

TECHNO

Gadgetry is not just the norm for Generation Y – it's vital

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► Heather Bashaw | Staff Writer

Technology and its integration into the college experience has proved itself limitless. Tons of colleges and career schools have hopped on the technology train, so much so that it is almost unheard of not to incorporate high-tech tools into teaching or engaging students. From advanced and integrated hardware for incoming students to online resources, such as social networks for parents, career colleges are taking advantage of the resources at their fingertips to enhance career college life.

Some schools, like McMurry University of Abilene, Texas, focus their efforts on technology in the classroom to enhance the career college learning experience. With – their Mobile Online Visionary Education program launched three years ago – the college arms every incoming freshman with a tablet PC, a mobile computer with a swivel screen

upon which a student can take notes and easily save them to his or her machine.

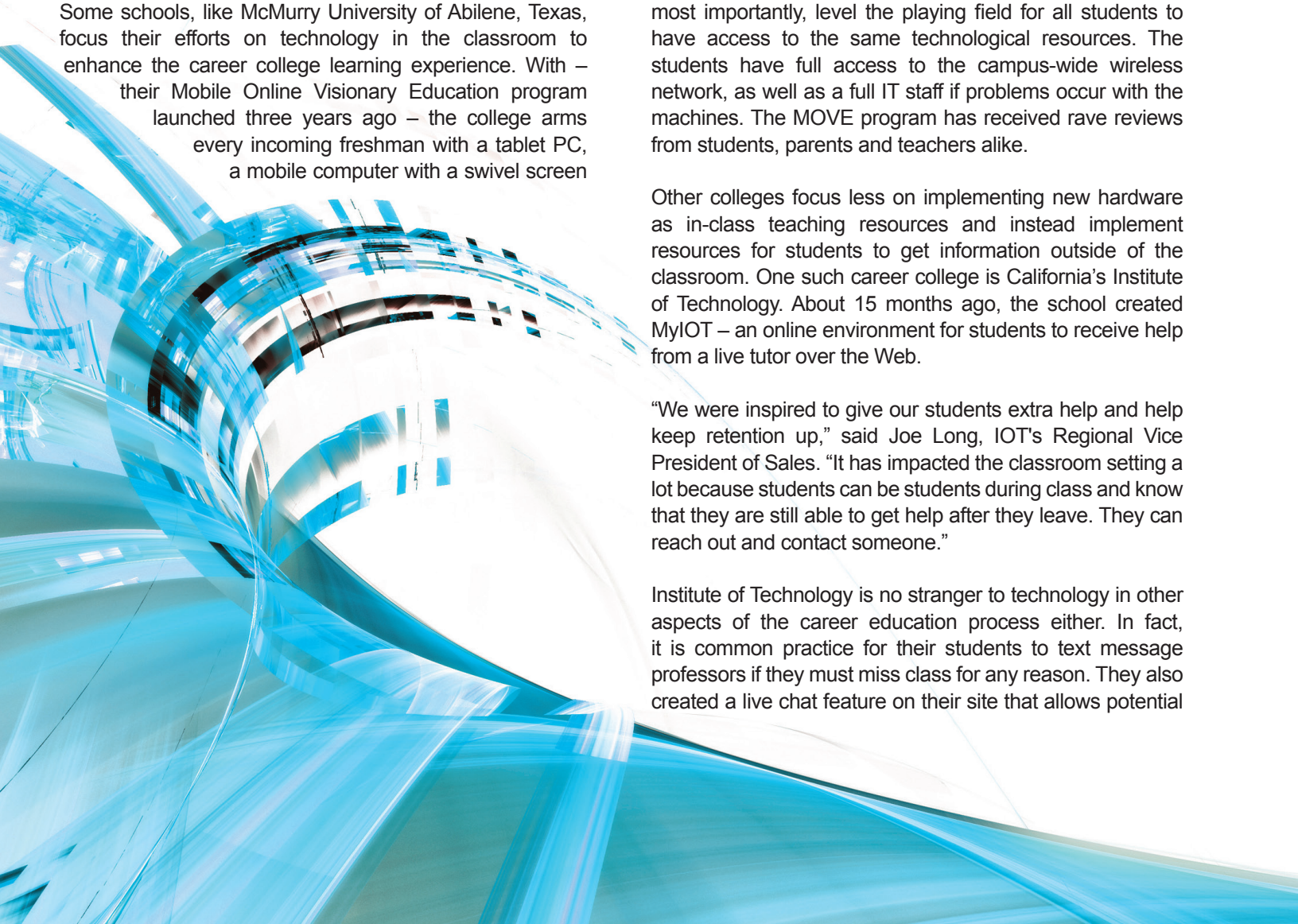
“We asked ourselves, ‘What could we use to make a classroom without walls?’” said Matt Chrisman, McMurry’s E-Communications Coordinator. “We wanted to do something to help students be better connected on campus.”

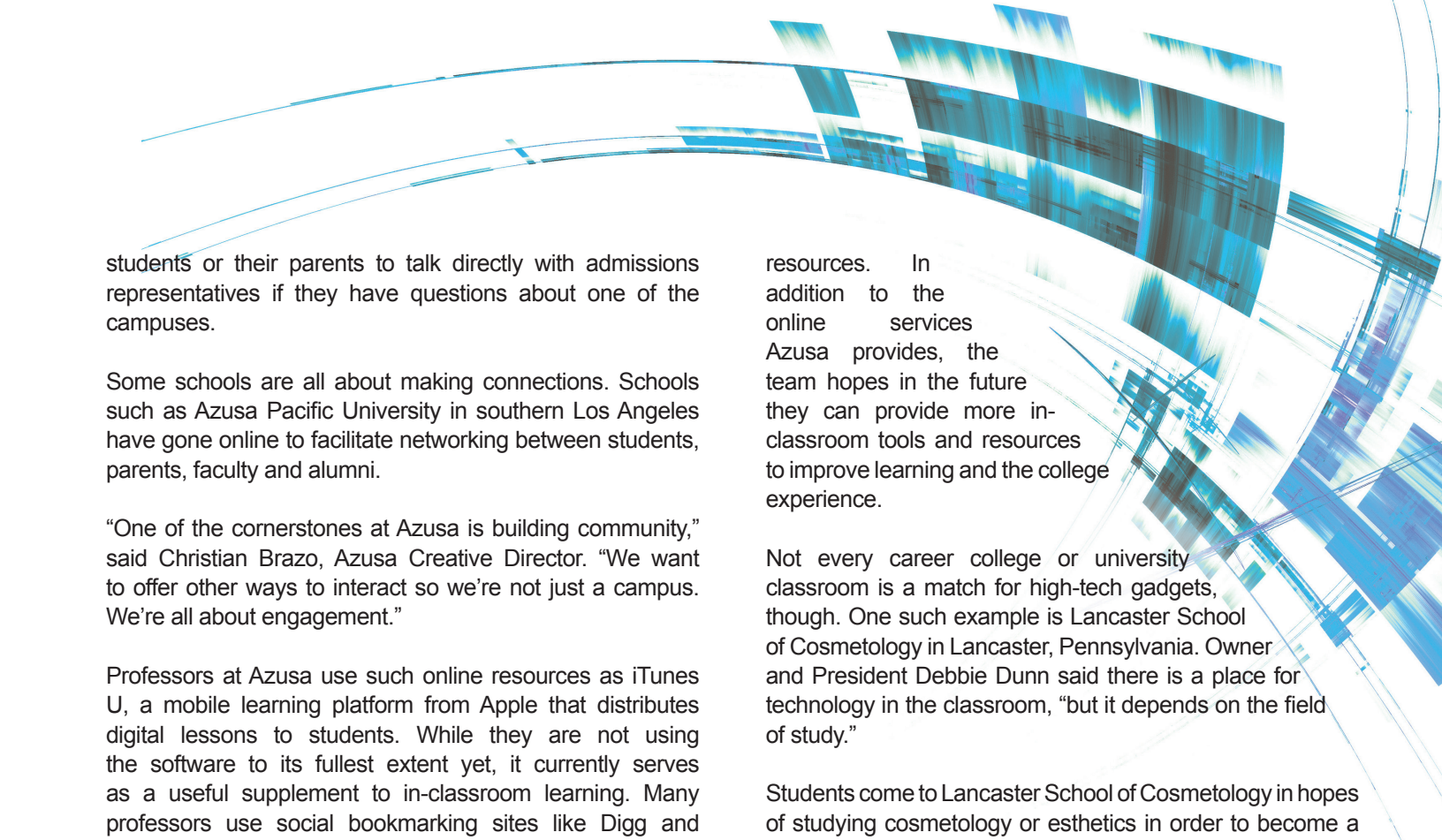
The tablet PCs streamline teachers’ sharing of notes and presentations, simplify making up missed classes, and, most importantly, level the playing field for all students to have access to the same technological resources. The students have full access to the campus-wide wireless network, as well as a full IT staff if problems occur with the machines. The MOVE program has received rave reviews from students, parents and teachers alike.

Other colleges focus less on implementing new hardware as in-class teaching resources and instead implement resources for students to get information outside of the classroom. One such career college is California’s Institute of Technology. About 15 months ago, the school created MyIOT – an online environment for students to receive help from a live tutor over the Web.

“We were inspired to give our students extra help and help keep retention up,” said Joe Long, IOT’s Regional Vice President of Sales. “It has impacted the classroom setting a lot because students can be students during class and know that they are still able to get help after they leave. They can reach out and contact someone.”

Institute of Technology is no stranger to technology in other aspects of the career education process either. In fact, it is common practice for their students to text message professors if they must miss class for any reason. They also created a live chat feature on their site that allows potential





students or their parents to talk directly with admissions representatives if they have questions about one of the campuses.

Some schools are all about making connections. Schools such as Azusa Pacific University in southern Los Angeles have gone online to facilitate networking between students, parents, faculty and alumni.

“One of the cornerstones at Azusa is building community,” said Christian Brazo, Azusa Creative Director. “We want to offer other ways to interact so we’re not just a campus. We’re all about engagement.”

Professors at Azusa use such online resources as iTunes U, a mobile learning platform from Apple that distributes digital lessons to students. While they are not using the software to its fullest extent yet, it currently serves as a useful supplement to in-classroom learning. Many professors use social bookmarking sites like Digg and

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del.icio.us to aggregate online articles and resources for their students. Azusa has also been known to use YouTube to log the college’s short films and weekly chapels for later viewing by parents and students. The college currently utilizes a Web-based platform to view their web site apu.edu on mobile devices, but at some point they would like to build a native iPhone application to increase interaction with students and give them better access to information like schedules and maps.

“We’re doing what we can to deliver what people want,” said Rafi Maljian, Marketing Director at Azusa. “What worked 20 years ago is not necessarily still what people want.”

Azusa is also creating a social networking site for parents of incoming and existing students. It will provide a unique atmosphere for future and current students, alumni of the school, parents and faculty to connect. It provides a space where parents and students can get more information about the school, read tips and articles, and gain access to useful

resources. In addition to the online services Azusa provides, the team hopes in the future they can provide more in-classroom tools and resources to improve learning and the college experience.

Not every career college or university classroom is a match for high-tech gadgets, though. One such example is Lancaster School of Cosmetology in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Owner and President Debbie Dunn said there is a place for technology in the classroom, “but it depends on the field of study.”

Students come to Lancaster School of Cosmetology in hopes of studying cosmetology or esthetics in order to become a cosmetologist, licensed esthetician, nail technician or other beauty professional. These students require hands-on training in their craft in order to pass their state exams and become licensed professionals.

“These are all still programs that are very personal,” Dunn said. “People want a personal connection, and our biggest challenge is to make sure our students can personally connect with clients. High-tech will not help us.”

Dunn said the school encounters many students who spend so much time text messaging that they “speak like they text,” and that it is much more difficult to teach customer service and personal connection with clientele now than it was 15 years ago. But Dunn does rely heavily on email technology to connect potential students with her entire staff so the students know they have a whole team of people interested in their welfare.

“I know that there are many, many ways to use technology to market our school, and I can see that growing exponentially over the years,” Dunn said.

Some career schools and other colleges may not be a great fit for the high-tech world of gadgets and Internet resources, but many others are finding new technology to be the greatest tool in their arsenal to engage and connect with students. Whether they work inside the classroom, after hours or all online – technology is enhancing the college experience for students at career colleges and trade schools nationwide.