Distance Learning

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When President Peggy Gordon Elliot began her tenure, one of her new initiatives was, as it was then termed, “distance learning,” and she wanted me to research and design the program at The University of Akron. Through her then provost and my colleague, David Jamison, I was asked to assume the task. I eventually agreed and began to learn all about “distance learning,” supported by an unlimited travel budget. A colleague and I toured the country from coast to coast. The things we saw when we traveled showed the possibilities. At the time, video was booming, and we discussed having distant video classrooms and even industrial workforce training with
Goodyear via satellite to all parts of the globe. The final and very successful product of our efforts was a joint Master of Social Work program with Cleveland State University, which we accomplished by designing classrooms for point-to-point video instruction with our partner. That was Akron’s first foray into “distance learning.” Since then, digital media has displaced video as the medium of choice in what we now call, variously, alternative instructional delivery and time- and place-displaced instruction. It’s still controversial and not much understood, but we had a very successful start in Akron.