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Telecommunications and Distance Learning in Canada – A Survey

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In the winter of 1985/86 Ryerson Polytechnical Institute and the Federal Department of Communications co-operated in compiling information about various telecommunications-based learning activities in Canada. The resulting *Sourcebook* will be published by the Department in the Fall of 1986. The purpose of the *Sourcebook* is to provide distance educators who wish to employ technologies as part of their delivery method with descriptions of the experiences and practices of other organizations. A subsidiary purpose is to demonstrate to telephone companies, manufacturers, and providers of instructional learning systems the scope and type of use of communications technologies used by this sector.

The focus of the *Sourcebook* is on instructional and learning support activities which use communications technologies in distance learning. Priority is given to currently ongoing projects. A number of pilot projects and experiments also are included.

The *Sourcebook* is broad in scope and includes distance learning activities at universities, colleges, school boards, provincial Ministries of Education, Educational Communications Authorities and some private companies. It includes projects which directly support the instructional process and those which support the administration of distance learning and research. The *Sourcebook* spans the whole range of communications technologies which are employed in distance learning. This includes satellite and cable services, TV and radio broadcasting, video-, audio- and computer-conferencing, slow-scan television, electronic blackboards, and other technologies.

The *Sourcebook* is divided into three main sections. Part One introduces the *Sourcebook* and its purposes. Part Two summarizes in chart form the key activities of each of the 57 major projects included in the *Sourcebook*. The three sets of charts deal with Communications Technologies, with education sectors served, and with programme content. Part Three contains detailed descriptions of the 57 projects, using the following descriptors: Educational Mission, Communications Technologies, Programme Offerings, Educational Delivery System, Enrollment, Administration, Software Development, Training, Financing, The Future, Services, and Contact Person. In addition, shorter descriptions of another 38 activities are included. The *Sourcebook's* Annex includes a glossary of terms.

The project descriptions are based on materials and information received from the various institutions in response to a letter/questionnaire. Each institution listed

in the *Sourcebook* had the opportunity to review its description. In many instances, phone conversations were held to review and specify points. While the *Sourcebook* is comprehensive, it is not all-inclusive; some projects did not fit the selection criteria or came too late to the author's attention. It is hoped that the *Sourcebook* can be updated and expanded periodically. For copies of the *Sourcebook* (about 200 pages) please contact Barbara Helm, Senior Policy Analyst, Social Policy Directorate, Cultural Policy and Programs Branch, Department of Communications, 300 Slater Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0C8.

Based on the materials gathered and the investigation carried out in preparing the *Sourcebook*, the following recommendations for future activities by federal and provincial governments and by educational institutions can be made:

- Set up a Clearinghouse on technologies, costs, performance, learning packages, institutional arrangements, and other issues which affect the use of technologies. Such a Clearinghouse should be able to perform a function somewhat like a Consumer's Report.
- Support and evaluate learning and technology packages which are not driven by a given technology, but by learner needs and financial resources.
- Promote innovative institutional models for distance teaching which make integrated, planned use of advanced technologies, rather than using technologies as adjuncts to the traditional way of doing things.

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