

Wired TO Learn

In conjunction with its 15th anniversary in October, Inti College is holding an International Conference on e-Education (ICEE) at the Mines Beach Resort. EQ talks to Dr Chia Swee Peng and Jes Tinawin about the issues and the steps being taken to turn Inti into an E-campus.

Despite a great deal of publicity and talk of 'visions for the future' the progress of IT education and E-learning has been far from smooth. Due to its complexity and rapidly evolving nature, nobody really knows where it is going. According to Dr Chia, "The analogy is with industrialisation. When growth is so great it is often unexpected and can have negative as well as positive implications for societies, and on families in particular."

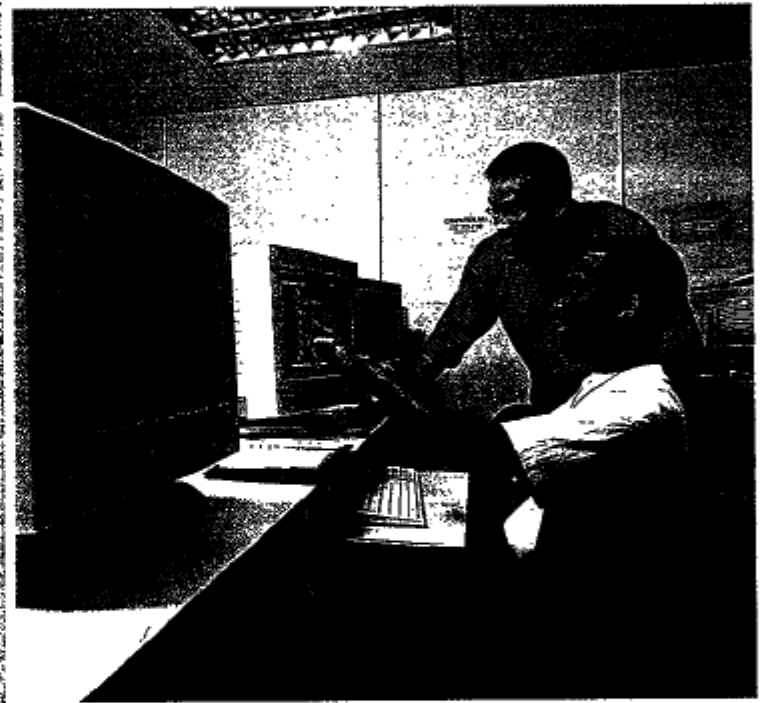
Unpredictable development

Given that no single e-learning platform or model has yet emerged, it is understandable that many organisations are hesitant about how events will pan out. The cost factor is one thing. Developing online content, along with the technology and support services required, is proving more difficult and costly than was first thought. "That's one reason why we were initially cautious," says Dr Chia. "It's like the pharmaceutical industry - the development costs are very high. Several million ringgit have been invested already in the e-learning infrastructure at Inti's campus in Nilar."

"So what e-learning models will evolve? It's not really a question of models. It's a question of effectiveness," he observes. Some institutions are putting their content (course materials, lecture notes, e-libraries...) online. Others attempt to provide support systems to monitor progress. Another approach, which also grapples with issues of pedagogy, is to focus on enhancing the learning experience using multimedia format and graphical representation of information.

E-campus

Inti's e-campus project (for details see article below) takes account of all these but will retain a physical presence and emphasise access to ICE. "The idea is to maintain student/lecturer contact but to minimise the amount of unnecessary interaction," says Dr Chia. "In effect this means that all those tedious things like registration, fees, schedules, time tabling and simple advice from lecturers can now be achieved without leaving the comfort of the hostel."



Wired to learn at Inti's e-campus.

The two key comments Jes Tinawin "are access and connectivity". Our first priority was to build connectivity direct to the student. Then we could give them access to support services and this has led to a heightened engagement between staff and students. Maybe 80% of the contact we have with students is online. This is a great boon for time management and it relies for its success on having effective messaging and collaborative tools.

Intellectual property

Apart from the support system, Inti has also invested in creating its own academic content. Although some premier institutions are now offering free access to materials, it is still vital for colleges to create their own intellectual property. "Courses need to be constantly updated so we contracted course design to subject experts. We then upgrade it as the syllabus requires," says Tinawin.