

Higher ed through television

University could compete with Harvard or MIT

By Sandy Johnstone
Of the Emerald

Television is on its way to becoming the latest educational tool, says one University professor.

Deanna Robinson, a telecommunications and film professor, says the University could use the Oregon Public Broadcasting System to set up educational programs for credit. The University should establish a task force to investigate a system that would explore ways to set up credit courses for television, she says.

Robinson recently attended conferences that addressed the issue of television and education and what new technology could add to educational television.

"The technology is all there. It's a matter of arranging it and where you want to put your dollars — what you think the future of education is," she says. "If you see the function of higher education as one of continuing education then you might want some funds (in television) instead of on the campuses."

Robinson admits some people complain the system is inefficient because there is no interaction with professors and students. But she says similar programs taught in New Zealand are believed to be just as good as the degree from a four-year University.

Tough competition with other universities may cause some problems because programs can be beamed via satellite almost anywhere.

"It would be putting Oregon in competition with schools like Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford... whether Oregon could do that successfully is questionable," Robinson says.

She also worries that television technology in general won't promote educational programs.

A number of bills in Congress promote competition in the hardware connected with mass communications but do not encourage the same type of competition in the software or programming, she says.

"We have the opportunity to use all different channels for education and continuing education, but it is not likely if the Congress keeps making laws in the same vein," she says. "There is a threat that there will not be much diversity in programs but a lot of diversity in systems."

The people attending the conferences came



Deanna Robinson

to the conclusion that no one really knows what effect TV has on education, Robinson says.

Two main groups emerged from the debate at a Wisconsin conference: people who extolled the evils of television, and social scientists who want evidence to back up any statements of television's effects, she says.

A series of studies since the 1960s has concluded that young children imitate violence on television, but "no one knows if it lasts," Robinson says. No other conclusions have been proved on the effects of television on education, she adds.

"We know kids do learn from TV but not so much from purposefully educating programs. It's more incidental learning, a lot of facts," she says.

The conference stressed visual literacy, teaching children how to view the industry and how to recognize different film techniques, Robinson says. For example, children would learn how to see the differences between a character such as Mary Tyler Moore, who was developed over a number of years, and a lesser developed character, like George Jefferson.

Vacancy rate reaches all-time high

The national vacancy rate for apartments is the lowest it has ever been, but vacancies in Eugene have hit an all-time high.

John Bennett, president of the Homebuilders Association, cites two surveys showing the Eugene/Springfield vacancy rates.

One survey, which did not count "run-down" apartments and single-room houses for rent, gave a vacancy rate of 13-15 percent for Eugene's apartments and a rate of about 15 percent for Springfield's apartments.

Another survey, conducted by a consultant for the city, estimated Eugene's vacancy rate at 18 percent and Spring-

field's rate at 30 percent.

The difficult economy and an enrollment drop at the University are possible factors, Bennett says.

However, "the vacancy rates have pretty much stabilized," he says. "And there is maybe a little drop (in vacancy rates)."

To lure people back to apartments, Bennett says many apartment managers have lowered rates and offered various incentives.

"When the rent situation started to get bad, people who had always lived on their own moved back in with their families. Now that the rents have started to come down, they're finding out that they liked living on their own and are getting apartments again."

But Bennett says as rents come down, landlords may let maintenance slip. And that's tough to recover from, he says.

"A lot of people would rather pay a little more money and get better maintenance and better service," he says.

The apartment complexes that do best in the long run are clean, well kept and offer quicker maintenance service, he says.

Bennett says the vacancy rate of 15 percent was half of one percent about six years ago in the University area. A vacancy rate around 6 percent is a happy balance, he says.

Bennett also predicts the vacancy rate probably won't come down much in the near future.

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