Thoughts About Online Courses in a 21st Education on the 40 Acres
from Dr. David Laude, Senior Vice Provost for Enrollment and Graduation Management

There is certainly no topic in higher education that is getting more ink than how technology fits into the equation — see the link below to President Powers’ recent report on the subject. I’d like to offer my take with respect to online courses in a 21st century education on the 40 Acres.

To begin, as I think back on my college experience, it is striking how similar it was, pedagogically, to high school. I took about 40 classes in high school and about 40 in college. I took mostly lecture courses with a few labs thrown in. I think I also had an independent study class in high school, same as college.

I can understand the sameness — in the 1970s we had very few tools to help with learning — mostly just a textbook and my ability to copy down as best I could what my teacher or professor thought I should know about the subject matter.

We all know how much things have changed now that all knowledge can be found on the internet. The boundaries to learning have dissolved — your daughter can earn 3 hours of college course credit in history as a high school sophomore and your father can complete a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) certificate on a cruise in the Mediterranean.

So what has this done to education back on the 40 Acres? Plenty. Most of the faculty have grown impatient with just being a talking head and have begun to explore new modalities in which to teach. So no doubt when talking to your son about how classes are going you will hear about a Signature Course with a dozen students sitting around a seminar table, or a research methods course in which your daughter has to develop and execute an independent inquiry. Maybe you are hearing words like blended or hybrid learning where your daughter watches the lecture before class and pushes buttons on an iClicker during class. There are the extremes, your son sitting under a tree taking a fully online class from a professor he may never meet, and yes, there are still a few of those 500 seat lecture classes where nobody knows your name.

To me, this is as exciting as learning can get. Because it isn’t just a matter, anymore, of making sure that you get a healthy dose of content knowledge, but also a chance to embrace experiential learning and skills development. And there are so many new ways to engage — peer-to-peer, online academic networks, adaptive interactive simulations, and so many more. This richness and diversity in how students engage the learning process suggests to me that higher education is in a place that has never been more vibrant and more exciting.

So rather than taking sides in trying to protect the way it was when you went to school or what you think should be the way to learn 20 years from now, take heart in knowing that when you put a couple thousand faculty together on the 40 Acres and tell them to innovate, then that best-in-class education you want for your child is almost certainly going to happen.

Technology Enhanced Education by President Bill Powers can be found by visiting: