

Opening Address Speech
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Education is evolving at an incredible pace.

Even the most astute fortune teller could not have anticipated the magnitude of exponential changes the digital revolution brought to teaching methods. It took 24 years for 50 million people to use television, but only four years for 50 million people to log-on to the internet.

This massive societal paradigm shift has created myriad new opportunities for teaching and learning. For example, since the adoption of a unified e-learning platform for the whole university back in 2005, more than 70 percent of our courses are now using the Blackboard Academic Suite. Our e-learning platform is fully integrated with our AIMS system, providing seamless access through a common e-portal that supports more than 30,000 users.

It doesn't really seem that long ago, but we've come a very long way from the days of chalk and blackboard.

As we look to the future, one thing is certain. The evolution of digital advances and methodologies in education will continue to advance. No one knows for sure what role, in the 21st century, will be played by blogs, podcasts, search engines, mobile communications, Knowledge Map, Wikipedia, networking websites like Facebook and MySpace, and the litany of other applications and technologies. It is both daunting and mouth-watering to think of how far we have come and what lies in store.

But as with most things in life, progress does come with its inherent difficulties and issues. With this technology that offers students and educators so much, we have to be mindful of security and privacy. Privacy can be described as a learner's ability to maintain a "personal space" within which they can control the conditions under which personal information is shared with others. Security examines ways and means for implementing data integrity and protection policies for organisations involved with e-learning.

Technology and ethics are never mutually exclusive. While many advances have been made in the mechanics of providing online instruction, the needs for privacy and security have to date been largely ignored or accommodated in an ad-hoc, patchwork fashion. This is an area that is developing, like e-learning itself, but is one that needs to be monitored and taken seriously in a university environment.

But regardless of the challenges in perfecting the e-learning model, its inherent advantages remain compelling.

The fact that instructors of the highest calibre can share their knowledge across borders allows students to attend courses across physical, political, and economic boundaries. CityU's strong emphasis on forging ties with other world-class institutions places us in the vanguard of e-learning's supporters.

Recognised experts have the opportunity of making information available internationally, to anyone interested at minimum cost. This can drastically reduce the costs of higher education, making it much more affordable and accessible to the masses. An internet connection, a computer, and a projector would allow an entire classroom in a third world university to benefit from the knowledge of an opinion leader.

There is the convenience and flexibility to learners. It can be, in some contexts, self-paced and the learning sessions are available around-the-clock. Students are not necessarily bound to as many specific days or times to physically attend classes. They can also pause learning sessions at their convenience.

And there is also the satisfaction of knowing that e-learning carries with it the practical, financial and environmental benefit of dramatically reducing paper consumption.

CityU is a firm advocate of e-learning and looks forward to this forum delivering many insights into the subject to help deliver an even better educational experience to teachers and students throughout the region.

Thank you!