

**Fact-check for “Could you be a ‘Hoopla-dite?’”
to be published 09/12/08 in *The Chronicle of Higher Education***

I. Articles, Documents and Sites

These are articles, documents and Web sites referred to directly or indirectly in the writing of “Could You Be a Hoopla-Dite”:

1. “Re-Thinking the Role of Information in Diffusion Theory: An Historical Analysis with an Empirical Test” by Eric Abbott and J. Paul Yarbrough, Paper Submitted to Communication Theory and Methodology Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, for its annual convention, New Orleans, LA, 1999. Available at http://www.infoamerica.org/documentos_pdf/difusion_teoría.pdf

Citation, p. 39: The Cycle of Media Coverage. Mass media tend to respond to news about innovations in much the same way as they respond to other forms of news. Often there is scattered and uneven coverage at first, followed by a time of peak coverage and intensive media interest. The innovation may become the “cover story” of magazines. After a time, coverage tends to decline (Abbott and Richardson, 1979). In a study of what they termed “**the hoopla effect**,” Abbott and Eichmeier (1998) found support for the idea that there is a regular pattern of media coverage of technological innovations.

2. “The 10 Most Annoying Habits of Technology Companies,” by Rick Broida, *PC World*, May 25, 2008. Available at http://www.pcworld.com/article/146201/the_10_most_annoying_habits_of_technology_companies.html

3. “Rising Tuition and Clever Marketing Drive Growth of Private Loans,” by Kelly Field, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 54, Issue 40, Page A24

Citation, p. A24: Last year, borrowers took out \$17-billion in private loans, more than 10 times as much as they did a decade earlier, according to the College Board. During the same period, federal borrowing less than doubled. ([See chart.](#))

Until recently most private loans went to graduate and professional students. But over the last decade, as college costs have risen and state and federal aid has lagged, a growing number of undergraduates have begun turning to private loans to fill the gap. In 2004 undergraduates made up 83 percent of all private-loan borrowers, says a report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

4. “Some State Loan Agencies Say They May Stay on the Sidelines This Year,” by Eric Kelderman, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 54, Issue 41, Page A14

Citation, p. A14: Among the scores of lenders that have halted student loans because of the credit crisis are several state-based agencies that serve tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of residents.

Despite last month's unprecedented action by Congress and the Bush administration to shore up the student-loan industry, some of those state-authorized organizations say they may not return to the loan business this year, and others are cutting some of the borrower benefits and services they provide.

5. Computer Counseling and Support Group (CCSG) Meeting Notes, Iowa State University, May 25, 2005, available at <http://www.it.iastate.edu/ccsg/notes/2005-05.html>

Citations of interest with those highlighted in maroon referred to directly or indirectly in the article:

CELT will do training and demos of best practices for faculty. Student transmitters will be sold at bookstore (\$16, can be used for multiple classes/years). There is also an enrollment fee that must be paid by the student at the manufacturer's website (\$15/semester covers one or more classes using the transmitter). The enrollment code allows a direct correlation between the transmitter and the student, giving a unique identity that can be used for attendance, grading, etc.

Q: How do we know that a student doesn't have two transmitters, one for himself and one for his buddy?

A: Good question. That's an ethical problem, and doesn't have an easy technical solution.

Q: What about student info going to an external company?

A: Also a valid concern, and we're working on ways of keeping that info local to campus.

Toward the end of FY06, we'll have data to support future direction of supporting clickers on the Iowa State campus. We have hopes of standardization but no promise; it may or may not be this system. **The book companies were giving IR systems away to faculty, which created problems with support expectations from faculty.**

Q: What kind of system needed several receivers?

A: The IR kind (particularly the ones that were given away). Lush Auditorium in 125 Kildee required 14 receivers to cover all the students.

Q: Is this something that a faculty member could take with him into the room?

A: No, this is something ITC would install for various reasons including interference with adjacent rooms, etc.

Q: How complicated a question can be used?

A: Quite complicated; verbal, concept, there are sophisticated reporting features. CPS has an online training facility for this. This software is not intuitive, training will be a very important part of this.

Q: Can you create questions on the fly?

A: Yes, once you get the hang of the software.

Q: Why the \$15 upfront/\$16 per semester thing instead of just charging the enrollment fee as part of the bookstore purchase?

A: That's the business model of the company; the student doesn't have to buy a new clicker each semester, but the company gets steady cash flow from enrollments.

Q: Do we know anything about the security, how sent, etc.? Can I watch everyone else's answer with a clever receiver and choose the most popular answer? Can you interfere with someone else's signal? Can I jam it?

A: The company continues to tell us it's a secure transmission. This is part of the evaluation process. Some universities are evaluating this by just having demos, but we wanted to do a good evaluation.

Q: Instructors need to know they're using an evaluation product for grading.

A: Good point, we'll try to make that clear to them.

5. Student Response Systems Committee Final Report, Iowa State University, June 2006.

Citation, p. 6: The University Book Store (UBS) stocked CPSrf clickers, at a cost of \$16 to the students. UBS worked to channel faculty requesting clickers to the eInstruction system. Still, a few faculty insisted on using other systems. In addition to the \$16 hardware cost, eInstruction's business model required students to log on to eInstruction's servers and register their clickers for the semester. This registration fee was an additional \$15 per semester. This ongoing registration fee became a sore spot for students and the faculty clicker users who represented them. The ongoing fee concept, even though in some cases it rendered cheaper systems costs to students, was perceived as more expensive and an ongoing burden to students. Other clicker systems that carry higher hardware costs with no fee are perceived to be the better value, even though the economic advantages are debatable. In the Fall 2005 semester, 12 classes used the clicker systems, representing more than 2,000 students. All faculty and many students were polled about their clicker use, and the results of those surveys are summarized in Attachment A.

D. FERPA

The use of eInstruction clickers on campus quickly raised questions regarding the Federal Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) legislation. FERPA protects the educational records of students, in part by insuring secure data flow. The registration process for eInstruction carries student records beyond the ISU network, where the control of such records cannot be assured. The committee therefore worked with ISU's Office of University Counsel to craft an agreement with eInstruction regarding the transfer of student records. The two-page agreement assigns to eInstruction responsibility for student records beyond the ISU networks, and makes the manufacturer liable for any breach of student data. The original agreement is on file with the committee, with a copy in the Office of University Counsel. It should be noted that eInstruction's business model is the only one among clicker manufacturers that calls FERPA into play. Other clicker systems do not require student records to leave the campus network.

II. Interviews with Sources on "Hoopla-dite" Issues

These experts were chosen to present different viewpoints across the technology spectrum. All are nationally known because of their work with technology. Each received an outline of the piece and was asked to respond to it via e-mail, in addition to follow-up questions. Below are their biographies and replies.

Christine Rosen

Biography: *Christine Rosen is a senior editor of The New Atlantis. She writes about the history of genetics, bioethics, the fertility industry, and the social impact of technology. Mrs. Rosen's opinion pieces and essays have appeared in publications such as The New York Times Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The New Republic, National Review, The Weekly Standard, Commentary, The New England Journal of Medicine, Policy Review, Society, The Claremont Review of Books, and Commonweal. She is also a frequent contributor to radio and television shows, including National Public Radio, BBC Radio, CNN, FOX News, ABC News, and C-SPAN. (Source: Ethics and Public Policy Center. For complete bio, see: <http://www.eppc.org/scholars/scholarID.51/scholar.asp>)*

On the corporatization of academe

It is intriguing to see how insidiously and effectively computer and software companies have colonized academia. A culture that prides itself on research and rigorous inquiry in all other areas – and an abiding skepticism about the conventional wisdom—is in this area uncritically enthusiastic, judging by the amount of money administrators are spending on technology on campus.

Technology has become a symbol for a university's or college's status in the modern world; administrators seem to be operating under the assumption that all of this technology is akin to having a successful sports team that draws alumni and student participation (and dollars) to the school, but without first considering whether this is, in fact, the case.

But it doesn't always work. Last month the University of Chicago law school announced that it would block internet access in most of its classrooms, because the distraction it posed to students during lectures was too great. Consideration of the school's academic mission trumped connectivity, in this case. But such thoughtful decisions are still rare on college campuses today.

Higher education's eager embrace of technology brings to mind something Neil Postman once warned about in a speech. He said, "When a technology becomes mythic, it is always dangerous because it is then accepted as it is, and is therefore not easily susceptible to modification or control." University and college administrators should carefully consider where the school's money – and their students' time—is going when they invest in new technologies.

(Rosen e-mail received 21 May 2008)

Jeffrey Cole

Biography: *Jeffrey Cole has been at the forefront of media and communication technology policy issues in both the United States and internationally for the past 25 years. In July 2004 Dr. Cole joined the USC Annenberg School for Communication as Director of the newly formed Center for the Digital Future and as a Research Professor. Founded on the belief that the best policy arises from the best information, the Center is a research and policy institute committed to work that has a real and beneficial effect on people's lives, while seeking to maximize the positive potential of the mass media and our rapidly evolving communication technologies. (Source: Center for the Digital Future. For complete bio, see:*

http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/person_details.asp?intTypeld=3)

On the issue of advocates over-reacting to criticism of technology:

You are really sticking your neck out with academics here, but I think you are completely on target. Although more universities are giving the professor the discretion to cut the wireless "plug" in the classroom, many still see technology as the ultimate solution to all problems. It is a useful tool and comes with many drawbacks as well. Although I work in this space, I look as much at the negatives as the benefits and have noted those who become rigidly defensive when results or effectiveness are measured. Incidentally, our work shows that digital technology did seem to contribute to education when [early adopters] were the primary people on-line in the 1990s. As the rest of the American world comes on-line, there are now the time-wasters and others. I particularly feel [the point] about not caring about the costs in right on point.

On the concept of hoopla-dites:

I think the "advances" rarely, if ever come from the IT guys or the Luddites. The IT guys are too enamored of the engineering features of the technology and frequently over-design or simply miss the real uses that people want. The "new Luddites" on the other hand have attitudes filtered by an overall disdain (or hatred) for how technology is changing the old ways. They change you talk about can only come from the users, the people who see the real application of technology to the lives they actually lead. It is the users who will demand transparency in all they do and it is they who can provide the data for effectiveness studies. I think all things stem from the users.

(Cole e-mail received 3 May 2008)

Bryan Alexander

Biography: *Bryan Alexander is Director for Research at the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, where he researches the advanced uses of information technology in liberal education. A PhD graduate of the University of Michigan, he taught English and information technology studies as faculty at Centenary College of Louisiana. His primary research interests concern mobile and wireless computing, digital gaming, and social software. Other interests include digital writing, copyright and intellectual property, information literacy, project management, information design, and interdisciplinary collaboration. He maintains and contributes to a series of weblogs, including [NITLE Liberal Education Today](http://b2e.nitle.org/) (<http://b2e.nitle.org/>) and [Smartmobs](http://www.smartmobs.com) (<http://www.smartmobs.com>). Committed to exploring computer-mediated pedagogy, he continues to research and write on the critical uses of computers and teaching in terms of interdisciplinary liberal arts and the contemporary development of cyberculture. (Source: Educause. See: <http://connect.educause.edu/user/bryanalexander/528>)*

Note: *Bryan Alexander provided much more information in his interview than others cited here, and while many of his comments were not included in the final edited essay, they caused me as author to delete several sections of the initial first draft and to focus on areas in which there was general consensus. Interviewees have that kind of influence over writers, especially ones who may not immediately agree with a writer's perspective on a subject. In sum, they provide balance—so much so, in fact, that they change the very nature of a report, as was the case here.*

On over-reaction of advocates who respond in "disbelief" to technology criticism:

Most of the discussions I've seen have ranged across various registers, from satirical to thoughtful to technical. "Disbelief" is not perhaps the best word, since, strictly speaking, everyone in technology and academic computing is so well accustomed to hearing criticism as to believe we'll see more of it.

On the notion of extensive technology assessment:

How extensive is extensive? For instance, would every pilot project require full institutional purview? Perhaps one could rather make an argument to scale, namely the larger and deeper the impact of a technological implementation, the fuller the review.

On the nature of those who dismiss anyone criticizing technology:

[This is] the flip side of net.gen stereotypes. It's hard to disagree with a recommendation (that stereotypes and personal slurs have no place in technology criticism). First, while I can't speak psychoanalytically to each writer's mental state, I can report that many people involved in the academic computing field do share their worries and anxieties. Second, in terms of higher education, Web 2.0-published content has not been able to drown out content published through other platforms, namely *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (our journal of record), and the world of scholarly communication (journals, society newsletters, email listservs, conference presentations). Indeed, higher education is so large and diverse that it is extremely difficult for one argument or voice to make itself hegemonic.

On the issue of technology criticism stifling innovation and engagement:

I don't think I've seen this argument made. Yes, there are concerns about stifling both engagement and innovation, but they are focused on policies and cultures. To the extent that policies and cultural forms are motivated by analysis and critique, those should be met by the same, and usually are.

On the matter of alarmist and elitist tech criticism:

Some critics are alarmist. For example, the Marty Rimm cyberporn fiasco, which reached as far as a TIME cover story and Congressional legislation. Further, some critics are elitist, as they can be in nearly any field. Consider arguments made from a standpoint assuming relatively high resource levels (example: use proprietary databases instead of Google searching the open web).

Note: Bryan Alexander is referring to disputed research conducted by Rimm while an undergraduate at Carnegie Mellon. The July 3, 1995 cover featured an illustration of a wide-eyed child on a computer confronting "Cyberporn: Exclusive: A new study shows how pervasive and wild it really is. Can we protect our children -- and free speech?"

Web sites checked for Rimm verification:

- "Censoring Cyberspace" by Philip Elmer-Dewitt
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,981828,00.html?iid=chix-sphere>
- "Would-be Censors Base Arguments on Bogus Research" by Howard Rheingold
<http://www.well.com/user/hlr/tomorrow/cyberporn.html>

On those who don't read service terms, clicking "agree" because it is all good:

Too often true of far too many people. Add to this a lack of awareness about an enterprise's legal practice (how often do they sue?).

On assessing terms of service that might undermine sunshine laws and long-standing academic policies:

They just might. Good advice.

On assessing hidden costs of technology:

[A]ssessing hidden costs has been a concern since the rise of open source software, when we all began exploring the secondary and political costs of free code.

On technology not being free and coming with a learning curve:

The first half of this statement is true. The second half begs a question: are you referring to institutional adoption, or to any first use of a tool? Compare, for example, a campus purchasing a campus island in Second Life, to a single professor holding a class therein.

On use of new media without assessment in the name of "engagement" so as to miss the revenue-generating components in the interface or application:

I think we've progressed somewhat in this field, especially with the scrutiny applied to Google and Microsoft. Apple still somehow manifests as a non-commercial entity. But I can testify to the resistance some faculty feel when confronted with the full-on advertising blast which is iTunes' opening screen.

On the claim that new media was supposed to democratize but ended up corporatizing the institution:

Setting aside for the moment whether democratizing applies to an enterprise's internal operations as well as to governments and cultural production. Again, this is something we're doing better at, and need to improve. For example, we tend to be concerned about format and publication strategy changes made by web 2.0 platforms (cf Flickr's shift on adult content, or various Linden decisions about Second Life).

On the claim that technology primarily surveils; but the difference between surveillance and transparency is open dialogue and freedom of information laws:

I don't agree with the opening assertion, but it's hard to argue against transparency and dialogue!

(Alexander e-mail received 19 May 2008)

Paul Gilster

Biography: *Paul Gilster is a writer who focuses on technology and its implications. He is the author of seven books, including Digital Literacy (John Wiley & Sons, 1997) and Centauri Dreams: Imagining and Planning for Interstellar Flight (Copernicus, 2005), a study of the technologies that may one day make it possible to send a probe to the nearest star. As lead journalist for the Tau Zero Foundation, he tracks ongoing developments in areas of interstellar research from propulsion to robotics on the Centauri Dreams Web site (www.centauri-dreams.org). In past years, he has contributed to numerous technology and business magazines, and has published essays, feature stories, reviews and fiction in a wide range of publications both in and out of the technology arena. In addition, he has for the last eighteen years written the weekly "Computer Focus" column, which now appears in The News & Observer (Raleigh, NC). Gilster is a graduate of Grinnell College (IA); he did six years of graduate work at UNC-Chapel Hill, specializing in medieval English literature, before turning his attention to computers.*

(Source: Association of Information Technology Professionals. See: http://www.rtp-aitp.org/speaker_bio_page.shtml)

On the nature of those who dismiss anyone criticizing technology:

The adoption of technology ought to be something we discuss with due respect to earlier tradition, to future possibilities, and to each other. That allows for a wide range of viewpoints and should stimulate debate. Too often, though, what ought to be discussion turns into blanket condemnation, sometimes personal, of those who question the technological baseline. This is hardly the kind of critical thinking that should be a core principle of higher education.

(Gilster e-mail received 14 April 2008)

Interview with Andrew Keen

Biography: *Andrew Keen is the author of the international hit Cult of the Amateur: How the Internet is killing our culture. Andrew has appeared on the Colbert Report, McNeil-Lehrer Newsnight show, The Today Show, Fox News, CNN International, NPR's Weekend Edition, BBC Newsnight and many other television and radio shows around the world. He writes a syndicated column for the London Independent, as well as for the leading Dutch paper Volksrant and the Belgium daily De Standaard. He has written for many other publications including The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, The London Guardian, Forbes, The Weekly Standard, Prospect, Fast Company and Entertainment Weekly.* (Source: Bright Side Group. See: <http://www.brightsightgroup.com/biography.asp?speaker=95>)

On the nature of those who dismiss anyone criticizing technology:

As I explain in *Cult of the Amateur*, my greatest fear is that the digital utopianism of Web 2.0 will degenerate into the whole scale destruction of mainstream media. That's Web 3.0. Then Web 4.0 would be a Luddite reaction to that digital utopianism – a Luddite reaction of the children of the YouTube generation, sick and tired of the narcissistic culture of their parents. Key thing for me is that unless we control the digital utopianism of today, then the luddite reaction in the future will be really bad. We're in the 50's now in terms of all the optimism about the digital revolution -- equivalent of the Eisenhower years. Unless we manage things better, we will have to go through the equivalent of the 60's reaction -- and that will be nastily Luddite.

(Keen e-mail received 14 April 2008)
