

Editorial

THE WEB—ASSISTANT OR HEIR?

The web is becoming a constant companion of student and faculty (see Engineering Education World). Schedules, scripts, demonstrations and information are posted for student and faculty use. Faculty who know how, can retrieve unprecedented amounts of information for their lectures, or direct students to resources. Students themselves are using the web for data retrieval, and as a learning resource. Will the web replace the professor, or is it only a tool with which we need to get acquainted? University Administrations see the web as both a cost factor, an income factor, or even as a savings factor. We do not yet perceive and know what the influence of the web on lectures and laboratories will be.

Virtual laboratories will no doubt be part and parcel of future engineering life. They provide a good preliminary base for hands-on experiments and will improve preparation of students for the real-life laboratory. Experiments that were carried out in a project by the editor with the University of Wroclaw in Poland created a set of functional simulation experiments. The programs in digital electronics save many hours of lab assistance, which is both expensive and not always available. On the other hand faculty and lectures will not be redundant. But they will need to adapt and incorporate the new technologies. After five hundred years of using books and hard copy as the main resource we will need to learn to handle source materials which are on-line and available to the students who will expect more direct contact and interactivity with faculty. The web will act as an assistant and companion but can never take over.

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