Instructional Telecommunications

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This book, as its authors state in their preface, is designed to show adult educators and others interested in extending educational opportunities "how the potential of electronic communications of all kinds can be used for distant learners," (p. vii). More important it makes clear that the delivery capabilities of media themselves are just a first step in solving the problem of serving the distant learner. As the authors put it, the "solution is a system of instruction," (ibid.). The "system" they single out and describe in detail is the "telecourse," which, as all involved in technology-based instruction are well aware, stands as the United States' major contribution to distance education within the past twenty-five years.

As for "electronic communications," the authors review the media now available for use by distance educators. Their descriptions are clear and understandable, for which the adult educator unacquainted with such arcana as "videtex," "teletex," "I-Nets," and so forth will be grateful. In addition, there is a glossary of telecommunications terms. Such information alone makes the book valuable for the adult educator, especially for one whose career will extend over the next decade or beyond and who will have to come to terms with telecommunications realities, whether he wants to or not.

As for a "system of instruction," Hudspeth and Brey, both experienced in its use, extensively describe the telecourse as an effective instructional system for students studying both on and off campus. After looking at the system as a whole, they look at its complementary components, which include indispensable ones like video programs, study guides, student syllabi, and test items, as well as additional ones like microcomputer exercises, audio programs, and so on. They also describe the instructional support a telecourse student must have access to, including a live instructor or tutor, counseling service via telephone, and other sources. There is also an informative section that reports on what researchers have learned and are learning about telecourse effectiveness. In short, this is a handy manual that tells administrators and faculty what they should know before they adopt and employ telecourses.

Some readers of the book may object that the authors seem overly enamored of video media. Indeed, they quite frankly admit that they are working on the assumption that television is an effective instructional method. In their own words, its "blend of systematic instructional design and creative imagery...can provide outstanding instruction" (p.53). But it should be noted that they are