I have written before about the ongoing debate in higher education regarding whether liberal arts values are more important than career values. At Stevenson, we believe that students deserve to be deeply steeped in the liberal arts but at the same time also made aware of how these values inform professional and career selection. If Stevenson graduates are to play any role in society, they need to embrace this complete array of values.

In addition, we want students to be exposed to practice and mentoring, not just theory. These three steps have always been part of the post-graduate experience, but we firmly believe that liberal arts and career values, when connected to practice and mentoring at the undergraduate level, produce a well-rounded individual and career professional. In many ways, these concepts have been long settled in American higher education for at least 150 years. However, this is only part of what makes Stevenson special and only part of the competitive equation.

A significant development that is altering higher education’s landscape now and moving forward is online technology. The university was created as a communications network designed to discuss critical human issues. Until recently, the physical university was higher education’s only option. Now, it is possible to create a university externally in the same way the Internet was created. This possibility will redefine higher education and will require more changes for Stevenson University.

For example, the structure of higher education will need to be more adaptable and flexible. Stevenson is fortunate that we moved to a school within a University because this gives us the ability to respond more immediately to what students want. If we had not, for example, established the School of Graduate and Professional Studies, we might not have online instruction to the extent we do today. This requirement for flexibility will continue for the foreseeable future.

The design and content of higher education will also need to change. The best higher education example of something that foreshadowed current developments was the textbook. In its inception, it was controversial because it impinged on the autonomy of the professor in the classroom. Collaborative curriculum development will become a similar challenge.

Higher education has come to a point where programs will and can be collaboratively designed like the automobile to be global and world class. We could assemble a team of international mathematicians, digitize the curriculum, and offer everything from a one hour lecture to a doctor of philosophy in theoretical mathematics. Like computer software and the textbook, this curriculum development could create an opportunity to license world class programs to collaborating universities. Stevenson University will need to become part of extensive curriculum networks that are likely to transform higher education in helpful and unimaginable ways.

At the heart of societal transformation is the availability of education in a variety of settings. For example, our School of Graduate and Professional Studies offers both undergraduate and graduate programs online across the United States. In addition, we have also begun to offer traditional undergraduate online courses to students.

Stevenson University has always sought to provide an education to its students in a cutting-edge, innovative way. As we progress through the 21st century, we see multiple opportunities to offer a quality education through technology, expanding our diverse student body in a way never before anticipated. By doing so, Stevenson will become much more competitive as it seeks to be a national leader in career education while building that experience on a solid base of liberal arts disciplines.

Regardless of how we view it, higher education has changed. Although it may be unsettling to those of us who have been in higher education for many years, the positive impact for the nation and the world will far exceed the inconvenience and short-term problems. As we journey through these exciting changes, Stevenson University will continue to envision and design powerful educational programs to serve our students in a challenging world combining the best of the liberal arts with the practical values of career education.