Panic may be too strong a word, but there is certainly a frisson of unease about the technological roller coaster on which tertiary education is travelling at the moment. ‘Will we have to put all our lectures on the Web? Does preparing computer-based learning material count for promotion? Will my students think I am Neolithic if I can’t log in from the classroom? Will teaching become mechanical and depersonalised?

The good news is that 50 years of research into educational technology has demonstrated that students learn equally well (or poorly) no matter what medium of instruction is used; the key variable is not computer vs. classroom but the quality and structure of the content. Computer-based instruction (CBI) can provide a student with flexibility in pace, time and level; enriched sources of information; and cognitive tools to assist learning.

CBI has arrived at a time when the traditional view of Instruction — as lecture-based, top-down teaching — is giving way to the concept of construction — the view that learners construct new knowledge based on what they already know. The role of the teacher is no longer to be “the sage on the stage”; rather s/he is responsible for organising and structuring learning experiences, diagnosing misconceptions in prior knowledge and developing students’ research and evaluation skills. The computer is both a gateway to information (e.g. through the Web) and a tool for cognitive construction (e.g. through simulation and multimedia presentation software).

In order to promote the effective use of information technology and interactive media in teaching and learning, the CAUT has recently expanded its staffing and operations and set up two new groups within the Centre: the IT & Teaching Group and the Interactive Media Group (IMG). What follows is a thumbnail sketch of the work of the IMG.
The IMG

Following the restructuring of the Centre for Media Resources in July 1998, the CMR production facilities and personnel were transferred to the CAUT. The new Group will provide consulting services, staff development courses and a range of state—of-the-art production facilities and services.

Headed by myself, this new group currently comprises Meenakshi Chartdiramani and Kitty Lai Sik-ling (graphic design) and Makin Fung Bing-fai (video). Its facilities include the TV studio, digital video editing systems, the graphics studio and the Cybercafé.

What can the IMG do for you?

The Group can provide expertise in a range of educational media production fields, including:

- Instructional design and writing for multimedia
- Project planning and management
- Graphic design for print, display and multimedia
- Video production, including digital video for multimedia
- Evaluation of educational multimedia.

The full range of activities is still being established (there are some deficiencies in skills which need to be rectified) and there is a wide demand for multimedia and a limited capacity to satisfy it. Unlike the old CMR, the IMG is not primarily a production service, nor do we charge for out time. We see our immediate future in three areas:

1. Staff development through formal CAUT courses and informal assistance to teaching staff and research assistants, on location and in the Cybercafé environment.

2. Consulting with departments, faculties and the University administration on aspects of media and learning, including facilities, strategies, budgets and evaluation.

3. Facilities: we provide up-to-date production facilities for multimedia, from self-help equipment (imaging, authoring, video recording and editing) to specialised services such as video digitising and compression and multimedia authoring.
“301 Cybercafe”

The CAUT’s multimedia laboratory (RR3O1) has been transformed from a computer classroom into an informal multimedia drop-in centre where you can get access to multimedia equipment and be assisted by IMG staff (while sampling our excellent and aromatic liquid Java!). The Cybercafé incorporates a range of self-help multimedia equipment, including:

- VHS editing decks
- Digital video editing
- Multimedia computers — G3 Macs running both System 8.5 and Windows 98, and IBM Pentium II machines
- Software including PowerPoint 98, PhotoShop 5,
- Home Page 3, Dreamweaver 2, SoundEdit 16, Authorware, Director, Premier, QuickTime and HotVideo
- Flatbed and film scanners
- Colour printer
- CD-ROM writer
- Consumables (and coffee) ate charged at cost.

Current Projects

A number of projects have been carried over from the CMR, including involvement with the Civil Engineering Department’s CIVCAL (the Virtual Site Visit), Medivision (video series for Medical education) and departmental Web sites. The following are some current activities the Group is involved in:

- redesigning the CAUT Web site;
- developing a range of digital post-production facilities for multimedia, including Sorenson compression and MPEG conversion.
- Managing the HotVideo research project in conjunction with the IBM Research Laboratory in Beijing, and providing a consulting service (together with the University of Wollongong Interactive Multimedia Learning Laboratory) on media and multimedia services for the HKIEd.
Further information

Please contact Ian Hart ianhart@hku.hk on 2859 2451, visit our Web site (http://www.hku.hk/cautlimg/) or drop in to the Cybetcafé for a coffee and a chat.

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