classroom anchored instruction

The principal components or activities that comprise most law school courses

An orderly sequence of topics or problems, assigned readings, faculty-student (classroom-based) exchange, student-student exchange, diverse study aids, a final exam

Purposes served by the classroom: presentation (illuminating the readings, adding context, critical analysis), various forms of faculty-student interaction ranging from simple Q and A (either direction) to joint investigation of a problem or issue, pacing with accountability, opportunity for self-appraisal, student performance opportunity, limit on faculty time with students ...

III. Copyright and Digital Works - One actual experiment (x3)

Students from four participating schools (Cornell, Chicago-Kent, Colorado, and Kansas)

A course responding to the subcritical mass problem

A course run in standard sequential mode (not self-paced learning)

The substitutions I made ... Web pages, e-mail, asynchronous written conference [1 | 2], and regular "real time" video conference exchange

IV. Gains and losses - A partial inventory plus some other observations

To some (students) virtual classrooms seem less "real" in competition with physical ones

Distance learning with significant asynchronous components requires serious attention to the pacing, accountability, and self-appraisal functions

Written exchange is substantially different from oral -- With strong advantages
(But it also requires substantial readjustment)

Separating teacher presentation from interactive exchange opens up the attractive possibility of "on-demand" presentation (and recycling)

V. Why implementation (by existing law schools) on any serious scale is so difficult

Institutional culture and administrative arrangements are at least as important as technology

The serious impediments lie not in the technology or its capacity to provide for effective learning , but in deeply seated pedagogical assumptions and practices and institutional limitations

The skill set and mindset of existing faculty

The atomistic structure of our institutions

Patterns of distance education that are the easiest to implement (given the preceding factors) are bound to disappoint (being high on cost and short on gain)

The apparent comparative advantage of "start from scratch" entities (Concord)

The interesting question is not whether but who:

When significant portions of professional legal education are being delivered by digital technology to students who need not report to a classroom <u>who</u> (which institutions) will be the major players?

When digital technology is used to provide education on U.S. and International law topics to students other than U.S. JD seekers <u>who</u> (which institutions) will be the major players?