Distance education is hardly a new feature of the American educational landscape. Since the turn of the century, correspondence schools (of varying legitimacy) have offered people the opportunity to develop professional skills and pursue academic credentials without leaving their homes.

However, as with shopping, banking, and many other daily activities, the expansion of the Internet is having a significant impact on the field of distance education. Recent years have seen the dramatic expansion of the number and type of online course offerings at traditional institutions and the development of full-scale, degree-granting "virtual universities." Both public and private institutions are jumping on the bandwagon, giving people the opportunity to "download" degrees.

**Minnesota Virtual University**

The major public endeavor in Minnesota is called the Minnesota Virtual University (MnVu). Unlike other "virtual universities," MnVu is not a degree-granting institution. Created by the 1997 Legislature, at the request of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system, MnVu was always intended to be an online course catalog, says its executive director, Gary Langer.

And that's exactly what it is. A visit to the MnVu Web site at www.mnvu.org allows viewers to learn about more than 30,000 course offerings from both public and private institutions across Minnesota. The site includes information about more than 600 different courses that its partnering institutions deliver entirely online. However, all transactions, such as registration, tuition and grades are dealt with directly between the institution and the student.

**Mondale identifies critical tasks**

Part two of two.

*Editor's note:* Citizens League Executive Director Lyle Wray and Research Associate Kris Lyndon Wilson recently interviewed Metropolitan Council Chair Ted Mondale on a variety of issues. Following is part two of an edited transcript of the interview. The first part appeared in the January issue of the Minnesota Journal.

**Minnesota Journal:** The Governor has said he wants to use the Big Plan and "smart growth" as templates for the bonding bill. What does this mean? What would it look like?

Ted Mondale: $1.5 billion worth of bonding requests have been brought down to $400 million with a smart-growth screen used as a rating criteria. There are only two other places in the country that are doing that—California and Maryland.

The difference in this administration is that this guy doesn't owe anybody and all of the decisions we make are based on the perceived best interest of citizens. Now, is the thought process or evaluation exactly how I would want it on every-

**Broaden debate beyond unicameral**

The current discussion of a unicameral is the first real debate on how the Legislature should be organized since we adopted annual sessions and party designation more than 25 years ago. It is certainly appropriate to consider how the legislative branch works, but certainly appropriate to consider how the Legislature should be organized. Although they can be additive in nature, the reality is that many conference committees are ineffective and are too concentrated at the end of the session for anyone to follow.

- Duplication of effort: Currently taxpayers elect two sets of officials to do the same work and it is expensive.
- Complexity: An average citizen has a very hard time following issues and proposals.
- Accountability: The Senate and House blame each other for action or inaction.
- Conference committees: Although they can be additive in nature, the reality is that many conference committees are ineffective and are too concentrated at the end of the session for anyone to follow.

**Continued on page 7**
Virtual learning: Getting on track with online education

Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

The "dot.com" world is upon us with a vengeance, as the flood of commercials during last month's Super Bowl demonstrates. The brick-and-mortar world of manufacturing, the Internet is driving considerable change. One observer has predicted that the Internet will metamorphose the "middle mile" - the middle of the U.S. economy in the next decade, wiping out many of the roles of the traditional options supply chain, reducing overhead levels and lowering overall costs.

In the world of higher education, this trend is remarkable different from that of 200 years ago. However, there are signs that a higher education technology revolution is underway and will accelerate. How should Minnesota graduate schools and undergraduate programs deal with these issues and present issues by this revolution?

First, let's think about the need. For instance, our largest undergraduate need an on-campus education limiting our consideration of new trends? For example, one of the foremost priorities: highways for rural legislators and some mass transit for urban legislators. Then, said the paper, the state "can get started on a new set of transportation needs such as the state's transportation system up to date." Red Wing Republican-Eagle (Jan. 11) reported that funding appears to have come up short in Gov. Ventura's transportation plan. It said it expects little support from rural interests for a policy that is largely focused on metropolitan transit.

Business Post-Bulletin (Jan. 4) said "not enough, as shown by two projects: Minnesota and some mass transit for rural legislators and some mass transit for urban legislators. Then, said the paper, the state "can get started on a new set of transportation needs such as the state's transportation system up to date." Red Wing Republican-Eagle (Jan. 11) reported that funding appears to have come up short in Gov. Ventura's transportation plan. It said it expects little support from rural interests for a policy that is largely focused on metropolitan transit.

Rochester Post-Bulletin (Jan. 3) said "Ventura's $400 million bill offers a way to resolve the conflict between urban and rural legislators. We should act on the recommendations: highways for rural legislators and some mass transit for urban legislators. Then, said the paper, the state "can get started on a new set of transportation needs such as the state's transportation system up to date." Red Wing Republican-Eagle (Jan. 11) reported that funding appears to have come up short in Gov. Ventura's transportation plan. It said it expects little support from rural interests for a policy that is largely focused on metropolitan transit.

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School districts are generally in better financial shape than they were during the 1980s. In our 1999 survey, 84 percent of districts reported an increase in funds available per student which is a reversal of the trends experienced during the 1980s. In addition, the number of districts in statutory operating debt decreased. Inflation-adjusted spending per student has declined since the 1970s. Last year, 19 districts experienced a decline in inflation-adjusted spending per student. 

Declining enrollment may also result in districts choosing to increase a little slower than inflation. While salary growth has not been a source of statewide spending growth since the mid-1980s, for some districts, Four-fifths of districts that consolidated between 1985 and 1990, and board in effect, an increase in average inflation-adjusted salaries for licensed staff. A 1991 survey produced the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

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I would say that’s a good decision. Doing the Livable Communities Act, which now has some 60 redevelopment projects out there, is big thing. So we are starting to make development and infrastructu-ure decisions that are good and thoughtul ones. We are changing our development model from the Atlanta and L.A. model. Not as far as any of us would like to, but it’s actua-ting that’s important. There’s no real direct service through the screen- ing. There is so real good express service out there and there are really many differences of the different legislative session.

We’ve had a weekday rider increase of about 18 percent over the last few years. As a result, season ticket sales have increased by the same level. We’ve had a weekday rider increase of about four percent. And we’ve had about a 30 percent rider increase on the week-

(/text)

I would say the decision to keep the $3 billion into it to make it a project of national interest is trying to accomplish three things. There major corporations or major gov-

emment entities that, in one year, take 20 minutes and totally re-engineer it from the bot-

om up. I think the idea is that we need to figure out a service that, instead of just picking everybody up every-

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Districts must now report revenue, spending by school

Jan. 30 was the due-date for reports from school districts to the Department of Children, Families and Learning about how much revenue the students bring to each school and how much the board spends at each school. This is the first year such information has had to be reported. Some districts are late. But the reports should be available either at the district offices or at the state.

The revenue-by-school will be the starting point for the budgeting this spring for the next school year. The law permits the board to reallocate and to expend the revenue as it wishes. So a key question up-front in the budgeting will be whether district boards of education want to let decisions on the money in each school, or some of it, be made by the school. And, if so, how much.

—Ted Kolderie.

Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport’s hub status is often cited as one of the important factors contributing to the economic vitality of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The current expansions of facility and service—especially international service—are designed to enhance the region’s global competitiveness.

Here’s a new twist: The Japan daily newspaper Yomiuri recently reported that U.S. government officials are charging that Narita airport doesn’t have enough arrival and departure slots to serve a city of the size and importance of Tokyo. The unnamed source referred to the inadequacy of the airport as a “non-tariff trade barrier”—pretty strong language—and said the U.S. government would ask Japan to improve the situation. Will having a good airport become a “have-to” rather than a “want-to” priority?—Janet Dudrow.

“Average teacher salary in the 1990s fell when adjusted for inflation,” read the subhead on a Feb. 3 Star Tribune story on a newly released Legislative Auditor’s report, School District Finances. The headline in the Feb. 2 Pioneer Press story was similar: “Education: Funds higher, teacher pay staying flat.”

And, indeed, that is one finding of the Auditor’s report. But it’s a finding that needs a closer look, as the report itself cautions. Two factors, the report says, led to the finding that inflation-adjusted average salaries for licensed staff decreased four percent between 1989 and 1999.

First, the report notes that the percentage of teachers with less than 10 years of experience increased from 23 percent in 1989 to 38 percent in 1999. At the same time, the percentage of teachers with 10 to 19 years of experience declined from 36 percent in 1989 to 23 percent in 1999. In what seems an understated remark, the report notes, “The increase in the number of lower-paid teachers likely [our emphasis] contributed to the increase in average teacher salaries.” Perhaps “almost certainly” would be more appropriate.

Second, the report states that average teacher salary schedules declined two percent in inflation-adjusted dollars between 1989 and 1999. A particular problem is the six-percent decline (inflation-adjusted) in the salary for an average beginning teacher with a bachelor’s degree and no additional credits.

But the report points out that because of the way teacher salary schedules work—with steps for years of experience and lanes for more education and training—most teachers are not stagnant on the schedule. The report gives examples of how a teacher moving up the average salary schedule between 1989 and 1999 could have earned increases of 22 percent, 53 percent, 39 percent, 64 percent—after adjusting for inflation—depending on where he or she started on the schedule and how much additional education he or she received. The report suggests that “most teachers have experienced substantial increases in salary, regardless of how average teacher salaries have performed.”

That makes a very different headline, indeed.—Dana Schroeder.

Every business is online these days, right? Not so. At least 40 percent of mid-sized and small businesses in US West’s territory have no connection to the Internet, according to Eric Bozich of US West, as quoted in the January issue of the Minnesota Technology.—Phil Jenni.

Despite Minnesotans’ annual grumbling about their property-tax bills, very few people are attending the local Truth-in-Taxation hearings that are specifically designed to explain the system and get citizen input. According to the Association of Minnesota Counties, a total of 448 people statewide attended the county-sponsored truth-in-taxation hearings last December. In 14 counties no one from the general public attended and in another 27 counties less than four people from the general public came. Only three counties had more than 20 people attend and the largest attendance was 40 people!—Kris Lyndon Wilson.

In the name of competition, the windshield replacement industry has turned an innocuous free box of steaks into a high-stakes giveaway—one company now offers $225 cash rebates or $450 government savings bonds. Not surprisingly, it’s the consumer who pays for this in the long run. But thanks, at least in part, to a ruling by the state Commerce Department back in May of last year, insurers must cover “all reasonable costs” for glass repair.

According to one insurance association, “court interpretations of ‘all reasonable costs’ have enabled glass repair shops to demand whatever price they want. Repair costs have risen dramatically as a result. Even before the ruling, average glass replacement costs in Minnesota were $329—more than 20 percent higher than any nearby state and significantly higher than Iowa ($220) and South Dakota ($170). “Free” steaks, indeed.—Ron Wirtz.

“Hang up and drive,” reads one popular bumper sticker. According to stateline.org, three states currently impose some minor restrictions on the use of cellular phones in cars and 20 more, including Minnesota, are considering legislation to regulate the practice.

On the other hand, a pilot project between the states of Virginia and Maryland and U.S. Wireless Corporation is evaluating a system that relies on cell phone users to track the speed of traffic on the congested freeways around the Washington, D.C., area. The system monitors the distance traveled by cell-phone users during their calls in order to calculate overall traffic speed and predict congestion. Officials argue that the approach is much easier and more effective than other methods of counting the number of cars on the road. Results are expected by this summer.—Dave Chadwick.

“Take Note” contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members; Janet Dudrow, policy analyst at Dorsey and Whitney; and Ron Wirtz, district news editor for the Federal Reserve Bank’s Fedgazette.
Welcome
New and returning members
Patricia McCormack and Mike Engel
David Sherwood Gabrielson
Sara Nagel
Gerry and Diane Paulson
Mary Weisensee

Citizens League
Matters
February 15, 2000
News for Citizens League Members

Public Affairs Directory is available now — The Public Affairs Directory contains the names, addresses and telephone numbers of government, education, communications and public affairs officials in Minnesota, with an emphasis on metropolitan officials. The Directory is a must for anyone interested in the who and where of public policy — you can order at www.citizensleague.net or call 612-338-0791.

Citizens League presents

University of Minnesota President
Mark Yudof

Thursday, March 16, 2000
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Cowles Auditorium
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

There is no charge for this event, but reservations are encouraged. Please RSVP by calling 612-338-0791.

New study to examine residential property taxes

The Citizens League Network meeting is sponsored by:
IBM
Imation
St. Jude Medical, Inc.
United HealthGroup

This Citizens League Network meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 22 and will feature John Wodele, director of communications for Governor Ventura. Mark your calendar now.

The next quarterly Network meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 22 and will feature John Wodele, director of communications for Governor Ventura. Mark your calendar now.

The Citizens League is about to embark on a new policy study which will examine residential property taxes in Minnesota. The study is being done through a partnership with the Department of Revenue, as part of the Ventura administration’s efforts to engage citizens in the process of preparing a major tax reform proposal for the 2001 legislative session.

The core question for the committee will be: Which policies should Minnesota pursue to best address the issue of property tax affordability among owners of homestead and cabin properties whose growth in taxes, due to increases in valuation, significantly exceed their ability-to-pay?

In addressing this question, the committee will consider how extensive the problem of valuation increases has become and whether a broad-based policy or more targeted relief is necessary. The committee will examine the fairness of the state’s value assessment methods as well as the current appeals process.

The committee will begin its work in early March and continue through the end of July. Efforts are currently underway to select co-chairs and determine the meeting day and time.

The committee will consist of about 30 people. Twenty will be selected from among metropolitan applicants and at least ten more will come from outside the metropolitan area.

Application forms will be mailed to all Citizens League members in the next few weeks. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like additional information you can check out our website at www.citizensleague.net or call the office at 612-338-0791.
**A Check Up for Health Care**

**Tuesday, February 8**

**DAVID STRAND**  
President, Medica Health Plans

David Strand will discuss current trends in health care and how they are effecting the HMO industry, consumer costs and benefit coverage.

**Tuesday, February 15**

**BILL BLAZAR**  
Senior Vice President, MN Chamber of Commerce

Bill Blazar will discuss how current trends in health care costs are impacting a major group of insurance purchasers—Minnesota employers.

**Tuesday, February 29**

**PETER WYCKOFF**  
Executive Director, Minnesota Senior Federation

Peter Wyckoff will address the issue from a consumer advocacy perspective and discuss how current trends in health care are impacting seniors.

**Tuesday, March 7**

**DR. ALFRED MICHAEL**  
Dean, University of Minnesota Medical School

Dr. Michael will discuss how current trends in health care are impacting medical education.

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**Virtual hearing on Unicameral**

Join experts, major political players, and other citizens in a serious public policy information exchange and discussion on proposals for a unicameral Minnesota state legislature, bi-cameral system reforms, and other representative reform proposals. The virtual hearing will mirror official legislative activities and discussions.

The hearing began February 1, 2000 and will run through the end of the Minnesota legislative session. Special online testimony will be sought in conjunction with official legislative committee hearings. This is a lower volume moderated discussion with a limited number of posts allowed each day. All messages will be clearly marked in the subject line making it easy for anyone to read or participate on their own time.

The virtual hearing is sponsored by Minnesota E-Democracy a non-partisan citizen-based project whose mission is to improve participation in democracy in Minnesota through the use of information networks. The web address for the virtual hearing is: www.e-democracy.org/vh.

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**Due to a scheduling change the Unicameral Legislature Debate that the Citizens League is hosting with Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), the Pioneer Press and the League of Women Voters has been postponed. It has been tentatively rescheduled for Tuesday, February 22. League members and the public are invited to attend the debate which will be held from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the North American History Theater, 30 E. 10th St., St. Paul.**

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**Happy Birthday, Citizens League!**

February 14 is the League’s 48th birthday. On that date in 1952, a group of civic-minded reformers elected the first officers and Board members and approved the articles of incorporation and by-laws for the new organization.

As the League’s 50th anniversary in 2002 approaches we intend to occasionally look back in the archives to give members a sense of the illustrative history of the Citizens League. You’ll note the CL logo with the flame on the publicity materials for Network programs. That logo was used by the League from December 1956 until September 1975. Of course, design elements from the 1950s are currently fashionable, so we think the flame logo is suitably retro to appeal to a new generation of civic leaders.

Also, look for a brand new look for the Minnesota Journal in the months ahead.