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Graduate Teaching by TV:
The GENESYS Network of the University of Florida

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Abstract

To meet the problem of graduate education for working engineers at several sites remote from a main campus. Many solutions have been suggested. From two years experience with one solution, it is clear that competent graduate work at an accredited University can be successfully presented at remote sites via TV.

The largest TV network now used for this purpose is the University of Florida GENESYS: Graduate Engineering Education System. GENESYS has four originating studio-classrooms and three additional sites in East-Central Florida capable of receiving programs. Essential to the success of the system is the full system audio talk-back. Each term some 40-50 Graduate courses are presented, in addition to several non-credit short courses each month.

The Need

A critical problem today is the development of graduate engineering degree programs for working engineers. In large metropolitan centers, this need is met by the evening courses taught at the local schools. Disadvantages of these programs are the long lecture period (usually three hours, once a week), and the student driving time to the campus, often in rush hour traffic. Frequently the instruction is done by adjunct, or other part time staff. While their competence is usually adequate, curriculum coordination may be inadequate and student counseling skimpy.

An even more severe demand on a university is to present such a broad graduate program at several remote sites. This was the problem facing the University of Florida which has a main campus in Gainesville remote from the Florida technical concentrations at Daytona Beach, Orlando, and Cape Kennedy. This pattern is typical of many State Universities.

Satellite Campuses Linked By TV As A Solution

The solution developed by the then Dean of Engineering, Thomas L. Martin, Jr., was a TV network linking satellite campuses. Operation began two years ago (April 1965), with studios at the main campus in Gainesville, and at satellite campuses at Daytona Beach, Orlando, and at Port Canaveral, just south of Cape Kennedy. This pattern is typical of many State Universities.

Student participation can be at any of the four studio sites, as well as in auxiliary classrooms at NASA's Kennedy Space Center on Merritt Island, Patrick Air Force Base, and at the Naval Training Device Center (previously the Orlando Air Force Base) just east of Orlando.

Six professors are resident at Cape Kennedy. Daytona Beach and Orlando have two full-time faculty members each. These professors are available for day and evening counseling and research direction of graduate students. As full residence credit is accrued with each course, a complete graduate program can be obtained at each of the GENESYS sites. This, as much as the use of TV, is an innovation of the system and has required new interpretation of conventional academic policies.

With the geographical convenience of nearby TV campuses, the courses meet twice a week for one hour and twenty-five minutes. Better student concentration is noted, as compared with the usual remote site class scheduling of once a week for a paralyzing three hours. Some schedule conflict exists with the traditional three one hour class meetings, used at the Gainesville campus for non-TV courses. With the dispersal of students and resident faculty around the system, a complete sequence of courses for a given student over several years would include some TV classes and some taken live in the studio-classroom.

Present enrollment is 466 students in 598 course registrations. The majority of the students major in Electrical or Systems Engineering, although the number of Mechanical and Aerospace students is expected to increase in the Fall of 1967 with a planned extension of the GENESYS network to West Palm Beach.

Most students at the satellite campuses take one course at a time (330) and some take two (134). Recalling that nearly all students are employed, it is not surprising that only a handful take three or more courses at a time. The video signal is from professor to student; full system audio is used. Thus, communication is no problem to anyone who has mastered any device as complicated as the telephone. Most of the TV doubters - or at least the noisiest in my experience - are those who have never visited a GENESYS campus, but only heard about it!

GENESYS experience with credit courses so far has been with small classes, 5-15 usually - rarely 25 - and one prodigious 56! Friday and Saturday the Short Courses (non-credit) sequences have carried as many as 60, but student talk-back is then much less. It can be argued that the size of the class and the personality of the Professor determine the possible student participation more than the geographical location of the student.
At the Masters Degree level, GENESYS success seems conceded in most quarters. The courses receive full residence credit when taken or originated at any campus.

The final oral exam for the Masters Degree is usually given at the Gainesville campus, but has been given at satellite campuses. There seems no valid objection to TV calls unless the Professor would miss the traditional handshake after successful completion. An emotional request for the student to visit the Gainesville campus "at least once" has been recorded. However, it is beyond the Masters level that system difficulty is encountered. The University of Florida has no degree between the Masters and the Ph.D. It can be argued that the Engineers Degree as given by Stanford, Cal. Tech, USC and MIT (to name only a few) would be desirable in the GENESYS context.

This degree is roughly one full year and a thesis beyond the Masters. It is not widely known, and there is much confusion concerning its name. In addition, it has the stigma in some circles of being a consolation prize for an unsuccessful Ph.D. candidate. However, it is well suited for the employed student who has already received a Masters.

Early in 1966 a program of non-credit Short Courses was initiated for transmission on Friday and Saturday when graduate courses were not scheduled. Thus the entire technical community, including busy management, can benefit from the talent available over the TV system in the professional improvement program.

System disadvantages have been surprisingly few. Lack of eyeball-to-eyeball contact is of course felt, but it can be minimized by the Professor remembering to look into the camera from time to time. Visits to the students on other campuses during the semester are encouraged by the Professors. Transmittal time of notes, problems, examinations, and homework papers is a nuisance, but can be minimized by proper pre-planning. Seminar participation has been a problem. The spectre of "Big Brother watching over you" could be raised by the faculty, but has not caused concern with the present staff. TV sets are located in the offices of the Dean and several senior Professors. This easy accessibility of lectures provides education of other professors, and a control on course content and level. Student complaints as to content and pace can be verified directly.

Classroom demonstrations of experiments, oscilloscope faces, and other detail can be improved even for the students in the studio itself as a zoom camera projects to TV viewers in the studio and to the remote campuses.

Present Projection Techniques

The GENESYS TV system has been briefly reported in references 2-4. The technical specifications will not be reported here; rather the system concepts are of interest. Visualization techniques on the TV system include the traditional blackboard as seen with remote operated zoom camera, camera projection of the desk top, and projection of desk top material on a screen to be picked up by the zoom camera. The students are provided microphones at all classrooms for communication with the Professor and with other students. This important feedback audio system permits all audio system permits all students in the GENESYS system to hear questions from all campuses. It is fascinating to hear the intrastudent arguments on homework problems during the break period.

Most instruction so far in GENESYS has used conventional all-mounted chalkboards or the desk top projection of felt pen written material. On the board, larger than usual writing is required. The board can be viewed by one of several fixed cameras, as at Ohio State University (5,6). At GENESYS, as at the new TV system at Southern Methodist University, remotely controlled cameras with pan, tilt, and zoom capability are mounted on the studio rear walls. These cameras can be controlled by Professor or by the operating technician. Figure one demonstrates a typical lecture situation using the chalkboard.

An installation at IBM was reported to be completely "self service", with instructor activated multiple TV cameras on the studio rear wall (ref. 7). In addition to large and heavy writing on the blackboard, written material must be grouped in one area rather than strung out over the entire wall. Rapid professorial movement back and forth across the room must also be discouraged. With zoom lens, full wall coverage is possible, but with attendant loss of detail of the material. The problem of blocking from view of the board, then the studio students who cannot see the board directly can view it on one of the two monitors located in the front of the class. With a throat or lapel microphone, the problem of talking into the blackboard is also eliminated. Wireless microphones eliminate the problem of a trailing umbilical cord with its dust and chalk.

As with any projection technique, sufficient time must be allowed for the student to copy before moving on to the next section of the chalkboard. As chalkboards must be erased eventually, recall is not a possibility. A wall roller paper or sheets on a easel could be used. Because of the contrast problem, a shade of green or pink could be used. The roller system could be foot treadle operated, even with reverse capability for recall purposes.

As a second projection technique, a camera mounted vertically over a desk has been very popular with the GENESYS professors. With either fixed or zoom lens, this camera picks up material written with a marker that is used with a felt pen. Buttons on the desk and/or at the technician's console, the transmitted signal can be switched from the desk top projection to the usual face-on picture of the zoom camera at the rear of the studio. Figure two shows a typical view during a discussion from the Professor's chair. The dart and dirt of chalk is eliminated, as is the strain on the professor's feet. Figure two shows a typical view during a discussion from the Professor's chair. Figure three shows the vertical camera above the desk is projecting material on the desk while the professor comments.

However, there are hazards to this desk method. Since the rest of the desk top is off camera, the temptation is strong merely to transcribe from the professor's notes to the felt pen pad. Direct eyeball contact is
also lost, except for intervals of the studio rear wall camera. An unrelieved hour of watching a dark hand move on a light page could be very anesthe-

tizing. Although the real wall camera is at the con

tentional setting, the desk top camera is stopped
down for the contrast with white paper, and the con-

test problem does not seem serious.

The desk top is a good method for projecting text-

book curves or other prepared material which could

c not be created in real time with enough accuracy.
A logical extension by one imaginative Professor is
to have the lecture pre-typed in jumbo type and

simply slip these cards in place as the lecture pro-
ceeds. Typographical errors are thus eliminated, at
least at the professor's end. A disadvantage is that
the professor may race on too fast for the student.

An ingenious variation of the table top camera was
developed by Professor Edward T. Pitkin at the
University of Connecticut. He utilizes a theat-

erical TV studio dolly on a platform behind the pro-

fessor to view his writing on an inclined drafting
board. The professor can be standing, presenting
a more graceful switch to the face-on camera at the
rear of the studio.

While two-way video might be desirable, it would

be prohibitively expensive for the seven classroom
work of GENESYS. From two years experience it is
our conclusion that it is not needed. Essential,
however, is two-way audio. Without talk-back, you
may produce a video tape, movie or illustrated book,
but you are not engaging in a two-way teaching pro-

cess.

System Assessment

Proper assessment of a satellite campus TV opera-
tion such as GENESYS is difficult because two
simultaneous experiments are actually in operation.
The first is TV teaching. In the opinion of many
of us who have participated for a significant peri-
od of time, graduate level instruction by TV is
entirely feasible and should be considered a proven
concept. Adequate solutions have been found for
most initial objections by students and professors.
No hope is held, however, for convincing the pol-
icitian or journalist who criticizes from afar and
will not visit the facility nor talk with any of the
participants. Since he "knows it won't work", mere
data is ineffective. A thousand students and
forty professors have found GENESYS TV teaching a
workable solution to quality graduate education at
geographical sites remote from a major university
main campus. The GENESYS experience is in agree-
ment with an older comment: "There can no longer
be any doubt that students learn efficiently from
instructional television-----it is at least as

effective as ordinary classroom instruction-----" (Ref.
8).

Rather it is the second phase of the GENESYS ex-

periment which causes concern. The operation of
remote satellite campuses can be considered rou-
tine for non-thesis Masters Degrees. It is the
thesis degree-Master, Engineer (6th year) or Ph.D.
which provide the severe test. Thesis supervision

by professors resident at satellite campuses must be
permitted and encouraged by university regulation
and action. Otherwise the TV system becomes just
another off-campus "Masters Mill". It is this
administrative confrontation that the most severe
problems have occurred in GENESYS.

Only with a clear charter for Ph.D. thesis supervision can qualified
faculty and students be retained and can research
grants be attracted. It is agreed by all that student
provision for concentrated research time, either com-
pany or contract sponsored or unpaid, is required for
an acceptable thesis. The exact length of this "period
of concentration" is subject to some question, but
unanimity exists for the need of some such concept, as
long as it is not merely used as a device to stifle the
program. At the present the outlook for GENESYS at
the thesis degree level is not encouraging.

In a broad ranging recent overview of the educational
uses of television at all levels, Murphy and Gross
(Ref. 9) have noted "TV is still far from fulfilling
its obvious promise"--- Instructional TV "still occu-
pies a marginal position in American education, de­­spite
the ever increasing number of students it reaches." At
the University level, they note "despite a variety
of demonstrations that TV could help solve the mounting
problems have occurred in GENESYS.

...
ing and ancillary courses such as math and physics, but now that the principle has been demonstrated, there is no technical reason why it cannot be extended to education, liberal arts, business administration, medicine, and other fields.

Color TV and two-way TV are not deemed necessary; the present system-wide audio (talk-back) is considered essential, however. Without talk-back the teaching technique is nothing more than a video tape, and student-professor rapport can hardly be expected.

TV classrooms could be installed in contractor facilities, making the student transportation problem even simpler. Some guarantee is needed, however, that the student would not be called from class for phone calls and the usual trivia of industrial life.

In a 1965 survey of Instructional TV it was concluded: "Most respondents made one over-all point: that the limitations on the use of TV in education are not due to the medium itself but to a lack of imaginative boldness and talent in the people using it" (Ref. 1). These general conclusions are evident in the GENESYS experiment also: it is the academic procedure, not technology, which is limiting.

This admittedly partisan review, of GENESYS, the largest graduate TV system currently in use, is presented for wider discussion. Whatever one may think of contrived acronyms that sound biblical, GENESYS could be the beginning of a new trend in graduate education in areas of geographic dispersion of students and professors.

References


1. TV Projection of Blackboard Material
2. TV Projection of Professor at Desk (Note Vertical Camera Above Desk)
3. Projection of Desk Top Material by Vertical TV Camera