

The European Students Forum, AEGEE point of view on e-Learning

What is AEGEE? (www.aegee.org)

Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE) is named after one of the birthplaces of democracy, the Aegean Sea, and the first parliament at the dawn of the French Revolution, *Les Etats Généraux*. AEGEE is one of Europe's largest interdisciplinary student associations, which promotes a unified Europe, cross-border co-operation, communication, integration among students and strives to create an open and tolerant society in the future. AEGEE is a voluntary, non-profit organization that is not linked to any political party. It is represented in 271 university cities, in 40 countries all over Europe and has approximately 17 000 members.

e-Learning

e-Learning is the use of online courses, video-conferences or any other ICT tools used in the framework of traditional education. Its main focus has to be on fostering collaborative learning and improving teaching methods. It is a tool for 'long distance learning' through online courses. Online courses provide an additional instrument for formal learning and can be used to create and update student curricula and re-train the existent workforce according to the latest research and achievements. eLearning will enable the Lifelong Learning process.

Although there are numerous benefits of e-Learning, there are also a few potential **threats** that need to be considered. If e-Learning shifts the students focus on computer to the extreme, the social and informal aspect of learning might suffer and the motivation decrease. These two elements are naturally essential in the learning and development process of each individual.

e-Learning must find a balance between online learning and face-to-face communication in order to be effective. e-Learning does not merely need to focus on providing text-based information but it could be combined with video-conferences, as a means of preserving the human interaction in the educational process.

e-Learning can also lead to the lack of community engagement since it provides access to information that might not fit in the local circumstances and decreases cultural diversity.

The use of e-Learning cannot be seen as a substitute to the student mobility as well as face-to-face communication.

In order to make use of the e-Learning opportunities several prerequisites have to be met:

a) **Access:** Internet and ICT has to be readily accessible to everybody

b) **Capacity building:** Training of human resources that will use and teach how to benefit from e-Learning applications

c) **Hardware and software:** The necessary equipment and the appropriate applications have to be made widely available.

d) **Recognition and quality assurance:** Standards for the online courses recognition have to be set up and new quality assurance forms have to be developed.

Several **actors** should be identified:

- *content providers (companies, universities, libraries);*
- *infrastructure providers (public and private institutions);*
- *students as recipients;*

Companies should be given the opportunity to re-train their workforce. Universities and libraries should make their academic resources available online.

This Position Paper was ratified at the General Assembly of AEGEE-Europe on 4th of May 2003 and represents the vision of 17 000 European students