Opinion

By Joel Charles

I haven't gone to a class in the last year. That's what one student told me recently. When I asked him what his marks were, he replied: "Between 86 and 93." I had a tough time believing it, but I checked him out and found he was telling the truth. "What about labs?" I asked him. "Oh," he replied, "I go to them."

On further questioning, I found that the student preferred to attend a straight lecture. There had to be an advantage of his status as a senior. He doesn't want to register for courses this close to graduation. He's taking advantage of a gift of our technology, the ability to make sounds about taking roll calls and requiring attendance--and not to improve the light of whale oil, once the most important reason for the adoption of totally new concepts in education. 

The instruction is usually more interesting than the lecture. The second is that the little cassette recorder with the built-in quiz can now be bought for as little as $25. Consequently, if a student has had a great deal of studying for a quiz later in the day, he can cut class, go home to quiz material, post someone to record the missed class, then study that material in the evening after the quiz has been taken. Or he can buy the notes from the stenographic service and read them.

A student isn't lazy or just plain cute if he sends along a surrogate, a tape recorder. He's taking advantage of a teaching method that can't be made any more, it has its parallel in the old man who marries a young girl and finds he is hoary. In place of words, he is saying that professors suffer from "teaching impotence."

Doctors tell us that impotence is mostly psychological, that it can be cured provided the factors that caused it can be changed. Impotence in teaching is no different. Change the teaching method, bring more up to date, add some challenge, use existing electronic aids, invent or adapt methods of getting the student to interact with the teacher during lecture and classroom periods, then watch the impotence fade.

Professors should learn to be consultants to their classes, not teachers. The president of a company is not a consultant unless he states that he is. If he's trying to help a consultant, he can't tell the consultant what to do. The second is that the little cassette recorder with the built-in quiz can now be bought for as little as $25. Consequently, if a student has had a great deal of studying for a quiz later in the day, he can cut class, go home to quiz material, post someone to record the missed class, then study that material in the evening after the quiz has been taken. Or he can buy the notes from the stenographic service and read them.

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