The Use of Telecourses in American Higher Education

Nicholas J. Teele
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Abstract
This paper is a study of the use of telecourses at four institutions of higher education in the United States. It also makes some comparisons with use of telecourses at the University of the Air (放送大学). It is hoped that the comparisons made will be useful to those interested in improving the use of telecourses in Japanese higher education. The investigation includes examination of seven categories: course production, broadcasting, course schedules, enrollment procedures, required attendance at orientation and review sessions, consultation services, and evaluation. The schools studied are Valencia Community College, the University of South Florida, Austin Community College, and Central Texas College.

Keywords
distance education, higher education, broadcasting education, America, telecourse

A. Introduction

I. Background
How widely are telecourses used in the United States? In 1985, Dr. Peter Dirr, Associate Director for Research, Planning and Evaluation, The Annenberg/CPB Project, reported that “Ninety percent of the nation’s 3,000 colleges and universities make some use of television. Most of it is for one-way instruction on-campus, through closed-circuit systems or direct videocassette replay of prerecorded lessons. About one-third of the institutions offered some 10,000 complete courses by television during 1984-85 and enrolled an estimated 400,000 students in those courses.” Dr. Dirr described the success of one of the telecourses: “in fall 1984, THE BRAIN, was carried by 275 of the 300 public television stations and was seen in about 5.4 million homes by about 8.5 million people each week.”

From April 9 to April 17, 1986, Mr. Michiaki Takaishi, Director of Administration, National Institute of Multimedia Education, and I visited the United States to attend the International/Intercultural Consortium and the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, and to visit several community colleges for the purpose of inquiring into their use of telecourses and their English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The following spring, I made another trip to the United States, during which time
I was able to do further research on telecourses in the United States. The following report is based on these two trips, and on subsequent research.

Sense of Responsibility

One important impression gained from discussions with the representatives of the colleges visited was that the colleges feel a great responsibility towards those students who are taking telecourses. This responsibility is felt for the students of each and every course; it is a responsibility which includes recognition of the need to provide Study Guides to the students to help them study for the courses they have enrolled in, recognition of the need to have a faculty member available to the students to answer their questions about the courses they are taking, and a recognition of the need to allow students to express their feelings about the telecourses they are taking.

It was the opinion of those interviewed at the institutions described below that because of the nature of the students taking telecourses, the availability of the faculty members must be somewhat geared to the lifestyles of the students. For example, because many telecourse students work during the day and the only time when they can ask questions is in the evening, faculty members must set aside time in the evening, such as one hour a week, to be available to students who may need help.

II. Possible Relevance to the University of the Air

There are a number of aspects of the findings which may possibly have some relevance to the University of the Air. Discussion of these aspects will focus first on two areas, and then on two others which derive from the first two.

The first area is that of creating an environment that makes it possible for students to study on their own. Recognition of the need to teach students HOW to study has now become so common at American educational institutions that most of them have centers to help students with study problems. Naturally the need is even greater in the case of distance education. Recognition of this need has resulted in two things: one is a mandatory orientation session in which the students learn exactly what is expected from them in the course, and the other is the use of Study Guides for each course (in addition to the course textbooks). These study guides give the students further assistance in studying for the course. In fact, one course outline we looked at went so far as to say “The secret of success of this course is to be found through faithful use of the study guide.”

The second area focuses on recognition of the need to give the students opportunities both to ask their teachers questions about the courses they are taking, and to express their opinions about the courses. In America, this has resulted in two things. The first result has been to encourage students to contact their instructors by telephone during two or three hours a week which have been set aside for that purpose. They may either ask their instructor questions by phone or set up appointments to talk directly with the instructor about course-related matters.
Students are given the telephone number of their instructor at the time they pick up the class schedule. The second result has been the introduction of student evaluations of the courses they take.

To my knowledge, none of the courses broadcast over Japan’s University of the Air comes with a study guide for the students, although several of the course textbooks contain study points, things to think about while preparing for the broadcast lectures, and comments on where to go for further study. There is a general orientation session for the students, however. In addition, both general and specific counselling is available at the Study Centers, although the hours of operation are limited.

With regard to specific questions which students have about the courses they are taking at the University of the Air there are “Question Corner” periods on both television and radio, but it is impossible to say that students are either encouraged to ask questions or that the “Question Corner” programs themselves are adequately advertised. Students are not encouraged to contact the course professors directly, nor are the addresses and telephone numbers made available to the students. Recent attempts to give the students access to their teachers via facsimile have only been partly successful because of the newness of that media. Students are not encouraged to approach the professors whose courses they are taking, at least partly because the great majority of the courses are produced by part-time faculty members who have full-time positions at other universities.

This brings us to two other points: course production and course management. Because the way these are carried out in the United States is very different from the way they are handled in Japan, it is important to discuss them at this point.

There are of course a variety of different levels of telecourse production in the United States. At the local level, a certain community college may make its own low budget telecourse for use only at that particular college. At the national level, several different groups may work together on producing a telecourse which they will then both use in common and make available to other colleges and universities on a lease basis. An example of the latter is The Write Course: An Introduction to College Composition. This telecourse, which will be discussed later, was produced by the Dallas County Community College District Center for Telecommunications in association with The Coast Community Colleges, Florida State Department of Education, and the Southern California Consortium, and in cooperation with the publishing company Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

I will try now to briefly discuss the production of a telecourse in terms of the common elements found between these different levels.

What usually comes first in American telecourse production is the textbook. An outstanding textbook in wide use at colleges and universities across the nation is selected to be used as the basis for a telecourse. The individual units of the telecourse are designed to emphasize, to supplement, and to clarify the material covered in the textbook.
Furthermore, the author or authors of the textbook selected may have no connection at all with the telecourse produced. For example, although William Inrmscher, the main author of the textbook used with The Write Course is a highly respected scholar in his field, he was neither on the telecourse Production Team nor its Advisory Committee.

A third key aspect of telecourse production is the study guide. The study guide is a book which is designed to help students get as much as possible out of each lesson. Typically, students are first told what to look for, both in the program and in the textbook. Then they are aided in reviewing the main points of both the program and the textbook. Thirdly, they are given exercises in applying the main points of the lesson. The study guide is usually not written by the author or authors of the textbook. In the case of The Write Course, however, the other author of the textbook, Harriette Stover, was also the author of the Study Guide.

These three aspects of course production are very different from course production at the University of the Air. There, each textbook is written by the professor or professors responsible for the course. The same person or persons also has responsibility for the television programs. All too often, the two are produced at the same time, with the result that the two are merely different versions of the same thing. Finally, there are no study guides.

Course management in the United States is also very different from course management at Japan's University of the Air. In the US, if a college leases a course such as The Write Course, it is also responsible for administering that course. This means that it will provide its own faculty member to give the telecourse students their course orientation, to answer any questions they may have about the course during the semester, and, finally, to give and grade assignments and examinations. At Japan's University of the Air, the person who writes the textbook and appears in the programs for a telecourse is also responsible for giving assignments and examinations, and for grading them.

The ways telecourses are handled at the four institutions described below may not necessarily be applicable to the situation at the University of the Air, but it is hoped that the discussion may provide food for thought.

B. Telecourses

By way of introduction to the telecourses used at the colleges we visited, the following comments can be made:

i. Number and length of programs

In most cases each lesson, or program, in a telecourse is thirty minutes long. Usually there are 30 lessons in one telecourse.

ii. Relation between video and printed text

It is my understanding that in the great majority of the widely used telecourses, specifically those produced by The Telecourse People7, a standard textbook in the field is first selected
and the telecourse is then built around that textbook. Because of this, opinions vary about how much importance is placed on the video materials themselves. Some people we talked with felt that the video aspect of any given course constituted fully fifty percent of that course, others put the figure at closer to thirty percent.

iii. Other materials

All of the telecourses that we heard about came not only with a textbook but also with a study guide for the student and a teacher's guide for the faculty member (sometimes called a ‘facilitator’) in charge of the course at the institution where it was being used. Some courses also came with a battery of questions available for the instructor to use in making examinations, if he or she desired.

iv. Credit and Credit Transfer

It was my understanding that all of the specific telecourses referred to below are being or were offered for full college credit which is transferrable just like any other college credit.

The discussion of the telecourse system at the institutions visited has been broken down into several categories which are discussed as appropriate:

1) course production
2) broadcasting
3) sample course schedule
4) enrollment procedures,
5) required attendance at orientation and/or review sessions,
6) consultation services,
7) evaluation.

I. Valencia Community College (Orlando, Florida)

1. Course Production

As opposed to the University of the Air in Japan, Valencia Community College makes few of its own telecourses, relying instead on those produced by one or another of the members of the Telecourse People, a nation-wide consortium of telecourse producers, which leases tapes to an agency of the State of Florida which then makes them available to state colleges and universities.

Although Valencia Community College does not make very many courses of its own, it does envision the day when it will; Dr. Paul Kinser, the man in charge of the telecourses there, even has the dream of making it possible for students to get an AA degree on the basis of telecourses alone.

Videotapes, however, are produced at Valencia Community College, and used both in special learning situations and at the Learning Resources Center, discussed at the end of this paper, in Appendix A.
One example of a videotape course which is produced at Valencia Community College is a course in Computer Programming for the physically handicapped. The videotapes are very inexpensively made, basically involving merely setting up one camera at some point in the classroom in order to effectively videotape the essentials of the classroom lecture, and setting up another in front of the computer monitor. The videotapes are then shown to the students, either in groups or individually, depending on the needs and resources of the students.

2. Broadcasting

The college’s *Open Campus* brochure states that “Weekly television programs are the basis of each course.” All of the telecourses are broadcast over cable television, in addition, some of them are also broadcast over the local PBS station at different times. Furthermore, videotapes of all of the courses, plus many videotapes made to supplement other courses, are available at the Learning Resources Center, described in Appendix A.

3. Sample Course Schedule (Session 2, 1985-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEB 1011-C01</td>
<td>The Business File: Introduction to Business</td>
<td>F. Hild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COC 1300-C01</td>
<td>The New Literacy: Introduction to Data Processing</td>
<td>F. Hild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEP 2003-C01</td>
<td>The Growing Years: Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>J. Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLY 1000-C01</td>
<td>Earth, Sea and Sky: Earth Science</td>
<td>L. Bagwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECO 2013-C01</td>
<td>The Money Puzzle: Principles of Economics-Macro</td>
<td>P. Kinser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS 1041-C01</td>
<td>U.S. Government I</td>
<td>M. Germaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY 1012-C01</td>
<td>Understanding Human Behavior: General Psychology</td>
<td>J. Warren</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The brochure notes that in addition to the television programs there are “reading and writing assignments using a step-by-step study guide and textbooks.” It further comments that “Telecourses may be taken alone or in conjunction with on-campus classes.”

4. Enrollment procedures

Students enroll in a section of a course with the specific instructor, much in the same way that they would enroll in a ‘normal’ course.

5. Required Sessions

If physically possible, students are required to attend an orientation session, the mid-term exam, and the final exam. In addition, there are optional review sessions before the mid-term and the final examination.

6. Consultation Services

   a. Course Facilitators
At the level of the individual college, specific instructors, called "facilitators" at Valencia Community College, are assigned to a course and are in charge of both determining how much emphasis is placed on the video materials and how much is placed on the textbook, and making up and administering the mid-term and final examination.

b. The "Hot Line"

One of the most impressive things was the insistence on the need for a line of communication between the students taking a telecourse and the instructor in charge of the course they are signed up for. In the 'hot line' system, students are provided with the name and telephone number of their instructor. They are encouraged to call the instructor (usually during fixed periods, similar to the 'office hour' system), and ask any questions they may have. In addition, they may make an appointment for an on-campus talk with the instructor if necessary.

7. Course Evaluation

As in regular courses, course evaluations are part of the regular schedule. Students are asked to evaluate their particular instructor, as well as the video and text materials. The following is the student evaluation form which was in use at Valencia Community College.

**Student Evaluation**

1. I learned a great deal in this course.
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) neutral

2. I would recommend this course to a friend.
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) neutral

3. This was my first class via television. If not, how many have you taken this way?
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) number of courses

4. I have television cable service in my area.
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) name of company

5. The television viewing times fit well into my schedule.
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) neutral

6. Would you benefit from the rebroadcast of TV programs during the next day?
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) neutral

7. Did you miss more than one episode, if so how many?
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) number missed

8. Of those missed, did you make up the lesson in the Learning Resource Center; if so how many visits.
   
   ( ) yes  ( ) no  ( ) number of visits

9. Did you receive an announcement of television course offerings through the mail?

Bulletin of the National Institute of Multimedia Education, No.1, 1988
10. Did you feel orientation was well organized?
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

11. Was the instructor accessible to answer questions?
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

12. The required text was clearly written and its content understandable.
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

13. The required study guide provided complete and timely instructions for the reading, studying, and viewing components of the course.
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

14. The video portions of the course were done both professionally and educationally.
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

15. When registering for this course, were you aware that it was taught by television?
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

16. Would you register for another television course? If so, what course?
   ( ) yes    ( ) no    ( ) neutral

17. Additional comments and suggestions:

II. The University of South Florida (Tampa, Florida)

1. Course Production

The University of South Florida makes use of nationally distributed telecourses, taking advantage of the Florida system referred to in the telecourse section on Valencia Community College above. In addition, however, the University of South Florida is also involved in producing its own telecourses, radio courses, and videotapes. Some of the courses they have produced are “Language & Meaning”, “Love, Sex & Violence”, “Introduction to Art”, and “Issues of Music”.

2. Broadcasting

All of the telecourses are broadcast over cable television. In addition, however, some of the courses are broadcast over the local PSB station.

   Students who miss broadcasts may view missed programs at the University Media Center Lab, on the Tampa Campus.

3. Sample Telecourse Schedule (Semester II, 1986/86)

   (includes one radio course)

College of Arts & Letters:
   Spanish I    Dr. Cano
   Spanish II   Dr. Tatum
   Freedom to Speak/Speech Communication    Dr. Doyle

252
Language and Meaning        Prof. O'Hara
Love, Sex & Violence        Dr. Gould

College of Education:
Money Puzzle/Macroeconomics Workshop     Prof. Hagen
Teaching Writing: A Process Approach     Dr. Vest
The University Experience        Drs. Panther, Bott

College of Engineering:
The New Literacy: An Introduction to Computers     Dr. Bowyer

College of Fine Arts:
Introduction to Art        Dr. Freundlich
Masters of the Silent Screen     Prof. Eaker
Issues in Music       Prof. Abram

College of Natural Sciences:
Topics in Human Biology     Mr. Latina

College of Social/Behavioral Sciences:
History of Black Music/From Jumpstreet     Dr. Glover
Japan: The Changing Tradition     Dr. Orr
American Diplomacy: (America's Role)*     Dr. Slider (* radio course)
The Brain        Dr. Strong

4. Enrollment procedures
As in the system followed by Valencia Community College, students taking a “distance”
course sign up for it just as they would for any other. There is a particular instructor in charge
of each telecourse which is used at the university, and students are given the name and
telephone number of this instructor. He conducts the orientation and review sessions and is in
charge of the mid-term and final examinations.

As of 1986, the Open University at the University of South Florida had been in operation
for fourteen years. As the Spring 1986 Open Forum, published by this Open University notes,
“Today it offers between 18-20 courses per semester and has an enrollment of over 7,000
students a year. It is the largest program in the country at four year universities offering such
courses.”

5. Required sessions
Required meetings vary from course to course. Here are descriptions of two courses to show
something of the range of variation.

For the course Spanish I, students are required to attend an orientation meeting, classroom
sessions, and language laboratory periods. Attendance is required at hourlong class sessions
with the professor four days a week. In addition, students are required to work in the language
laboratory for fifty minutes each week. Finally, there are regular quizzes, both in the classroom
and in the language laboratory. The courses are very popular and considered quite successful.
The course Japan: Living Tradition, has no mandatory meetings, however, the course outline lists review sessions before both the midterm and the final examination. The course outline further states that “The secret of success in this course is to be found through faithful use of the study guide.”

6. Consultation Service

Students are also given the telephone number of the instructor so that they can call him with any questions they may have. Usually, however, the period during which they may call the instructor is restricted to a few hours a week, as in the “office hour” system.

In addition, students are encouraged to from “peer study groups,” and the experience of the Open University at the University of South Florida is that “students who do form study groups often do far better in their courses.”

7. Course Evaluation

The Spring 1986 issue of Open Forum contains the following paragraph with regard to evaluating the courses: “The Open University takes a serious interest in course evaluations. Each course is evaluated twice each term, once through the use of machine-scored evaluations, and once again, through the use of a random mailout of a narrative evaluation questionnaire to students who have just taken the course.”

III. Austin Community College (ACC) (Austin, Texas)

1. Course Production, 2. Broadcasting, and 4. Enrollment Procedures:

As in the two colleges described above, ACC is proud of its telecourse program. With regard to course production, course broadcasting, and enrollment, the system is similar to the two institutions described above.

Three other features of the system may be mentioned:

i. The system is self-paced, allowing students to proceed at their own speed.

ii. The videotapes of the courses are made available for viewing at public libraries specified in the course catalog.

iii. In addition, ACC makes use of Testing Centers, to allow students to take examinations for courses they have enrolled in BEFORE the end of the semester, if they so desire.

3. Sample Course Schedule (Spring 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Instructor¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0921</td>
<td>BIO</td>
<td>1603 Life on Earth</td>
<td>S. Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1111</td>
<td>BMG</td>
<td>1013 Introduction to Business</td>
<td>L. Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1191</td>
<td>BMG</td>
<td>1023 Principles of Management</td>
<td>S. Schneider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1212</td>
<td>BMG</td>
<td>2053 How to Manage a Small Business</td>
<td>N. Sarantakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538</td>
<td>CDP</td>
<td>1613 Parenting Skills</td>
<td>S. Bossard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2094</td>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>1003 Introduction to Computers</td>
<td>M. Kohls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>1023 Programming with Basic</td>
<td>J. Koenig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² The Use of Telecourses in American Higher Education
5. Required Sessions

Attendance at an orientation session is required, unless special circumstances prevent it.

6. Consultation Services

Each course is assigned an instructor, and students contact him or her when they have course-related questions or problems.

IV. Central Texas College (CTC) (Kileen, Texas)

i. The Larger System

The Central Texas College System, part of the American Educational Complex, is a multi-campus organization which serves both the local community and U.S. military personnel both in the US and abroad. Situated amidst the U.S. Army base Ford Hood, CTC has over 200 locations all over the world, including a Continental Campus, a Europe Campus, and a Pacific Far East Campus headquartered at Yokota Air Force Base in Japan. In addition to regular college courses, CTC also works with the military and military-related industries to provide necessary technical-vocational education training both to military personnel and to their dependants. Telecourses are an integral part of this network, and are made available to students as the situation requires. At an isolated outpost in Alaska, for example, broadcasting telecourses is not feasible, and so videotapes, textbooks, and tests are provided at the outpost for the students. In such cases, the tests are administered by the education officer at the base or outpost in question.

ii. The Telecourse System

1. Course Production, 2. Broadcasting, 4. Enrollment Procedures, 5. Required Attendance, 6. Consultation Services: The telecourse system is similar to that described for the colleges discussed above, with the important difference that CTC has both its own television station and its own radio station. CTC uses its studios to produce a variety of courses tailor-made to the
needs of its environments. Many of these courses are not college credit courses but training
courses made in conjunction with industry, often for use with military personnel.

In addition to broadcasting telecourses via cable television, CTC also broadcasts courses
over the local PBS station. The brochure on CTC's instructional television programs notes
"Telecourses are designed to provide self-paced individualized instruction in any kind of
environment."

3. The Spring 1986 Telecourse Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIST</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>The American Story: The Beginning to 1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIST</td>
<td>1302</td>
<td>America: The Second Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>The Write Course: An Introduction to College Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>1302</td>
<td>Communicating Through Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOL</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>Introducing Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVT</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>American Government I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVT</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>American Government II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYC</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>Understanding Human Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSC</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>The New Literacy: An Introduction to Computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCI</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>Focus on Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSS</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>The Business File: An Introduction to Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSS</td>
<td>2306</td>
<td>Personal Finance and Money Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT</td>
<td>1305</td>
<td>The Business of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>Marketing Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHDV</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>The Growing Years: An Introduction to Child Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. A Look at One Telecourse

The courses used by more than one of these four schools are all courses which have been
produced by one of the members of the consortium known as the Telecourse People. These
courses include The New Literacy, The Money Puzzle, The Business File, The Growing Years,
and U.S. Government I. Another course so produced is The Write Course, An Introduction to
College Composition, and it is this latter course that I would like to take a brief look at now.

The Write Course, An Introduction to College Composition (hereafter referred to as The
Write Course), is a telecourse which was produced in 1984 by the Dallas County Community
College District Center for Telecommunications in association with The Coast Community
Colleges, Florida State Department of Education, and the Southern California Consortium, and
in cooperation with the publishing company Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Funding for the
course was assisted by a grant from The Annenberg Foundation Corporation for Public
Broadcasting.

The Write Course is based on *The Holt Guide to English, Alternate Edition*, by William F.
Irmscher and Harryette Stover (published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston). This is a condensed version of The Holt Guide to English, by William F. Irmscher, a standard and widely used textbook of Freshman English Composition published by the same company.

The fifteen chapters of the Alternate Version are divided into three parts: The Elements of Writing (chapters 1-8), Toward Better Writing (chapters 9-13), and Special Kinds of Writing (chapters 14-15), and in general the telecourse follows the order of the textbook. However, the telecourse focuses especially on the first nine chapters and the fourteenth (Writing a Reference Paper). Of the telecourse's thirty lessons, twenty are concerned with one or another of the first eight chapters of the textbook. The single chapter which is given the most attention is Chapter Four, "Order, Logic, and Mode," which is the subject of seven different telecourse programs (lessons 9 through 15). In selecting some chapters for special emphasis, the telecourse has been made to play the role of the teacher.

Each of the thirty lessons which make up The Write Course is about thirty minutes long. These lessons use drama to give viewers the feeling of actually experiencing both the contents of the textbook and the problems students have in mastering those contents. Each lesson is concerned with presenting dramatically the problems that six writers have. These writers are involved in the production of a course in English composition. Among them are both experienced and inexperienced writers.

The design and production team was made up of both an award winning Project Director, Rodger A. Pool, and an award winning Executive Producer, Robert Crook, as well as an experienced produce/director, and a content specialist. The latter, Ms. Harryette Stover, was also both co-author of the textbook and author of the Study Guide. She is an instructor at Dallas County Community College District, and had had experience in distance education prior to becoming involved in the project. In addition to this there were both a specialist consultant and an Advisory Committee.

As mentioned, in addition to the textbook and the thirty telecourse lessons, there is also a Study Guide. This study guide is divided into two main parts: The Lessons, and Program-Related Writing Assignments. The study guide for each of the lessons is divided into eight parts, which are at the same time the eight steps which students are asked to follow when studying:

1. View the program

In this part of each lesson, students are told what to look for when they watch the program, and the importance of the main idea of the dramatic plot to their study of English composition.

2. Review the examples in the program

At this step, students read the examples of writing which are contained in the televised lesson, and comments about those examples. These examples are included in the Study Guide in order to make them easier for the students to remember. The comments supplement those made in the televised lesson.
3. Review the main points in the program

In this part of each lesson of the Study Guide The main points of the televised lesson are listed, along with key words and phrases to help students remember them.

4. Read the assignment

At this stage, students are told the pages in the textbook which they must read, and are briefly shown how the televised lesson relates to those pages.

5. Review the main ideas in the text

In this part, students are given questions to answer. These are questions which help the students better understand the relationship between the televised lesson and the assignment in the textbook. There are also hints to help the students understand what the answer should be.

6. Apply the ideas

In this stage of each lesson, the students are given exercises in applying the ideas presented so that they will better understand them. They are also advised to check to see if the syllabus made by their course facilitator (the specific instructor assigned to them for the course) contains any written assignments. If it does, they are reminded that they should do the assignment and turn it in to that instructor.

7. Make a final check

In this brief section, students are given a review of the key points they should have learned in the lesson.

8. Check your syllabus

In the last part of each lesson, students are advised to make sure they are aware of the subject of the next lesson, and of when the next writing assignment is due.

The Study Guide also contains a section of program-related writing assignments which the specific instructor for the course the student is enrolled in may assign to the students.

In addition to this, the main core of the Study Guide, there are also two questionnaires and a log. The two questionnaires are a “Self-evaluation Questionnaire” and a “Peer-evaluation Questionnaire.” The first questionnaire helps each student keep track of his or her own feelings at various points in the course. In the second questionnaire, the student gives a paper he or she has written to a friend, a family member, a classmate, or someone else who has been approved by the instructor, and has that person read the paper and fill out the questionnaire. Thirdly, the student fills out a Process Log and sends it to his or her teacher, in order to help the instructor better follow the progress of the student.

Notes

1 From the text of “Distance Learners in the United States” a lecture delivered by Dr. Dirr at the 1985 Annual Seminar On Distance Higher Education, National Institute of Multimedia Education, November 13, 1985.

2 The Telecourse People, is an American consortium made up of six organizations which
produce radio and telecourses which are sold or leased on a nationwide scale [the six are Coast Telecourses, Great Plains National, Maryland Public Television, Southern California Consortium, Miami-Dade Community College, and Dallas County Community College District]. This consortium has produced the most widely used telecourses.

3 It is my understanding that 'Instructor' here refers not to the lecturer appearing on the telecourse programs but rather to the students contact faculty member at ACC, the 'facilitator ' in the system described at Valencia Community College.

Appendix

ESL and the Learning Resources Center at Valencia Community College

One of the most interesting aspects of the English as a Second Language program is its use of a 'self-help ' Learning Resources Center. The Center is used in this way: students go to the Center either because they know they have a specific problem or because they are afraid they are weak in a certain area and wish to improve themselves. They can select an area, for example 'reading,' and then either by themselves or with the help of someone on the staff of the Learning Center, take a pre-test to determine their level. Once that is done, the students can pick out a learning module to study. There are a wide variety of materials to choose from: those which make use of textbooks and cassette tapes, those which combine the use of filmstrips and cassettes, those which are contained in computer software, those designed for use with special reading skills improvement machines, etc. Students may select or have recommended to them both a particular mode of learning and a specific program and unit within that program. In many cases, the unit (sometimes referred to as a learning module) begins with a pre-test and ends with a post-test, so that students can measure their own improvement. There are a vast number of materials.

Use of Computers (CAI) in Independent Learning

One of the most impressive aspects of the Learning Center was the use of computers. The annotated list of just the computer softwear alone makes up a book one-inch thick. In the list of the computer softwear, each program has been evaluated, and the evaluation is given alongside of the description of the materials. The description includes the level of the materials, number of lessons, and other key information.

Use of Videotapes at the Learning Resources Center

As mentioned above, videotapes of all of the telecourses are available for the students to view at the Learning Center. In addition, many videotapes have been prepared locally as supplementary material for other courses, especially for basic courses in Math, the sciences, and English.

My understanding was that the students do not receive any credit for the work they do at
the Learning Center, but there was no doubt in the minds of the people we talked with that
the Learning Center represents a solid investment.

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Professor of the Research and Development Division)