

THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

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Part 1

Good Morning, my name is Neil, Neil Sumner and I'm from City University in London although I have worked in this university before which is how I know Joan and some of the teachers of CALS over the last few years. I work as an e-learning consultant at City University, so my area of interest is in technology, and change and education. So I've done this lecture here at CALS for the last 4 or 5 years, I think it is 5 years now. It's basically the same lecture - although I do tweak it from year to year- as you will be pleased to hear. It seems to me, and I was thinking about this coming over here this morning, I live on the other side of Reading, that this lecture becomes more relevant every year that I come to give it. It's more important, the topics that I am covering. So I find it even more interesting now than I did when I gave it 5 years ago. Anyway that's enough about me.

So I want you to think a little bit yourself - where have you come from? How much has it cost you to get here? How much are you going to spend while you are here in financial terms? How much you might miss your family, that sort of thing. Because I want you to calculate during the course of the lecture this morning - what are the costs and benefits to you, coming to this beautiful campus, to be taught by these superb teachers? You know - what are the real benefits for you in doing that? And would you be able to do it more efficiently, more effectively working from home, or from a virtual campus. So, that's the kind of area that I want to cover.

You would have noticed I kind of rapidly moved past my title page, on that title pages had 'Virtual University,' and it said 'the collapse of time and the death of distance', the collapse of time and the death of distance because one of the things that technology does is - or the a kind of technology we are talking about here anyway - is it makes everything instant. So, we can have instant messaging across the world. We can be doing that with a MSN messenger I'm sure you are all familiar with that, with your mobile phones. There are all kinds of experiments in this country now where students especially at primary and secondary school are learning from their mobile phones. So that's about the collapse of time.

And the death of distance because, you know, we could be talking to each other, I could be talking you from wherever you are from, the other side of the world in a virtual classroom, we can have a whole wall which would be just your room over in Hong Kong or somewhere and you could be seeing me from this room here in Reading if you wanted to. So we have a technology to achieve that, and that brings about the death of distance, right? So the subtitle, this is the 'collapse of time and the death of distance', and that's really a kind of catchphrase or by-line of what we think of as the post-modern society, post modern society. Have you ever heard of this phrase, 'post-modern' before? Because it's the one that characterises a lot of the kind of churning that is going on in modern culture

today because, in part, of the impact of technology. Anyway, I will give you a couple of things about. I am going to come back to ask you during the course of the lecture. This is going to be a bit of an interactive lecture after all, about how you feel about some of the changes I'm talking about, ok? And then at the end there will be an opportunity I hope, for you to ask some questions, to elaborate on anything I have said, or that you may not have understood.

So, my first question is: is a university like this, Reading University, or indeed most of the universities here in the U.K., is it still relevant in the post-modern era in this 21st century that we are living in? If you think about you are sitting here I can see many of you have already started taking notes, very commendable. You are paying attention to me, I can see you all are paying attention to me. But you might be actually - inside you're thinking about - what I am going to do for lunch? What happened to me last night? You know, what about the party I'm going to at the weekend? How long is this guy going to talk on for? When is he going to shut up, when can we get out of here and get on with our real lives? Which have got nothing to do with sitting in the classroom being lectured at by some boring old person you have never met before and probably will never meet again. So, you know it could be that this kind of model, the expert at the front, the students spread out in the classroom, is already a redundant model of education. Although it's probably the one you have all experienced going up through school, but it could well be there are different and perhaps better ways to access information than in this traditional expert and student model which has characterised the development of universities throughout the ages. So, another thing I want to do, and I am going to start speeding up now because we have already spent far too long on this introductory section, is to give you a brief history of universities since they first emerged in world history, some time in the, well about 4 thousand years ago.

Part 2

And to look at how universities have a vital role to play in modern industrial society in providing skills that societies need. I mean university is kind of schizophrenic in a way, on the one hand, they are dealing with universal concepts, the concepts that can be applied across all geographical and national boundaries. We think of underline concept of physics or mathematics or even some aspects of cultural studies. On the other hand, they are set up to deliver a skilled workforce for a particular nation state. All right? So, each nation is trying to have a better high education than the next one to give them a competitive economic advantage. And there is a kind of contradiction between these two aims, one is the pursuit of Truth, which is one of the things universities likes to think they are about, regardless of nationality, the other one is about the pursuit of a narrow national self interest, ok? That's a kind of contradiction that there is at the heart of our university systems. Not only here in the U.K., I hasten to add, but everywhere.

Thirdly then, we are going to look at some of the pressures for change. One of the things driving these changes we have already started talk about this morning. Firstly, in terms of the lecturers - and producers of knowledge if you like, the libraries and the laboratories. First the pressure is coming from you, and probably this is the most important pressure. You are the new learners, right?

You are the new learning generation. And you're making it clear by your daily habits that you don't particularly like or succeed in the traditional, conventional model of education. You want more flexibility in the way that you learn, in when you learn. And you probably know, actually I feel rather sorry for you at this point, that whatever degree you get now, probably isn't going to last you for your whole career. You are probably going to have to go back to a university or some kind of further education in order to improve and enhance and develop your skills throughout your working career because now with a pace of change increasing so rapidly as it does. You are going to have to acquire new skills throughout your working life and that will require you to go back into education. So, you are no longer looking at the situation where you get to 21 and you've got your degree and that sets you up for life, which used to be ok? Which used to be the case certainly in this country and throughout the Western world. Now you are going to have to be prepared carry on learning, carry on developing your skills, if you are going to remain relevant to the demands of the contemporary and rapidly changing workforce. So that's one pressure for changes from you the consumer.

Secondly, there is what I call the explosion of digitised knowledge. You've all been using the internet for what, 4 or 5 years, shall we say? You all use internet, do you? Yeah? And is that your main first port of call when you are looking for something new? Go and put it into Google, find out what I can from Google first of all, some other internet search engine. Maybe you know later on, you go to the library and look in a book if you really have to, but most of the things you look for today you can find from the internet. And that's you know the digitisation of knowledge so we are looking at all the things that are being written in books now being digitised put into digital form, so you can access them online, all this kind of online digital repositories being developed. Do you know what I am talking about? For example, if you think of a resource like the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which at one point, it was claimed, used to contain the whole of human knowledge. Well I mean that is now digitised so if you pay a fee to Encyclopaedia Britannica, you can find anything you want at the click of a button on your computer. That's what I am getting at about digitised knowledge.

Thirdly, and this is the thing I asked you to think about the beginning. There are the costs of your education. The costs of education, they don't go down, do they? You have ever known them to go down? They just go up and up and up and becomes more and more expensive, especially if you add on that the cost of travelling to another country to learn, the cost of maintaining yourself, and indeed what we are finding here in the U.K., is that most students, most U.K. students, and this may not apply to you, most U.K. students do some part time work to support themselves through their education, their higher education. That never used to be the case. The grant that students used to get, when I went to the university, was as long as you didn't get too drunk too often, was enough to support you through a university degree without falling seriously into debt. But nowadays, the cost of higher education is such that many young people are either in debt or they're working. An average of something like 16 to 20 hours a week in many courses I know about at City University where I work in London. So it's very expensive. Fourthly, the benefit of educational technology, I've already said that in some way this model of me standing at the front and you learning, taking notes of what I say, is a redundant model of education.

Part 3

How many of you actually use computer aided learning in your current learning? Just give me a show of hands. Do you use computers to help you learn, do you use language programmes and this sort of thing, or have you used them in the past? Yes? So, well at least half of you then have used computers to help you learn. How many of you have ever done any of what we call 'e-learning' that is you are learning at a distance over a computer. Yes I can see someone nodding at the back there. Right well that interesting and I am sure there is going to be a lot more of that, oh that's going to become ever more popular.

So, another aspect, and perhaps this will be the final one for now, is the challenge to traditional universities. Lots of big private companies now like for example, Microsoft, one that we have all heard of, or Oracle or Sun Micro Systems, they have their own corporate universities now. So if you want to be a Microsoft employee you don't have to come to the University of Reading to learn about computers, you can go to the Microsoft University. You can go to the Sun Micro Systems University. I know that this is a phenomenon that's happening across the world. We are getting the emergence of corporate universities. In other words universities which are owned and controlled entirely by business. And that's aside from the fact that most modern universities here in the West are increasingly funded by corporations. And there are all kinds of arguments about whether that affects the impartiality of scientific research, whether it prejudices the pursuit of Truth, whatever that might be. What it does mean however is that a university degree no longer means quite the same thing as it did say, 10, 20, 30, 50 years ago, because now you can have a degree from a whole range of different providers some of which are traditional and conventional, like Oxford and Cambridge, Reading, or some which are very modern, former polytechnics or business-led universities. So that's quite an interesting change. So we are going to look at some of these developments in a bit more detail and see whether the universities which are beginning to emerge now, are better or worse than the traditional universities that have prevailed thus far. I want you to think about whether these changes are good or bad. That's what your task is during the course of this lecture this morning. Are these changes that I am talking about good or bad? I mean my view is that they are inevitable, that is they are going to happen anyway but I want you to think are these changes 'good' or 'bad'.

So I did say that we would start by having a brief tour around the history of universities, just so that you have some idea of where they have come from. I don't want to spend too long on this but I think universities are at least 3,000 years old now. I think the first universities, ironically enough, developed in modern day Iraq, in the civilization of Mesopotamia, and the first university was founded by the Emperor Assurbanipol in about 640 before the common era, and just outside what is known as Nineveh, so that's where the first recognizable university was. We have a kind of mural of the Royal Library there and somebody giving a talk, pretty much like I am giving a talk to you now, and a lot of students sitting around in their robes and their fancy hats reading books in the Royal Library. That's a really fascinating image actually really because it tells lots of things about universities that are still true today. Firstly if you wanted some knowledge, some expert knowledge, you had to go and get it, but you have come to Reading. People travelled all round the Middle East to go to Nineveh, to the

Royal Library. Secondly, it wasn't just anybody who could go into that library, they had to be special people, like you are special people. You have already get some qualifications that have allowed you to come to this university, haven't you? It is not open to just anybody. Not anybody can just walk into this room and hear me talk about this, so it belongs to a special privileged elite, the upper ranks of society, and that's who you are. You can always get anywhere by flattering your audience I have heard.

And the development of universities after this, that is to say the ones that developed in Ancient Greece and Rome, those are the models which have most influenced the West, the development of Western universities - had exactly the same kind of control, so they were controlled by the kings, or in case of Europe during the Middle Ages when Oxford and Cambridge were established for example. They were established by the kings but controlled by the Church. Either way, they were controlled and access to them was controlled and only a privileged minority would be able to go into those universities and get that superior knowledge, knowledge which gave them a privileged position in relation to the rest of their society. OK?

Part 4

So, I'm afraid I don't know very much about university development in other parts of the world, but I suspect, that because most parts of the world have at one point or another in the last few hundred years, been the victim of Western Imperialism that the universities you have in those countries are pretty much along this kind of Western model. Access to them is restricted, it's controlled and the people who go there belong to a minority. Would you agree with this statement? Yeah? It's not open to anybody to go to university. Anyway, that's something for you to think about. So, control of knowledge and access, let's talk briefly about one of the first technological revolutions, that's the impact of the printed book. I want to draw a parallel, you can tell where this is going can't you, between the impact of the printed book which got us away from the kind of handwritten manuscript books, and led to all kinds of improvements in the transmission and reception of knowledge. I want to draw a parallel between that and what happens with technology in universities today.

The printed book you will know, I hope, was first established by Guttenberg in 1454 in the Common Era. That's just a date for you. But of course books were, until very recently hugely expensive, and only rich people, only members of the elite, the minority could afford to buy books and get that expert knowledge. Universities would often control access to those books. So it remained the prerogative of a privileged minority. Then we have the development of industrial society, I am going through a very rapid survey of world history now, so you will just have to hold on for the ride. The Industrial Revolution - the thing that brought us electricity, steam, iron, all the rest of it, required a more numerate and more literate population to service it. So we begin to see the expansion of higher education to provide the skilled workforce that you need to manage a power station, a railway system etc.

This has led to the expansion of universities, the number of universities that there were. So here in the country up until the middle of the 19th century they were about 10 universities. Today, there are about 250, right? So you can see that we've had to open the gates of the university to a much wider audience in order to provide the skills that a modern technological industrial society demands.

And indeed in some countries, like in the United States and Australia and Canada - you will be able to think in a minute what characterises those countries in common. In some countries, they couldn't build universities fast enough to keep up with the demand. So, they developed what we call 'distance education' that is to say they would send out the learning materials to the students who lived in the outback in Australia or who lived out in far west of the United States. The United States expanded westwards from the east coast settlements where it had first been colonised by the white people. And distance learning has continued to grow throughout the 20th century. Indeed the Centre for Applied Language Studies here at Reading University has a very well-known distance education course where the materials are posted out to the students I saw them just on the table as I was walking down here this morning, all right? And so that was the beginning of a kind of, not the beginning of the end necessary, but the beginning of a change to the traditional campus based university education, right? So, instead of you, the student having to go to the university to learn, now the university is sending you the materials and saying 'OK, you can learn this on your own' which is quite a different model than the one that had prevailed hitherto.

So, now we have entered another phase, I've already described the need for life-long learning in modern technological societies and that has brought the demand for much more flexible learning, so learning at *your* convenience, at your own pace, in your own time, ok? This is what we sometimes call 'any time any place any pace' learning. Any time, any place, any pace, all right? You can learn where you want, when you want, and how you want.

Part 5

So universities, traditional universities are under a lot of challenge. Let's look at some of the reasons for this. I've already mentioned some of these reasons, rising cost of traditional universities. Modern societies are becoming ever more specialised, so traditional universities cannot provide all the courses that are required to meet the ever more differentiated skills that are demanded by a modern technological economy. That is why more and more courses are being provided by corporations. They are taking over, so what university used to do, in that respect.

And as I've already said, unlike me, you know I've got two degrees, I got my last degree when I was in my mid-twenties. That served me quite well, thank you very much. But I don't think that's going to be the case for most of you guys unfortunately. You are going to have to keep on going back and learning new stuff, as the pace of change accelerates throughout your working lives ok? Maybe you look forward to that. You love learning and want to go back to continue refreshing and update your skills, that's great. But for many people, you know, they can't wait to see the back of a classroom and that's something I can

occasionally relate to. If we just take what has happened here in the U.K. in terms of what you could describe as the 'massification' of higher education, that's increasing numbers. When I went to university, 8% of 18 year olds went to university. Today I think we have got something like 38% and the government's target is for 50%. So that itself has a huge impact on the nature, content and delivery mechanisms of higher education.

On the way over here this morning I heard this little item on the news that next year India, I don't know if any of you are from India? - is going to produce 4 million graduates. 4 million graduates. China is expecting half of its population by 2050 to go through a university education. That is a massive revolution. So you can infer from that, if you like, that the centre of gravity for ideas-generation will somehow move from the West, to these nations that are producing every increasing numbers of graduates in places like India and China.

So, students want more choice. I am sure you want more choice, would like more choice and control over how and when you learn. You want cheaper education, you don't want to go into massive debt when you are having to go through an education in order to acquire skills that after all your society demands of you. So you are going to want to lower costs. I learn a lot about what is happening in education from my children, I have two school-age children. The way they learn at school is completely different from anything I ever did at school. They use technology all the time in the classroom. They have interactive white-boards, do you have those around here? No, OK. This is where you can put a whole series of different kinds of images up onto the screen. You can have video, internet, you can write on it with different coloured pens. My youngest son who has just started secondary school, he already has an e-portfolio. An e-portfolio is something where he keeps all of his work and he will carry that with him throughout the whole of his school, an electronic record of all his work. It is also where he keeps stuff, is encouraged to keep stuff about his hobbies and share that with his friends. He can share it with his teachers, he can share it with his friends and his relations, a completely different way of learning. I mean I used to have my stuff written in note files and I was always losing it and getting it all messed up but his is all neatly compartmentalised in cyberspace. So that's a completely different way of learning. I was - do you ever watch that programme 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' You know when they vote they say 'Vote Now'. Well they have these voting handsets in his school and so the teacher says 'what is 12 plus 12 and gives 4 possible answers - is it 25, 26, 27 or 24? Vote now. *Bing* they all go, and they all say '27' and the teacher knows 'oh my goodness this class does not understand anything'. So it's an instant kind of response mechanism and indeed the university where I work, I don't know whether this ever happens to you.

Part 6

They have big lecture theatres, they have 250 students in a lecture. They have one lecturer at the front talking to 250 students for 3 hours. That should be against the Human Rights Convention shouldn't it? I mean that's really appalling. But one way that we are looking to liven that up, that is to give all these students handsets and say 'OK - if you are falling asleep vote now, or better still - 'how

many of you have understood this complex concept that I have just outlined to you?' So I am just saying that technology is changing the way we teach and learn.

How many of you talk to your friends about education over MSN or some computer chat thing? Do you ever talk to your friends about work on the computer? Yes, yes? I mean I know when my eldest son is doing his homework, he can only do it if he's talking to his friend, he can't do it just by focusing on the book. He has to be talking to his friend - 'so what's the Latin for this?' you know, that sort of thing. Anyway enough on that.

The privatisation of Higher Education. I have talked to you a bit about that already. There have been various initiatives in this country, the E-university, the University for Industry is what U.F.I. stands for - that is this bit here. M.I.T. in America, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology one of the world's leading universities, right, put all its courses on line 'for free' every course. There is now the African Virtual University which is where African Heads of State have got together and they decided they were going to support the development of an African Virtual University since many African States can't really afford to invest in a top quality university in their own countries so they're collaborating on this African Virtual University. The University of Phoenix offers online degrees, which you can study from anywhere in the world.

I don't know what you feel about this but the high point of a student's life at the University of Phoenix, Arizona is a cyberspace graduation. So what that means is that instead of you working hard for 3 or 4 years then going to the degree ceremony at your university and shaking hands with the Vice Chancellor, and getting your certificate, this all takes place in virtual reality. So that all of your friends will be there. It's like little virtual avatars in a virtual degree ceremony hall and you will be handed your virtual degree certificate by a virtual person who is on the other side of the planet. That's how they do things at the University of Phoenix, Arizona. So here we are then.

What are the current trends, the advantages of e-learning? *Use this space already*, there's a good word for you - asynchronous, right - not in real time. So any time, any place, any pace learning that's what e-learning is about. Giving you the opportunity to learn when you like. I'll just break off for a minute to say that one of the responsibilities that we have, in the Unit where I work, is we manage a 'managed learning environment' and one of the things that gives us the ability to do is to see when students are doing their work. An awful lot of students, over 30% of students, do most of their work between midnight and 4 o'clock in the morning. Now, some lecturing friends of mine say well it's no wonder their work is bad all the time if they are doing it when they should be sleeping. But the fact is that that 's when some students really want to work and e-learning, making all this digital information and multimedia- rich environment available to students whenever they want to access, it will allow you to work when you want to work. So you can see how to combine work and study using these virtual or managed learning environments.

Of course it's so much cheaper. Once you've established an e-learning environment you can update it at no cost. It's not like having to go and print a new book once the old one becomes out of date. You can just update something automatically in a few seconds in cyberspace. You don't have to wander round

under, as I see lecturers doing at many universities, under a huge arm of photocopied materials that you are going to give out to the students. You just say to the students 'if you want the notes of this lecture you just go online and access them yourself, you can read them at any time. Or you can watch the lecturer again and again and again. You think - 'I heard him say that thing about asynchronous learning and I didn't really know what it really meant and you can play it back, play it back until you've really got the hang of it. You could ask a friend over the chat facility that there is in many of these environments, to help you understand it. So there are all kinds of ways in which you can have a greater variety of materials at cheaper cost and higher quality than in traditional face-to-face campus-based learning.

Part 7

And students already know that it works. There was a National Student Satisfaction Survey carried out last year and the university that came out as No.1, far in advance of all the other universities, was the Open University. What is different about the Open University from most other campus based universities? There's no campus, there's no campus that students attend, anyway, for their lectures. This is the one that gave students the greatest sense of belonging and satisfaction with the learning that they were doing. Now that's a bit odd isn't it, that is rather peculiar that the students who were the happiest were the ones who saw less of their lecturers in a face-to-face situation but were supported online and through traditional forms of distance education.

So these kinds of trends and changes that I am talking about are having a huge impact on traditional educational structures and especially on the nation state. This is an area that I've become particularly interested in the last few months because one of the things that I am involved with is, something I mentioned already briefly, the e-portfolio thing, something called Euro-pass, and for U.K. students, this may not apply to you, I don't know, for U.K. students, by 2010, only 4 years away, it will be possible to study one module here at Reading, another module in Bologna, another one in Paris, another one in Lisbon, and you will be able to put all these courses together to create - into your degree, OK? So, if you know there is somebody, a bit like going back to the old medieval model, in fact where wandering Greek scholars used to walk around from one expert another, you know, from Erasmus in Rotterdam to Lorenzo Valerin in Rome, OK, the wandering scholars. So, you will be able to that now. But have all your work in your e-portfolio and you will be able to develop your own degree from the experts available to you throughout the 25 member states of the European Union. This has all been agreed by the governments in the European Union, so that's part of the kind of globalisation process taking place there.

But of course what that means is that this idea I have mentioned a few times already, that what's really valuable about you people, is that you're going to go back to your countries and work and contribute to that countries' gross national products and push back the frontiers of knowledge and be innovators, and creators, and leaders in those countries, right? Students just don't feel that any more, they don't feel that deep sense of rootedness, of belonging. We've got this kind of modern phenomenon of knowledge nomads. You know people who will travel around the world, to work anywhere, any culture and society, their

knowledge and skills are transferable. So, the point of nations investing in the elite education of their best brains, somehow loses its force and it's going to be interesting to see how nations deal with that. Other issues that are coming up are things like the loss of copyright protection. You know if you go, and I don't mean to be at all patronising about this, but if you go to markets in Middle Eastern or some Chinese or Asian societies, you can buy Microsoft products that would cost hundreds of pounds or dollars for next to nothing, right? So there is a loss of copyrights, isn't there. Intellectual property rights are no longer as easily protected as they used to be. Now that we live in a digital age where anything can be copied easily, right?

So, intellectual property, and the loss of intellectual property which has given nation's states their superiority in the past, let's be quite clear about that - you know - why won't the West give Iran the right to developed enriched uranium, for example, because that's special protected knowledge. Apart from the fact that it might lead to a nuclear war, but that's a whole separate issue. You see what I am getting out? The collapse of intellectual property rights and loss of copyright, is a major assault on the privileged position of Western societies hitherto.

And the control of knowledge, the control of access to knowledge, that thing which characterise the Royal Library of Asabanepal in Nineveh, all those are millennia ago. That's becoming much more democratised now that anybody can access just about any knowledge they want by going onto Google or some other search engine. These are massive changes whose impact we can only begin to kind of guess at. So, I have talked a little bit about this already, the tendency towards globalisation, the fact that students travel the world.

Part 8

They will increasingly make up their degrees from courses of studies in different countries. There is conglomeration of universities, so recently I've read about this very important collaboration that is going on between Singapore University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology I mentioned before. They are creating a kind of alliance, just yesterday I was reading in The Guardian of an alliance between Manchester University and The Open University, the one I mentioned earlier on, to provide courses that have a global market rather than just appealing to their national markets. So there is a lot of awareness I think, that the traditional campus based university - maybe it's time is going to be over unless it can make itself more flexible and more agile for the future. But I want to talk about what we might lose in this. So, you've got a bit of time.

What might be lost if the traditional campus university becomes a bit of a fossil, a bit of a redundant model? One of the things that people say is that teaching quality will just fall over. That people cannot learn as effectively on line as they can do in a face- to- face teaching and learning environment. I don't know what you think about that. I don't know whether you think you need face to face support from your teacher or whether you could get that support just as effectively and efficiently through an on line discussion with your teacher, with your friends, through a computer programme that asks you to repeat various points until you get them right.

Another defence of the traditional campus based university is – well where we push back the frontiers of knowledge, where we carry out the important ‘blue skies’ research that we need if we are going to continue to innovate and be creative as nation states. Well – are you taught by people who are actively engaged in research? I don’t know. Does the fact that they are doing active research improve the quality of their teaching? I’m not sure. You are probably better judges of that than I am. I have my own ideas about it, but all I want to point out here is that one of the defences of the traditional universities is that research informs teaching, which makes for better student experience. I am just not so convinced that that is really true.

This is, I think, very important. The loss of campus based conviviality, this may not be a word that you are too familiar with ‘conviviality’ so I will just try and explain a bit what it means. It is the idea of living a social existence. That we are not isolated, atomised individuals all sitting in front of a computer terminal in a little egg-box somewhere, never communicating with each other which is a kind of dystopian nightmare of possible cyber future, but campus based conviviality is about the idea that the most important thing about going to university is just going there, it’s getting away from your parents. It’s going to university and being able to, you know, live a new life, to explore new ways of carrying on with people. Joining societies, staying up till 6 o’clock or all night and for several nights on the run if you really want to and nobody is going to say ‘No you can’t do that. So universities should be about this. They should be about, as one – I hope I don’t offend anybody by using this quotation but I can’t get it out of my mind now I have just remembered it, and this came from the Chancellor of Harvard University, one of the world’s leading universities - he said ‘the main point of Harvard University is to provide students with the opportunity for free sex and car parking’ OK. Well that adds to a sense of conviviality in student life I am sure. But more important than that – it’s about the idea that students are able to learn how to live together away from traditional forms of authority, parental authority or school authority, and that this is essential to the formation of a democratic, civilized society and that it’s when you are a student in higher education that you have the opportunity to learn how to do that.

Part 9

That is a defence of the traditional university. You might be thinking well, why don’t we do that anyway? Why don’t we forget about all that having to go to school stuff, all that going to class and lectures? Why can’t we just all go away for 3 years and live together as 18-21 year olds whatever it is, without having to bother about getting a degree?

So what would be the gains of this new technological future that I’m talking about? It would be... cheap, we’ve said. Much, much cheaper. For one module of the Open University at the moment, that’s a 60 point-carrying credit module, I think it’s round about £300. So you work that out. You could get a whole degree for £3,000. If you compare that with the cost of campus based education many students, to my knowledge, leave university after 3 years and they’ve got debts of £30,000 so that’s very considerable, 10 times more in fact. So one of the advantages would be – you are not in so much debt.

Quality - well we talked a bit about quality already, but you must think for yourselves whether you feel that only face-to-face education can provide you with the high quality that you need to succeed as a student. Then you will decide whether or not you could be an efficient and effective learner. Not without a teacher at all, but with a virtual teacher, somebody who is at the other side of the world.

Just a small anecdote: one of the courses that I have an interest in that we have at City University it's a Masters Degree in Maritime Operations Management. This is dealing with stuff that happens at sea. I do see these students once when they start the course. The rest of the time they are on board ship sailing around the 7 oceans of the planet and they are accessing their course via satellite connections from their ship, when they want to do it other than they are never seen. And they love the course. They talk to each other a lot about what they are doing, as we see from the Discussion Boards that they have on their virtual environment. And they certainly don't think that they are missing out on a campus experience. But maybe that is not a fair example since they are post-graduate students rather than under-graduates so there might be a difference as far as that is concerned in respect of this particular point.

And then we have talked about access, about widening access, changing the culture of teaching and learning and now I want to move on to some of the conclusions.

Current and future trends. Already universities in India and China are reversing what has been the traditional model for the last 50 years, that if students in those countries want a really good education they have got to go to the West. Either go to America or Europe. Now these countries have recognised, India and China I am particularly talking about, that they must reverse than brain drain because what happens is students come over to the West, they think 'I quite like the way people live over there I think I might stay and invest my future there'. So now the idea is to reverse that, and keep all the students at home. And they are also massively investing in education in those countries, Higher Education, in order to increase the number of graduates in the specialisms that are required.

Also we have looked at the development of corporate universities briefly. I mentioned that a couple of times and the way in which many of the specialist areas of knowledge that modern society requires... businesses, corporations are providing degree level courses sometimes in collaboration with a traditional university, but as often as not entirely on their own, and they are providing these traditional courses for their own employees.

Part 10

So you don't go to university to do that. You do that as part of your working career. So there's no separation between work and leisure in that respect.

And finally about you the students. When I talked about that conviviality stuff, I could see lots of you nodding, oh yes, that's really why I am here. I am here to have a good time meeting people from around the world that I haven't met before and away from all that kind of surveillance that I get in my own home society. It's a serious question for you to answer. Is it worth it? Couldn't you do

that by staying at home, maybe just leave home and get a job in your own country. Don't get me wrong, I don't want you to do that, I love coming here and giving these lectures to you, and I want future generations to carry on doing it but I really want you to ask yourselves - what are the real benefits to you travelling here, the expense of it, the disruption of it..... You really have to think very hard and carefully I think, about how that benefits you as individuals, and what are you getting that you wouldn't get, if you were studying at some virtual university.

Technology developments are just going to accelerate, as we have seen already. The development of mobile technologies will mean that you will be able to access your learning materials from literally anywhere on the planet. I read just the other day that the whole City of London is going to have free wireless connection, can you imagine that? You know if you've got one of these wireless laptops like the one I brought in this morning that means that you can just go anywhere in the City of London and access the internet for nothing, from anywhere. Now I think that that is just the beginning, that's going to happen in more and more cities around the world and it won't be long before my favourite fantasy that I will be able to lie on some beach on the coast of the Mediterranean, or somewhere in Africa or Asia, and I could just do all my work from there sitting under a palm tree because the world will be 'wired up' and I could learn what I wanted from there, I could earn my living from there. Why would we want to come to a frozen country like England for example, and suffer the weather that we have, although it is rather beautiful today. You don't get weather like this in many countries do you? Anyway you know what I am saying, so that's really it.

Thank you, you seem to have been a very attentive audience. If you've got any questions for me I would be pleased to hear them now, otherwise, good luck to you in your studies and I will be interested to know what your reaction is to this in the follow-up classes that I am sure you will have about it. Thank you very much.