

Imperfect Accountability Inside Higher Ed

March 2, 2010

WASHINGTON -- One by one, as the U.S. Education Department under Secretary Margaret Spellings intensified its pressure on higher education to be more accountable to the public, groups of colleges unveiled voluntary efforts in which their members would collect and publish data designed to answer that call. The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities put forward its University and College Accountability Network (known as U-CAN) and the country's two major groups of public institutions unveiled their Voluntary System of Accountability, on a site they called College Portraits.

"U-CAN profiles also include information identified by policymakers as important for accountability," the independent college group writes on its Web site. "Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have called for more consumer information to help the public evaluate and choose colleges -- a goal that NAICU strongly supports."

"The College Portrait is a source of basic, comparable information about public colleges and institutions presented in a common, user-friendly format,... designed to provide greater accountability through accessible, transparent, and comparable information," the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities say in describing their accountability system.

Nice rhetoric -- but the groups' accountability systems/networks don't live up to it, researchers from Education Sector and the American Enterprise Institute say in a report released today.

"[A] close examination of these two prominent efforts reveals serious flaws that undermine their utility as engines of accountability," Chad Aldeman of Education Sector and Andrew Kelly of AEI write in "False Fronts? Behind Higher Education's Voluntary Accountability Systems." "For these efforts and others like them to improve consumer choice and exert meaningful pressure on schools to improve, they need to be more complete, comparison-friendly, and designed to highlight institutional differences.

"If existing flaws are not resolved, the nation runs the risk of ending up in the worst of all worlds: the appearance of higher education accountability without the reality. As such, policy makers and consumers should not be persuaded that these systems satisfy the need for increased transparency and accountability in higher education until their flaws are addressed."

The authors are particularly dismissive of the independent college group's U-CAN effort, which it says "provides almost no new information about costs, student experiences, or learning outcomes to parents and prospective students." While the site allows students and others to compare multiple colleges based on certain student and institutional characteristics (including college prices), "it does not obligate institutions to gather or reveal any data that are not already available elsewhere."

U-CAN, the report says, "is best cast as a pre-emptive attempt to fend off federal and state regulators, not a sincere effort to compel institutions to focus on consumer needs."

NAICU officials, not surprisingly, took umbrage at the groups' conclusions, noting that U-CAN has grown from 440 college and university profiles in 2007 to 708 now.

"The study criticizes the U-CAN's repackaging of existing data, without acknowledging that consumers historically do not know where to find this information in a consumer-friendly format," said David L. Warren, the group's president. "This is what U-CAN aims and succeeds in delivering. The report also fails to note that U-CAN provides original data on institutional net tuition -- information that was a precursor to the new federal requirement." U-CAN emerged in response to pleas from key members of Congress "for a simpler, less confusing way to get the vast reservoir of existing information on cost out to families in an institutionally comparable format," not in response to Spellings' call for learning outcomes data, Warren said.

"The wide diversity of private higher education's institutional missions makes a standard measure, or set of measures, of outcomes impossible. For this reason, U-CAN does not -- and will not -- prescribe one-size-fits-all learning measures for participating colleges," he said.

The authors spend a vast majority of the report detailing imperfections of the College Portraits Web site -- which is in many ways a tribute to the two public college associations that put together the Voluntary System of Accountability. "There's a whole lot more to the VSA than there is to U-CAN, and given some of the issues they tackle, we applaud them for it," Kelly said in an interview. "But while we applaud them for what they've done so far, that doesn't mean we should be satisfied with it."

The report critiques a range of structural and other limitations in the system's approach that impair its usefulness for consumers and policy makers alike. Most fundamentally, College Portraits does not allow users to compare institutions to one another based on a set of characteristics of their choosing, "nor can they easily rank schools on any of the criteria that they might want to."

Although the report notes that data from each institution's College Portrait page resides on the college's own Web site -- which was true when the project began -- that is no longer the case, said Christine Keller, executive director of VSA. The data is now collected on a centralized Web site and the groups could present it in a way that allows users to compare institutions (as the report's authors suggest) if there was demand for it, Keller said, but "there hasn't been a great outcry from our users that it's something they would really need and want."

Kelly and Aldeman praise the public colleges' voluntary system for doing something others have criticized it for: requiring all participating institutions to use one of a handful of measures of student learning outcomes. "Colleges and universities are generally loath to submit to this kind of standardized testing for fear of how their results might compare to those of their peers," the authors write. They also praise VSA for collecting and publishing data on "student engagement" that many institutions use but many fewer publish.

But they point out that the way that the accountability system uses data from the National Survey of Student Engagement results in relatively little variation among institutions, and note that institutions use drastically different "cost calculators" that make any attempt to compare price information difficult.

The fact that some of the most selective and highly visible public universities in the country (University of California campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles and San Diego, the University of Michigan, and Georgia Institute of Technology, to name several) and numerous colleges with low graduation rates have opted out of the VSA lead the authors to suggest that such accountability systems should be mandatory instead of voluntary.

They argue less for a federal mandate (though "it's not as if the government mandating that schools report data is a new concept," said AEI's Kelly) than for states to ensure (as North Carolina does) that all of their public institutions submit their information. "If the higher education market is to exert pressure on poor-performing institutions, consumers must have the necessary information to make informed choices and 'vote with their feet,' " the authors write. "Though social and political pressure to join voluntary systems might succeed in the long run, statutory or regulatory pressure from state legislatures to increase transparency could pay more certain and immediate dividends."

Keller of the VSA said officials at the two public college groups were fairly heartened by the think tanks' report, which she said recognized "that the VSA is a pioneering higher education accountability project."

She said the authors made some valid and helpful points about how the College Portraits site might be improved, but dismissed the need for more mandates to participate -- "which is exactly what we were trying to avoid by developing the voluntary system" -- and urging patience instead.

"With two-thirds of our membership participating, and upwards potential, I think we're doing pretty good job representing the public colleges and universities to the public," she said. "We need to continue to work on this, but we've got a good faith effort going."

Aldeman acknowledged that the existing systems were works in progress, and noted that he and Kelly had weighed in not only to critique the existing accountability projects but to shape those still in the works -- to be put forward (at some point, presumably) by groups of research universities and community colleges.

— **Doug Lederman**

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Given the strict criteria on when an institution can declare exigency, and the obviously unwelcome scrutiny such a declaration would bring about, institutions have hesitated to invoke that status. As a result, while institutions eliminate adjunct positions all the time, the tenured faculty member has been protected.

But maybe not so much anymore. In a series of recent actions, colleges appear to be ignoring the exigency requirement either when eliminating tenured jobs or considering the possibility of doing so. Administrators defend their moves as necessary to manage institutions in tight financial times, but faculty leaders see an erosion of a key right.

Consider these developments:

- Florida State University, without declaring financial exigency, is currently moving ahead with layoffs for 21 tenured faculty members (along with many more who lack tenure).
- Clark Atlanta University eliminated 20 tenured faculty members' jobs last year (along with more layoffs of non-tenured faculty members) without declaring financial exigency.
- The Idaho Board of Education last month changed the rules on the budget cuts that public college and university presidents can impose without declaring financial exigency. The impact of the language that was approved is in dispute. Everyone agrees that campus presidents can now impose furloughs without declarations of financial exigency. Faculty members believe the language could be used to impose layoffs -- including of tenure faculty members -- without a declaration of exigency.
- The University of System of Georgia on Monday released lists of program and position cuts its campuses would make -- including the elimination of tenured faculty positions -- if additional steep cuts are ordered by the state. The lists were compiled at the request of legislative committees and nobody in higher education is pushing the planned cuts. But while faculty groups are insisting that these cuts could be imposed only under a state of exigency, the system has resisted linking an exigency declaration to the potential cuts.

Why does a declaration of exigency matter so much? "It really guts tenure when you have layoffs" without financial exigency, said Jack Fiorito, a professor of management and president of the faculty union at Florida State University. Right now, he said, Florida State is hiring in some programs, even as tenured faculty members must search for work elsewhere while waiting

for the outcome of a union grievance on the layoffs. True tenure rights should mean that no university with the means to be hiring some faculty members should be getting rid of those promised lifetime job security in other academic areas, he said.

So if declaring financial exigency would give colleges more flexibility to impose layoffs, why don't they want to do so?

Officials cite a variety of reasons, including concerns that bond-rating agencies or accreditors may immediately impose extra reviews, and that students and donors might be scared off. They argue that the current economic downturn is so severe that colleges need more flexibility even if their financial survival isn't threatened. Indeed, given the general unwillingness of states to close public colleges and universities, but great willingness to impose deep cuts, some state higher education leaders say that they need more budget-balancing options to be available quickly -- even if they can't claim that their campuses are about to collapse.

Mark Browning, a spokesman for the Idaho Board of Education, said that these times really are different. "You've got to give the presidents all the tools possible to manage" in a situation where "conditions erode rapidly" and colleges could easily run out of money, he said. The speed with which financial realities change today may not allow a state board to meet and deliberate on financial exigency before a president needs to impose cuts, he said. (Browning stressed his belief, however, that the new authority approved by the board doesn't extend to layoffs, although he acknowledged faculty fears on the issue.)

A related issue, said John Millsaps, associate vice chancellor of the University System of Georgia, is that higher education systems are being forced to plan for budgets that they hope to avoid. In the last year, the university system has seen state support fall from \$2.3 billion to \$2.1 billion, and the governor's proposals for next year would bring state funds down to \$1.9 billion. The new list of program cuts is in response to state legislative committees that, noting a massive additional shortfall in the state budget, asked the university to come up with plans to cut an additional \$300 million in state funds.

In planning, the Board of Regents has told individual campuses that they may not declare exigency, and that only the system could do so, as a system -- an event considered highly unlikely.

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Likewise, he said system officials are not endorsing the list of potential cuts that they have just released. The system had to comply with the legislative requests for cuts, he said. "We want to give a realistic picture [to legislators] so they understand the magnitude of what they are asking

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So Millsaps said that the decision to declare financial exigency is one question while the development of lists of potential cuts is another. He acknowledged, however, that the additional \$300 million in cuts does in fact involve tenured faculty jobs -- primarily through colleges and universities saying that they would deal with cuts by eliminating entire programs.

Some of the institutional cut plans submitted specifically state that tenured jobs would not be at risk, although these plans typically have exceptionally high projected layoffs for those off the tenure track. The University of Georgia, for example, says that it could absorb its share of the cut in part by eliminating 543 filled instructor positions held by those off the tenure track, but that it could avoid tenured or tenure-track cuts.

But the plan for Georgia Southern University calls for eliminating 33 tenured faculty positions and the plan for the University of West Georgia would eliminate 17 tenured faculty jobs. Many of the plans call for eliminating entire departments and their associated faculty -- and while they don't specify that tenured faculty would be included, they suggest that would be the case (at least in any programs with tenured faculty members).

The reports are detailed on the negative impact that all of the cuts would have on students, with enrollment limits, fewer options for majors and so forth. And university leaders say that detailing all of these impacts doesn't mean that they want layoffs, but is part of a strategy to avoid or minimize them.

That doesn't reassure Hugh D. Hudson Jr., a history professor at Georgia State University and executive secretary of the Georgia Conference of the AAUP. He views the current process as "a massive assault on tenure."

That's for several reasons. One is that AAUP guidelines do not allow program elimination (as is central in all of the plans) to be a substitute for declaring financial exigency when it comes to eliminating tenured jobs. The AAUP rules give colleges the right to eliminate academic programs for educational reasons decided by the faculty -- and in those cases, tenured lines may be eliminated, although the colleges are supposed to make every effort to find other appropriate positions for those who'd lose their jobs. But that's supposed to be an educational decision-making process, not a budget-cutting process. That's also an issue at Florida State, where administrators have justified the layoffs by saying those losing their jobs are in areas from which the university has decided to withdraw.

Hudson said he is receiving calls from around the state with reports that the campuses have been told that they can go ahead and eliminate programs (if the additional cuts are ordered) without financial exigency and with tenured faculty members losing jobs. The campuses "are being told to just figure it out," he said.

Idaho may provide an illustration of why faculty members care so much about the process of declaring financial exigency. In 1981, the state board declared financial exigency and layoffs followed, including some of tenured faculty members. Some of those faculty members sued, and won a court battle over the appropriateness of the declaration of financial exigency and the way layoffs were determined. The AAUP censured the University of Idaho over the issue in 1983, lifting the censure in 1989. A key part of the lifting of the censure was an agreement about declaring financial exigency, with stipulations about the conditions that would be required for such a declaration.

Nick Gier, a professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Idaho and president of the Idaho Federation of Teachers, said that the board's recent action followed presidents "begging for more power" to make cuts as they wish, regardless of the pledges made in 1989. (Idaho law bars collective bargaining by public college faculty members, but the federation -- an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers -- works on behalf of faculty members while pushing to change the law.)

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Gary Rhoades, general secretary of the AAUP, said that "no one is contesting that we face bad times" economically in higher education. But he said that colleges are trying to have it both ways. "What you have is institutions playing a game of internally invoking financial difficulty, but not wanting externally to indicate financial difficulty in ways that could hurt their public image or bond rating."

Rhoades also said that the protection provided by financial exigency rules -- namely that in many rounds of cuts, tenured faculty jobs can't be included -- is appropriate. "What has been happening nationally is that we have been moving money away from the students and educational activities, moving money away from hiring tenure-track faculty," he said. A strong tenured and tenure-track faculty, he said, is directly related to student learning in that these professors develop the curriculum and build relations with students. "The very first thing we should be protecting are the people and activities that serve the students," he said, and financial exigency rules do that.

Although Rhoades said he is "skeptical" that significant layoffs of tenured faculty members are needed or will help higher education, he said it was possible that some institutions need to declare financial exigency. But he said that the traditionally high standard for such declarations was appropriate. "You have checks and balances and you have a wide range of people, not just administrators, determining how dramatic an economic situation is," he said.

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The fact that some of the most selective and highly visible public universities in the country (University of California campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles and San Diego, the University of Michigan, and Georgia Institute of Technology, to name several) and numerous colleges with low graduation rates have opted out of the VSA lead the authors to suggest that such accountability systems should be mandatory instead of voluntary.

They argue less for a federal mandate (though "it's not as if the government mandating that schools report data is a new concept," said AEI's Kelly) than for states to ensure (as North Carolina does) that all of their public institutions submit their information. "If the higher education market is to exert pressure on poor-performing institutions, consumers must have the necessary information to make informed choices and 'vote with their feet,' " the authors write. "Though social and political pressure to join voluntary systems might succeed in the long run, statutory or regulatory pressure from state legislatures to increase transparency could pay more certain and immediate dividends."

Keller of the VSA said officials at the two public college groups were fairly heartened by the think tanks' report, which she said recognized "that the VSA is a pioneering higher education accountability project."

She said the authors made some valid and helpful points about how the College Portraits site might be improved, but dismissed the need for more mandates to participate -- "which is exactly what we were trying to avoid by developing the voluntary system" -- and urging patience instead.

"With two-thirds of our membership participating, and upwards potential, I think we're doing pretty good job representing the public colleges and universities to the public," she said. "We need to continue to work on this, but we've got a good faith effort going."

Aldeman acknowledged that the existing systems were works in progress, and noted that he and Kelly had weighed in not only to critique the existing accountability projects but to shape those still in the works -- to be put forward (at some point, presumably) by groups of research universities and community colleges.

— **Doug Lederman**

Feds allege student visa fraud ring

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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BY CINDY CARCAMO

Eamonn Daniel Higgins never graduated from college, but he took lots of tests, immigration officials said Monday.

The 46-year-old Laguna Niguel resident didn't take the tests for himself, but posed as a foreign student taking tests on behalf of others who wanted to stay in the country on a student visa better known as an F-1 visa, prosecutors said. In exchange, foreigners paid him at least \$1,000 per exam, prosecutors allege in court documents.

On Monday morning, Higgins made his first appearance before a federal magistrate at the Santa Ana Federal Courthouse. About the same time, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents fanned out across Los Angeles and Orange County counties, arresting 16 students he is suspected of providing services for.

Of those, six were taken into custody on suspicion of committing visa fraud. The remaining 10 individuals were arrested on suspicion of administrative immigration violations and will be placed in removal proceedings, immigration officials said.

Higgins is suspected of providing services for at least 119 students – all from Middle Eastern countries.

Higgins, a man with salt-and-pepper hair and wearing black Converse-like shoes and a dark jacket, declined to comment. His public defender, Elizabeth Macias, also declined to comment. The magistrate entered a not guilty plea for Higgins, which is common procedure in federal court.

Higgins could face a maximum of five years in prison if convicted. His trial is scheduled to take place May 4.

Immigration officials said it was the most unusual case they've seen involving a suspected visa fraud scheme. They said the sting also highlights the vulnerability in the college and university testing process.

"The whole thing was very gutsy. This is the first I've seen of this," said Debra Parker, acting deputy special agent in charge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement investigations in Los Angeles. "This was a pretty sophisticated scheme ... I've never seen a visa fraud scheme involving a professional test taker."

According to prosecutors, the scheme began in January 2002 and ended in December when agents served a search warrant to Higgins' home. Agents said they seized 60 California driver's licenses featuring the names of foreign students and photographs of Higgins or his associates who prosecutors said were hired to take the exams.

The complaint document also states that agents discovered college exams and spiral notebooks with university course notes taken by Higgins among other items.

Immigration officials said Higgins was a legitimate tutor at one point. They say what likely motivated him to get in the visa fraud business was money.

"Apparently his services were pretty well-known in these student circles," Parker said. "They would contact him ... I think it's very ironic. I really do. It's an awful waste of his talent."

On Monday, agents arrested the following men on suspicion of obtaining a visa through knowingly fraudulent means:

- Mohamed Khalfan Hazeem Taresh Almehairi of the United Arab Emirates
- Khalid Butti Khalifa Mohamed Almehairbi of the United Arab Emirates
- Ibrahim Salem Khalfan Almansoori, of the United Arab Emirates
- Abdullah Mohammed Alhogail of Saudi Arabia
- Mohammed Ali Alnuaim of Saudi Arabia
- Saeed Mohamed Hilal Zayed Alfalahi of the United Arab Emirates

All were enrolled at Irvine Valley College, according to a federal complaint filed in federal court against the suspects.

HOW IT WORKED

Immigration officials said the defendant and others he recruited posed as foreign students, gaining access to testing centers at colleges and universities throughout Southern California such as Irvine Valley and Saddleback colleges, prosecutors alleged in court documents.

They gained access with fraudulent California driver's licenses, officials said. In return, Higgins charged at least \$1,000 each for English placement exams, math and English tests. The price went up if he or the others attended classes on behalf of a student.

Prosecutors state that he provided services to at least 119 students – all men from Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, and Qatar.

For the last eight years, prosecutors said Higgins aided students by taking or directing his associates to take math and English proficiency exams to sociology and marketing classes.

About half of the students are believed to have returned to their home countries, immigration officials said.

In Orange County, prosecutors said Higgins took a sociology class at Irvine Valley College on behalf of a United Arab Emirates national who had entered the country on a student visa.

In another case, Parker said, Higgins hired a blond woman who they said posed as a Middle Eastern man to take an exam.

Higgins' suspected associates had not been arrested as of Monday afternoon.

Parker said that other than getting to stay in the country, it's unclear whether the students had more nefarious reasons.

"That's one thing we're drilling on now." Parker said. "It's too premature to know what their motives were other than just wanting to stay here."

She said agents planned to interview the students after Monday's arrests.

A foreign student temporarily granted admission to the U.S. on a student F-1 visa is allowed to stay in the country as long as he or she is enrolled as a full-time student in an educational program, attending classes at least 18 hours a week. Any failure to comply could lead the student to lose his visa, according to immigration law.

TIES THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

Court documents state that agents were tipped off to the suspected scheme after Daly City Police Department officials retrieved a blue wallet dropped in their city.

The wallet contained fraudulent California driver's licenses and the name of Higgins' nephew, court documents filed by the prosecution state. Each of the licenses had a photograph of Higgins' nephew with seven different names.

Officials stated they later discovered that each of the names on the licenses belonged to foreign nationals who had entered the United States on a student visa and were studying at different schools in the area.

Prosecutors stated that the students attended the following colleges and universities:

Irvine Valley College, Saddleback College, Coastline Community College, Golden West College, Orange Coast College, El Camino College, Santa Monica College; California State University in Los Angeles, California State University in Long Beach, and California State University in Dominguez Hills.

Immigration officials plan to educate college and university officials, making them better aware of visa fraud schemes, Parker said.

"So they can guard themselves and protect themselves of such abuses in the future," she added.

3/9 — El Camino College 10th Annual Cherry Blossom Festival rafu.com

March 9 — El Camino College will present its 10th Annual cherry blossom festival from 1 to 2 p.m. Tuesday, March 9 on campus, next to the planetarium at the adjacent cherry tree grove.

Now known as the Dr. Nadine Ishitani Hata Memorial Cherry Blossom Festival, the event is named after the college's former vice president of Academic Affairs, who served El Camino College for 34 years as history professor, dean, and vice president. Hata was a fourth-generation Japanese American whose teaching and scholarship promoted awareness of issues related to Asian Americans.

The winner of the 2010 Dr. Nadine Ishitani Hata Memorial Scholarship will be announced at the event. Renowned koto player and composer, Yukiko Matsuyama, will perform several works on the 13-string harp-like instrument, the national instrument of Japan. Student presentations will also be featured, and light refreshments will be served.

Much of Hata's career as an internationally known historian focused on improving American history education to include the contributions of both genders and all races and ethnic groups. Hata was a fellow of the Historical Society of Southern California and a distinguished humanities educator of the Community College Humanities Association. A recipient of the California Community College Chancellor's John W. Rice Award for Promoting Equity and Diversity, Hata co-published with her husband, Dr.

Donald Hata, a supplement to elementary school history textbooks that documented the plight of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Hata was instrumental in working with American Honda Motor Corporation to bring several dozen Japanese cherry trees to El Camino College 10 years ago. Under her leadership, the cherry blossom festival has become a college tradition celebrating friendship and the beginning of spring.

South Bay business calendar

The Daily Breeze

From staff reports

Posted: 03/05/2010 01:40:52 PM PST

Business funding advice

Monday. The Small Business Development Center is offering free, by appointment, advice for small business owners who want funding for their businesses, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at El Camino College Business Training Center, 13430 Hawthorne Blvd., Hawthorne. Call 310-973-3177 for an appointment.

College 2.0: More Professors Could Share Lectures Online. But Should They?

Chronicle of Higher Education

March 7, 2010

There are good reasons to press the 'record' button, but uploading to the Internet might desecrate the classroom

By Jeffrey R. Young

Charlottesville, Va.

"Camera shy" is not the first phrase that comes to my mind for Siva Vaidhyanathan. The University of Virginia faculty member commands healthy fees for his lively presentations on media studies and law at conferences, and he has even appeared on *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*. But he's not sure if he should record his lectures—or if he does, whether he should share them freely online.

An associate professor who focuses on digital media, Mr. Vaidhyanathan regularly teaches and writes enthusiastically about movements to make music, movies, and other creative works free online. I thought he'd be one of the first people to advocate open access to lectures.

But no. "I find myself playing devil's advocate all the time" in class, he said. "I don't want to be on the record saying something I don't even believe" if the lectures go out on the Web. He considers the classroom a "sacred space" that may need to stay private to preserve academic freedom.

Professors across the country are now wrestling with this issue. More and more colleges have installed microphones or cameras in lecture halls and bought easy-to-use software to get lecture recordings online. The latest Campus Computing Survey, which gathers data on classroom technology nationwide, found that 28 percent of colleges have a strategic plan to provide coursecasting equipment, and 35 percent more are working on a plan now.

Those plans raise a lot of issues. Some professors *are* camera shy—at least when it comes to their teaching. Others say they discuss ideas with their students that are not yet ready for prime

time. And some administrators are nervous about giving away too much of their educational content as the cost of college continues to rise.

So far, most lectures seem to be locked up. A vast majority of the classes recorded on college campuses are available only to registered students in those courses as a study aid, say experts who track the trend. At Purdue University, for instance, just 24 of the 92 courses now recorded are open to the public through the university's ambitious coursecasting program.

Though several colleges run such open-courseware projects, in which they make syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, and other materials free, most of those efforts are still small, and only a few of the open courses include full lecture videos.

And though hundreds of colleges have set up channels on YouTube or reserved sections of Apple's iTunes Store devoted to material from colleges, the majority of the public content on those sites consists of marketing material or sports highlights rather than course lectures.

It's worth noting that the famous aphorism "Information wants to be free" is part of a longer quote from Stewart Brand, the *Whole Earth Catalog* editor who is also a computer pioneer. The other part of what he said, at a conference in 1984, was "Information wants to be expensive because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life."

The next few years could be crucial for determining how this balance tips for lecture videos, which can be produced for next to nothing but remain highly valuable in the eyes of professors and administrators.

Barriers and Fears

Mark A. Thoma, an associate professor of economics at the University of Oregon, was one of the first professors to make his every lecture free to the world. He started all of four years ago.

Like many professors I've talked to who have tried doing that, he says he's gained more viewers and attention than he ever imagined. Fans of his econometrics lectures are so loyal that some even sent him money to buy a new camera to improve the image quality.

Mr. Thoma said he hasn't felt inhibited in his lectures by the flashing red camera light, though at first he thought he might. But he knows colleagues who say they're not willing to join him.

"People are way more self-conscious about their teaching than you would think," he told me. "They're afraid people are going to grab some little clip and make fun of you."

Because so many students carry cellphone cameras that can shoot video, though, any professor could already become a laughing stock on YouTube. At least with his lecture recordings, Mr. Thoma has the ability to edit out any potentially embarrassing spots before he uploads.

For him the biggest obstacle has been finding the time to manage the recording process. He still does it the old-fashioned way—he hires a student to operate a camera during class, and he uploads the video footage to his personal YouTube account.

Mr. Vaidhyanathan struggles with the hassle factor. (He says he does hope to find a way to record and make available at least parts of his lectures, in part because he finds other professors' videos so useful.) The University of Virginia has a system set up in some classrooms that is designed to make recording a class as easy as clicking a few icons. But on a recent afternoon when he tried it, the system prompted him for a password and then didn't accept his. In the past, he said, he was able to log in and record his lecture, but then he had no idea how to find the file or post it online for his students.

John Alexander, a manager of instructional technology at the university, said that officials are working on bringing in a new system that will work better and be easier to use than what the institution has now. Other colleges are improving their technology as well, and the process seems to be getting easier on many campuses.

And while many professors feared that students would skip class if they could watch it in reruns, many professors I've talked to said they were easily able to short-circuit that practice by offering quizzes in class or taking attendance and making showing up part of the grade.

Copyright can be trickier. The law allows an exception for classroom use of clips of creative materials, but that doesn't extend to the public Web. So a professor can show a slide with a table from a textbook in physical class settings, but showing that same slide on an open Web site as part of a lecture video can potentially lead to legal trouble. Early this year, the University of California at Los Angeles temporarily forced professors to stop posting copyrighted videos to course Web sites after a trade group complained that the professors were violating copyright law by doing so. Last week the university decided to resume the practice, though, after its lawyers reviewed the issue.

For some guidance, professors can check out the "Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for OpenCourseWare," offered (free, naturally) by American University's Center for Social Media. Compliance can be difficult though, which is why open-courseware efforts end up spending time and money on securing permissions.

What If?

So what if all the professors now recording lectures for their students opened the videos to the world?

Not the discussion portion of class—let's skirt the issue of student privacy by excluding that. Imagine that all of those lectures, in which the camera is pointed squarely at a professor, were suddenly freely available.

Crazier things have happened: Google is digitizing the full text of millions of books in major university libraries as you read this (though the company faces court challenges over whether it is violating copyright in the process). What if, alongside a library of all the world's books, there was a library of tens of thousands of lecture videos?

Some scholars' ideas would be stolen. Some professors would face mockery. Some students would try the equivalent of home schooling at the college level, saving money by skipping the campus and watching at home instead.

Ideas would flow, though. Some students would get an earlier and better sense of what they want to major in by virtually sitting in on courses they may never have been exposed to before. Some professors would watch each other and improve their techniques by seeing what works for others.

And lectures might just fall out of popular use in physical classrooms, because professors could just point to their past recordings or those of others and assign viewings for homework. To keep students interested in the classroom, some professors would focus more on discussion or group projects and things that can't be easily captured on video.

Such radical openness is unlikely, and maybe not even desirable. After all, it will probably remain up to each professor to decide whether or not to press the record button. And it might work for some disciplines better than others. (Medical and highly technical ones have been the quickest to adopt the practice so far, I'm told.)

Mr. Vaidhyanathan's lectures are certainly worth catching. The day I visited his class, he gave the 200 students a clear outline of the differences between analog and digital media, and explained why using ones and zeros changes everything. He showed a couple of YouTube videos, flashed some homemade diagrams, and got a couple of students to express their thoughts, all the while pacing the floor at the front of the classroom, gesturing to emphasize his points.

It's not the kind of presentation he would do at a conference. It's more detailed and less crowd-pleasing.

But if you're a student or professor of media studies, it'd be worth a download—if he ever decides to put it online.