

Technological Innovation for Mission and Status: Access, Exclusivity, and the Evolution of Cassette Programs at Canisius College

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Abstract

Before online learning became commonplace, audio- and videocassette courses offered an early form of asynchronous distance education. This archival study examines the emergence and evolution of cassette-based distance learning at Canisius College from 1973 to 1994. Initially launched as an innovative audiovisual extension program to expand access to higher education for nontraditional students, the initiative culminated in a 1980 proposal for an accredited associate degree program. Framed within Canisius's Jesuit tradition of service and educational access, this programmatic expansion prompted sharp criticism in student newspaper editorials and raised students' concern regarding academic quality and institutional prestige. Through the analysis of student newspaper reports alongside socioeconomic and political factors, this article uncovers a persistent tension in higher education: the friction between leveraging technology to democratize access and maintaining the institutional exclusivity that confers prestige and status. The historical analysis offers valuable lessons for contemporary discussions on remote and digital education and provides critical insights into the institutional challenges of integrating nontraditional educational technologies within established, traditional academic frameworks.

Keywords: cassette program, educational access, distance learning, educational technology, technological innovations in education, nontraditional students, higher education history, Jesuit education

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Founded in Buffalo, New York, in 1870 by German Jesuits, Canisius College was established to serve the sons of the city's German Catholic immigrant community (Canisius University, n.d.-a). Today, as a coeducational university, Canisius serves 1,728 undergraduate and 688 graduate students through the College of Arts and Sciences, the Wehle School of Business, and the School of Education and Human Services (Canisius University, 2025). Canisius's Jesuit mission emphasizes service to others and engagement with the wider community. Across its history, the institution has continually adapted its traditional and extension programs in response to changing community needs and technological developments (Canisius University, n.d.-b). Its School of Continuing, Advanced, and Professional Studies has long offered continuing education, professional certificates, and flexible learning pathways designed for working adults seeking to advance or pivot in their careers (Canisius University, n.d.-e). In 2020, the university launched the New Buffalo Institute with Dr. Mary Rockwell as its first director, to foster community and civic engagement in surrounding neighborhoods, demonstrating its continuing commitment to service, social justice, and the common good in the Ignatian tradition (Hurley, 2020).

The primary goal of this article is to recount Canisius's history of extension education, particularly the development of its cassette-based learning program, as a case that demonstrates the persistent tension in higher education between expanding access through technology and preserving institutional exclusivity that confers high status on its students and graduates. In 1973, Canisius began offering audio cassette courses through its extension program, expanding to video cassette courses in 1980 (Cornell, 1973; Ratke, 1980). This innovative Cassette Studies Program offered a novel form of distance education that allowed Canisius to extend its educational reach to nontraditional students in the community. In 1980, the college attempted to develop these courses into an accredited associate degree program designed to expand educational opportunities for underserved Buffalo residents. This objective can be understood as consistent with Canisius's Jesuit commitment to serving those at the margins. However, commentary in *The Griffin* expressed concern that the program might devalue Canisius degrees and diminish the status associated with attending a private college. This historical case study examines how

technology shaped nontraditional college education and how stakeholders resisted institutional efforts to expand access.

The first section of this article situates the Canisius cassette initiative within the broader history of extension and distance education, highlighting how technological innovations have long been leveraged to widen access for nontraditional students. The subsequent section traces the development of extension education at Canisius and the origins of the cassette initiative, examining how local demographic and institutional contexts shaped its design. The article then analyzes opposition expressed in student newspaper coverage of the proposed associate degree program, focusing on the rhetoric concerning institutional identity, quality, status, and prestige. The article concludes by considering the implications of this case for the current debates over educational technology, equity, and the enduring tension between access and exclusivity in higher education.

A Brief History of Extension Education

The history of extension education begins with the public lecture movement in 19th-century England and encompasses several different distance education modalities in the United States. Its development in the United States was anchored in the Wisconsin Idea and its commitment to public service and the democratization of academic knowledge (Hoeveler, 2016). Through correspondence study, radio and television broadcasts, and eventually audio and video recordings, extension education expanded access for women, working adults, and geographically isolated students (Davidson, 2006; Hoeveler, 2016). This section provides a backdrop for analyzing Canisius's effort to transform its cassette-based extension education into a formal associate degree program.

From European Public Lectures to the Wisconsin Idea (1850s–1900s)

University extension began in England in the 1850s, with Cambridge University pioneering the use of lecture-based courses offered to the general public that included syllabi, reading assignments, and written examinations (Reber, 1916). These lectures, such as those given by James Stuart on the history

of astronomy in 1867, were intended to spark public interest in and support for science while broadening the reach of academic knowledge beyond university students (Wade, 1976). These early public lectures established a model for later university extension programs in the United States that aimed to make higher education accessible to wider audiences.

Extension education in the United States emerged alongside early innovative forms of distance education. One of the first forms of distance education was correspondence courses, where students received instructional materials by mail and completed their coursework independently. In 1873, the Boston Society to Encourage Studies at Home began as the first correspondence school founded to provide women with access to higher education (Fraczek, 2019). The Chautauqua Correspondence College, established in 1881, became the first institution authorized to grant diplomas through correspondence (Fraczek, 2019). The founder of Chautauqua, William Rainey Harper, became president of the University of Chicago, where he introduced the first university-based correspondence courses in 1892 (University of Chicago Graham School, 2021). Harper integrated extension education into the university's core activities, establishing 54 extension centers that targeted working adults and extended beyond Chicago (University of Chicago Graham School, 2021; Wade, 1976). The legitimacy of these correspondence programs depended on universities' ability to uphold established academic standards and their willingness to confer recognized credentials.

The expansion of credentialing in distance education programs did not diminish the spread of extension education in the United States. The university extension movement grew from the English public lecture model, leading to the founding of the American Society for Extension of University Teaching in 1891 and the University Lecture Association in 1909 (Extension of University Teaching, 1891; Wade, 1976). Both the public lecture model and these newly established organizations reflected a shared effort to democratize higher education, extending university-level instruction beyond the traditional campus.

The philosophical foundation for the expansion of extension education in the United States can be traced to the Wisconsin Idea, developed at the University of Wisconsin–Madison during the presidency of John Bascom (1874–1887). Bascom argued that universities should serve the broader public and

apply academic knowledge to social and economic problems. The principle was later popularized in 1904 when the Wisconsin governor, Robert M. La Follette, declared that “the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state” (Hoeveler, 2016, p. 4). This philosophy encouraged universities to extend their research, teaching, and expertise beyond campus to inform public policy and expand educational opportunities across the state (Hoeveler, 2016). The Wisconsin Idea became a foundational influence on the growth of extension education and public outreach initiatives in American higher education during the early 20th century.

Live Broadcasting on Radio and Television (1910s–1950s)

The growth of correspondence courses was enabled by the size and efficiency of the U.S. Postal Service, but advances in communication technologies transformed extension education in the 20th century. The first university radio stations appeared as experimental initiatives around 1907 and expanded rapidly during the 1910s and early 1920s as universities obtained broadcast licenses (Pittman, 1986). By the 1920s, several institutions were offering college-level instruction through radio broadcasts, bringing higher education directly into homes across the country (Slotten, 2009).

In 1922, Pennsylvania State College began broadcasting courses on regional radio networks (Dawson, 2017). Three years later, the University of Iowa introduced for-credit courses by radio with similar programs developed at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, University of Minnesota, Oregon State University, and the University of Illinois (Dousay & Janak, 2018; Saettler, 2004). These early radio courses set the stage for the broader extension mission and university outreach beyond campus boundaries and into local communities (Blakely, 1979; Janak & Dousay, 2020).

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, educational broadcasting had grown into a national movement. Programs such as NBC’s *RCA Educational Hour* (1928), the *Ohio School of the Air* (1929), and CBS’s *American School of the Air* (1930) demonstrated radio’s ability to reach thousands of students in real time (Saettler, 2004).

By the mid-20th century, radio courses were widely used in colleges and extension education had expanded into live television broadcasts. In 1956,

Chicago City College's *TV College* offered tuition-free associate degrees through open-circuit broadcasts accessible to anybody in the city with a television (Zigerell, 1967). As Dousay and Janak (2018) observed, educational radio and television functioned as early forms of mass distance learning, sharing similarities with modern online courses in their capacity to distribute instructional content synchronously to large audiences beyond the physical classroom.

The Use of Multimedia Recordings for On-Demand Education (1960s–1970s)

By the 1960s and 1970s, extension schools had become laboratories of educational experimentation, employing a range of multimedia modalities designed to broaden access to higher education (Kentnor, 2015). These programs focused on student-centered learning, responded to growing public demand for college education, and capitalized on the increase in federal and state funding in the postwar higher education expansion in the United States. Increasingly, institutions were starting to integrate multiple delivery systems to meet the needs of a more diverse student population. For instance, the State University of Nebraska, an early open university, offered courses through a variety of media, including television, textbooks, newspapers, correspondence, video cassettes, audio cassettes, and regional learning centers (Wang, 1975). Similarly, the State University of New York founded Empire State College, a non-residential, decentralized institution that utilized technological innovation and a network of regional learning centers (Lefor et al., 2001; Wang, 1975). At Empire State, students pursued an individualized learning program with guidance from a faculty mentor instead of attending traditional classes, illustrating how technology created a shift toward flexible, student-directed education (Coughlan, 1980; Keller, 1973).

During this period, the higher education system in the United States was ripe for expansion and open to new forms of education. The introduction of compact, reproducible media, like audio cassettes, which became commercially available for the music industry in 1966 (Cross, 2013), and video cassettes, which entered the movie market in 1977 (Ganapati, 2010), offered promising opportunities for broadening access to higher education with asynchronous and on-demand learning. These technologies allowed institutions to extend

instruction beyond scheduled class sessions and live broadcasts, enabling students to access lectures and course materials at their convenience. Colleges and universities willing to integrate these technologies could position their institutions at the forefront of educational innovation and take the next step in extension education.

Extension Education at Canisius College Prior to the 1970s

Canisius began educating nontraditional students early in the 20th century. This section examines the development of Canisius's extension programs within the context of its Jesuit tradition with its emphasis on moral responsibility and service to the wider community, and its position within Buffalo's expanding higher education landscape. It then traces the history of nontraditional education at Canisius, from evening classes for working adults and live television broadcasts to the eventual development of the cassette program.

A Jesuit Tradition and Higher Education in Buffalo

As a Jesuit institution, Canisius was shaped by a long tradition of educational engagement rooted in service and social responsibility. The Society of Jesus, founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, developed an educational mission centered on helping others and serving the broader society. The first Jesuit school opened in Messina (Italy) in 1548. By 1773, the Jesuits operated over 800 schools worldwide, earning a reputation as the "schoolmasters of Europe" (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 7). Their commitment to community service drew on the pedagogical principles codified in the 1599 *Ratio Studiorum*, which emphasized liberal learning, active engagement, and moral responsibility (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2011). Within this framework, Canisius's extension education can be interpreted as an expression of its Jesuit mission, particularly its emphasis on treating the extension of educational opportunities as a moral responsibility.

In the mid-1950s, Canisius was one of a growing number of higher education institutions in Buffalo, New York. The University at Buffalo, originally a private professional school, joined the State University of New York system in 1962, receiving substantial state funding and triggering enrollment

growth as it planned for a large, new suburban campus in Amherst (University at Buffalo, n.d.). At the same time, Buffalo State College evolved from a teacher's college into a comprehensive institution, adding liberal arts and professional programs, expanding facilities, and launching educational opportunity initiatives that brought more underrepresented students into higher education (Buffalo State University, n.d.). Nearby Catholic colleges, D'Youville and Rosary Hill (now Daemen), were also growing their enrollments, constructing new residence halls and academic buildings, expanding their academic programs to include professional programs, and transitioning from single-sex to coeducational institutions during this period (Bradley, 2022; D'Youville University–Montante Family Library, n.d.). Given the growth of the higher education sector in Buffalo, Canisius sought innovative ways to attract and serve a broader segment of nontraditional students, including through initiatives such as the cassette program.

Early History of Nontraditional Students at Canisius

Less than 50 years after its founding in 1870, Canisius began to offer courses to nontraditional students by introducing noncredit afternoon and evening programs for working adults in 1919 (“Night Session,” 1941). In 1941, the college announced that students in these extension programs would be eligible for bachelor’s degrees in business administration (“Night Session,” 1941). A decade later, Canisius established an Adult Education Center within its Evening Division, offering 19 courses that had no prerequisites, homework, or examinations (“College Initiate Adult Education,” 1953). These courses, held once a week for eight weeks and costing \$10, quickly gained popularity (“College Initiate Adult Education,” 1953). By 1955, despite a \$50 increase in tuition from the previous year, enrollment ballooned to 300 students (“Adult courses,” 1955). That same year, the Department of Sociology launched a television series based on a Canisius course, *Marriage and the Family*, which featured six male and six female students and aired on Sunday afternoons in Buffalo (“Adult courses,” 1955). This course offered another form of public access to a Canisius education.

By 1968, the Civil Rights Movement had strongly influenced the campus, prompting the college to consider its role and the impact of its extension

education programs in serving the increasingly diverse Buffalo community. The Community Action Organization hosted a conference on campus to “give residents of Buffalo ghetto areas an opportunity to voice their opinions regarding various recreation, job opportunity, and adult education programs aimed at community development” (“CAO Designs,” 1968, p. 9). Later that spring, the Independent Catholic Action Now (I CAN) expressed interest in “developing programs of study and action which will assist the Negro ghetto” (Maryniak & Brady, 1968, p. 2), specifically identifying the college’s adult education program as a tool for positive change. I CAN envisioned Canisius as a pivotal community institution capable of bridging divides between Catholics and Protestants, Black and White residents, and middle-class and low-income communities in addressing poverty (Maryniak & Brady, 1968). However, our review of *The Griffin* and the other archival materials found no evidence that Canisius implemented targeted changes to the Adult Education Center in response to calls to address the needs of the Black residents of Buffalo.

The Canisius College Cassette Program

The expansion of nontraditional education at Canisius from 1919 through the 1960s highlights the institution’s willingness to experiment with new forms of technology and educational modalities to meet community needs. The increase in government funding for colleges and universities and public demand for access to higher education in the 1960s, especially for nontraditional students, demonstrated the need for new educational opportunities in Buffalo (Kisker et al., 2023; Thelin, 2019). This environment opened the door for the cassette program at Canisius. Audio cassettes, a product of the 1960s, offered a novel approach to distance education, capable of delivering instructional content flexibly and efficiently (Kentnor, 2015). Canisius saw this technology as an opportunity to enhance its extension education offerings and provide a valuable resource for Buffalo residents, although some faculty members, student representatives, and student newspaper editorialists questioned the program’s quality and institutional implications. The next sections recount the origins of the cassette program and the opposition that the college faced in implementing an associate degree program based on the cassette courses.

The Origins of the Cassette Program (1973)

The idea for the cassette program was first reported in the student newspaper in March of 1973 as Canisius explored new extension centers in the Buffalo suburbs to target what was described as “a huge, untapped market, the suburban housewife” (Cornell, 1973, p. 9). This demographic differed from the urban Black community that I CAN had earlier urged the adult education program to serve.

Reporting in *The Griffin*, Cornell (1973) noted that the proposed program included at least five credit-bearing humanities courses delivered via audio and video cassettes, none of which led to a Canisius degree. Students would be required to meet with a faculty mentor at least three times a semester at the center in Eastern Hills Mall, which would be open from noon to 9 p.m. five days a week to accommodate nontraditional students. Tuition was planned to be \$75 per course, half the rate for traditional students, with eligibility restricted to those 25 and older to prevent traditional students from accessing the discounted rate. Dr. Joseph Bieron, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, believed this new extension program would address challenges faced by evening classes on campus, such as security and parking issues, while potentially “increas[ing] the income of both the College and the faculty” (Cornell, 1973, p. 9). He also saw it as an opportunity for “Canisius to get into the field of video cassette courses on a trial basis” and to compete with external degree programs and credit-by-examination options available at other New York institutions (p. 9).

The initiative was expected to cost at least \$40,000 and would require budget cuts in less productive areas of the college (Cornell, 1973). By 1975, a revised and reduced version of the cassette program was initiated under the Advanced Institute Development Program, a college-wide program supported by \$1.5 million in federal funds (Heimback, 1976). In an advertisement in *Courier Express* in 1978 (see Figure 1), Canisius promoted its adult education programs, including the new cassette classes, as “custom-tailored to meet your needs ... from a highly respected institution” (“Canisius College offers you a new opportunity,” 1978, p. 38). The advertisement promoted its cassette program as “Take the First Step in Continuing Your Education. Scan our program list below, review our cassette studies innovation” (p. 38).

Figure 1

Canisius College Advertisement for Adult Education in 1978

CANISIUS COLLEGE OFFERS YOU A NEW OPPORTUNITY

WE KNOW ADULT EDUCATION NEEDS...

Since your high school days, you've probably realized that acquiring additional education is almost a matter of necessity. Perhaps you are now considering college studies for the first time, or you may already have some previous college experience... or graduate school may be your next goal. Whatever the case, you want your education to be custom-tailored to meet your needs, and to come from a highly respected institution.

Even with all your responsibilities, you intend setting aside time to review college program brochures. A busy schedule, however, delays you from writing, telephoning, or visiting the college to obtain information.

Today, by way of this circular, Canisius College is offering you an education reply card to assist you in receiving information.

YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR SUCCESS. Consider our programs.

Choose a career from over 50 different undergraduate programs. Specialize in any area which excites your imagination and is consistent with your capabilities, e.g., Management, Biology, Art History, Accounting, among others. With regular study, you can be a success in your program at Canisius. We understand your career education needs.

In addition, opportunities to gain knowledge and power from the liberal arts are available for every Canisius student, regardless of career program choice. The liberal arts courses span all areas of human interest from Psychology to History, from Literature to the Sciences, and more. Knowledge from the arts can increase your power to understand other people, evaluate new ideas, communicate your thoughts, recognize social and political responsibility, and can add greater meaning to your personal existence.

TAKE THE FIRST STEP IN CONTINUING YOUR EDUCATION. Scan our program list below, review our cassette studies (see reverse) and then mail in reply card for further information and brochures.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (Bachelors)

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION ☐ Accounting ☐ Economics ☐ Fashion Institute of Technology ☐ Finance ☐ Management ☐ Marketing NATURAL SCIENCES ☐ Bio-Chemistry ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pre Dental ☐ Pre Engineering ☐ Pre Medical ☐ Pre Veterinary ☐ Medical Technology	HUMANITIES ☐ Art History ☐ Bio-Chemistry ☐ Biology ☐ Communication ☐ Education - Secondary ☐ Biology ☐ Chemistry ☐ Commerce ☐ English ☐ History ☐ International Relations ☐ Mathematics	☐ Modern Languages ☐ French ☐ German ☐ Italian ☐ Philosophy ☐ Physical Education ☐ Physics ☐ Political Science ☐ Pre Law ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology and Anthropology ☐ Religious Studies ☐ Urban Studies
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SPECIAL INTEREST COURSES/PROGRAMS

☐ CLEBS ☐ Computer Science ☐ Criminal Justice ☐ Military Science ☐ INSTITUTE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT ☐ Essentials of Finance for Non-Financial Managers ☐ Management Skills for Women ☐ Minor M.B.A. ☐ Supervisory Development and Application	GRADUATE PROGRAMS (Masters) <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> ☐ Education ☐ Administration and Supervision ☐ Teacher Education ☐ Educational Research ☐ Counselor Education ☐ Special Education (Deaf) ☐ English ☐ Religious Studies </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> CASSETTE STUDIES ☐ Financial Aid Information ☐ Veterans Benefit Information ☐ Evening Division ☐ Summer Session </td> </tr> </table>	☐ Education ☐ Administration and Supervision ☐ Teacher Education ☐ Educational Research ☐ Counselor Education ☐ Special Education (Deaf) ☐ English ☐ Religious Studies	CASSETTE STUDIES ☐ Financial Aid Information ☐ Veterans Benefit Information ☐ Evening Division ☐ Summer Session
☐ Education ☐ Administration and Supervision ☐ Teacher Education ☐ Educational Research ☐ Counselor Education ☐ Special Education (Deaf) ☐ English ☐ Religious Studies	CASSETTE STUDIES ☐ Financial Aid Information ☐ Veterans Benefit Information ☐ Evening Division ☐ Summer Session		

Director of Career Services
Please send information for the programs checked

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Telephone _____ Occupation or profession _____

VETERANS
Canisius College programs are approved for veteran payments. Veterans discharged within the past 10 years may still be eligible for BENEFITS. For further information, please check the Veterans Benefit box.

FINANCIAL AID
Canisius College can assist you in acquiring all the financial aid you are eligible to receive, e.g., IAP grant, HEUG grant, etc. Please check the Financial Aid box for more detail.

For information by telephone, call Career Services office 716-883-7000, Ext. 260 or 267.

Note. Advertisement for adult education and cassette studies published in the Courier Express, August 1, 1978, p. 38.

To provide deeper context regarding this innovation, the advertisement prompted readers to turn the page (see Figure 2), asking, "Have You Ever Considered Continuing Your Education?" (1978, p. 37). The reverse side expanded on the program's logistics and urged readers to take immediate action

Figure 2*Canisius College Advertisement for Adult Education in 1978, Reverse side*

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED CONTINUING YOUR EDUCATION?

It's not too late – persons of **all ages** are returning to school. Listed below are some reasons why CANISIUS COLLEGE adult students are pursuing additional education.



- Career Advancement
- Greater job security
- Improved job performance
- Knowledge to keep ahead of business competition
- Obsolescence of current job skills

- Reentry into the labor market
- New career preparation
- Realization of missed educational opportunities
- Fulfillment of a lifelong ambition to be a college graduate

- A second career
- Personal enrichment
- Desire to learn a particular subject
- Recognition of learning as a lifelong process

CANISIUS COLLEGE MAY BE FOR YOU

Consider the workstyles of current Canisius adult students: managers and aspiring managers in the business community, secretaries, housewives, industrial workers, sales personnel, government employees, scientists and technicians, returning veterans, professional persons, and many more.

Yes, our adult students have varied backgrounds, but generally they share a common ambition – a desire to learn something new in order to increase their success in life and career. You may share the same ambition with our adult students. Canisius College is expanding its enrollment opportunities and invites you to review its programs.

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Mail in the reply card today, and we will send you a free brochure for the programs you request. The Career Services Office at the college can provide counseling for those persons who are unsure of which career or course to pursue.

Many of our adult students begin studies with just a single course and later enroll in additional courses, after they become familiar with the requirements of academic life. Students may enroll part time or full time, in the Day Division or Evening Division. Courses begin in the Summer, Fall or Spring semesters.

CASSETTE STUDIES

Persons who are not able to attend campus classes because of family or work commitments may now earn college credit through the Cassette Studies program.

Cassette Studies is unique: cassette tapes are substituted for the conventional classroom lecture, therefore classroom attendance is not a requirement. Using the tapes along with the traditional textbooks and other materials, the student accomplishes study and examination independently, generally at home, but under the guidance of the college faculty. All Cassette Studies courses carry appropriate Canisius College credit. If you wish further information, please check the Cassette Studies box.



BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed In The United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

Canisius College
 Career Services Office
 2001 Main Street
 Buffalo, New York 14208, U.S.A.

First Class
 Permit No. 1415
 Buffalo, NY



Note. Reverse side of the advertisement published in the Courier Express, August 1, 1978, p. 37.

by mailing back an enclosed reply card. This intentional combination of broad educational access and logistical innovation captured both the flexibility and the quality Canisius sought to market. Interestingly, the ads emphasized the value of taking courses, specifically in the liberal arts, for personal development and fulfillment as a primary focus, with career benefits as secondary.

The program was also promoted through advertisements in rural newspapers, such as *The Journal-Register*, *Tri-County Times*, *Wellsville Daily Reporter*, and *Westfield Republican*, signaling an effort to recruit students from small towns and rural communities beyond the city of Buffalo ("Canisius College Offers Cassette Studies Program," 1976; "Canisius Offers Cassette Studies Program," 1976; "Earn College Credit," 1977; "Residents May Take Cassette Courses," 1976). The outward-facing strategy contrasted with I CAN's earlier calls for Canisius to direct its adult education resources toward predominantly Black neighborhoods adjacent to campus. The strategy arguably conflicted with Canisius's commitment to serving the educational needs of its immediate community because it directed outreach toward more distant rural areas.

A Proposal for an Associate Degree via Cassette (Spring 1979)

In March of 1979, the student newspaper featured a front-page story breaking the news that Canisius was considering offering an associate degree through the cassette program (Jarzembek, 1979). As Jarzembek (1979) reported for *The Griffin*, the Academic Council had recently rejected a proposal to seek state board approval for associate degrees in humanities and social sciences, but was continuing to explore the option. The chairman of the council's committee, Mel Schroeder, had voiced concerns about the efficacy of audiovisual education and questioned the value of an associate degree compared to a traditional bachelor's degree. Fr. Anthony Brozoska, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, had opposed the proposal, fearing that adding an associate degree might dilute the college's academic standards. A student on the committee had echoed those concerns, arguing that the lack of interactive engagement might compromise academic quality and claiming the cassette courses "will not result in the same type of education from a lecture. There is no give and take. The quality of education will not be the same" (Jarzembek, 1979, p. 1).

Jarzembek (1979) provided several further details on these developments. Dr. David Valaik, head of the continuing studies program, countered these objections by noting that he had received no complaints about the quality of the cassette courses over the past three years. He clarified that the proposed associate degree would not rely solely on cassette courses; instead, he estimated that about 90% of students would complete their degrees through a mix of cassette and traditional classes. Valaik emphasized that the program was designed to serve students who lived far from campus or had demanding work schedules. Its goal was to address the issue that evening students took an average of seven years to complete a bachelor's degree and that over 80% did not graduate. The associate degree aimed to provide a credential for significant progress and motivate students to continue toward a bachelor's degree.

In his article, Jarzembek (1979) also reminded readers that the college had been planning the associate degree since the inception of cassette courses three years prior. This initiative was intended to offer tangible proof of academic achievement while providing flexibility in instruction to accommodate the varied schedules and challenges of nontraditional students. Not even Empire State College—Jarzembek emphasized—a public institution founded to offer flexible learning opportunities for nontraditional students, had developed a cassette program. Although the innovative approach could allow Canisius to secure a larger share of the nontraditional-student market, the college was entering a period of fiscal contraction, and the Academic Council saw the program as an unnecessary risk. Valaik assured the council that the program would be economically viable as long as it enrolled 100 students (Jarzembek, 1979).

A student editorial in the same newspaper issue, titled “Dubious Degree” (1979), mocked the proposal, likening it to a late-night television advertisement for a cheap and useless product. The editorial argued that declining enrollments and revenue drove the initiative and expressed concerns about the program's impact on the college's academic reputation. The editorial contended that emphasizing traditional lectures would improve academic standards: “If the school is truly serious about its academic responsibility and is serious about offering an associate degree program, the traditional lecture type of instruction should be emphasized instead” (“Dubious Degree,” 1979, p. 2). The editorial questioned whether introducing a two-year degree might tarnish Canisius's

image, suggesting it could shift the perception of the college closer to that of a community college rather than an elite institution. The editorial questioned, “how will the institution of such a program affect the school’s academic image” noting that “this is not an Ivy League school, but then neither is it a two-year community college” (“Dubious Degree,” 1979, p. 2).

A Renewed Proposal for an Associate Degree via Cassette (1979–1980)

Although the Academic Council’s vote appeared to halt the development of the associate degree program, the cassette program continued to grow. In November 1979, the college opened the Main-Eastwood Building, a former Catholic elementary school on campus, to support various initiatives, including the cassette program (Morey, 1979). Thus, although originally intended to be offered off-campus in the surrounding suburbs, the cassette courses found a home on the Canisius campus.

The program’s increasing prominence and impact on the student body were evident. In January 1980, a student suggested, perhaps in jest, that the college acquire the vacant Sears building adjacent to campus to establish Canisius Community College (Phalen, 1980). The student argued, “For a school that gives credit for cassette courses, this is a natural” and claimed, “a good college-level technical education program isn’t widely available in the city” (Phalen, 1980, p. 3). The proposed use of the Sears automotive facility for an automotive technology major, combined with liberal arts core courses, was seen as a way to address the college’s financial challenges by attracting new students and counteracting declining enrollment, “this influx of students ... would certainly retard contraction of college programs caused by the drop in prospective college student population” (Phalen, 1980, p. 3). The following week, just under a year after the Academic Council rejected the associate degree proposal, the student newspaper’s top headline read, “Associate Degree Via Cassettes Pending” (Ratke, 1980). The proposal was submitted to the Academic Council and the state for approval (Ratke, 1980).

An article in *The Griffin* by Ratke (1980) detailed how the proposed program would position Canisius to become the first four-year college in New York to offer an associate degree entirely via distance education. The program was designed for students such as “the swing-shift worker, the shut-in, the severely

handicapped, and those who must travel” (Ratke, 1980, p. 1). Unlike Empire State College, which required part-time adult learners to meet with a faculty mentor occasionally, Canisius’s proposed program allowed students to complete their degree entirely remotely and without faculty meetings. The article further reported that Dr. Charles Schmidtke, acting dean of the Office of Continuing Studies, was inspired by Azusa Pacific College students who created a sense of community by watching videos together. His anecdote offered a counterpoint to some of the program’s concerns, but perhaps it was an exception and not the rule based on the targeted population. The proposal indicated that credits earned would be transferable toward a bachelor’s degree at Canisius.

The article also reported that the program would utilize cassettes developed through a consortium of colleges that included Notre Dame, University of Southern California, University of Miami, and Azusa Pacific. Canisius consulted with Azusa Pacific faculty in the design of the cassette courses and adopted key elements of its instructional model that combined video cassettes, printed materials, and independent assignments, allowing students to complete coursework outside the traditional classroom. Students also worked with contracted faculty mentors who guided their progress and evaluated assignments.

The college began collaborating with local businesses to establish pilot extension sites for employees, with plans to launch classes in the spring of 1980 and anticipated enrollment of between 125 and 180 students by the summer of 1981 (Ratke, 1980). Tuition for the new program was set at the same rate as the evening program. Canisius planned for a full evaluation of the program after four years (Ratke, 1980).

Student Newspaper Opposition to the Associate Degree Proposal and Further Evolution of the Cassette Program

The announcement of the proposed cassette-based associate degree provoked sharp criticism of the administration in an editorial titled “‘Can’ the Cassettes,” published in *The Griffin* on February 1, 1980. The editorial argued that, despite the Academic Council’s rejection of the proposal the previous spring, the administration seemed intent on moving forward with the program:

"The administration also has gone ahead with plans to implement the program in an attempt to convince people that the cassette program is inevitable and fighting it is useless" (p. 2). The editorial revisited early questions, "Is Canisius the kind of school that should offer a two-year degree? Are cassettes an effective learning tool?" (p. 2). It urged the Academic Council to reject the proposal again.

In response to the editorial, Keith Burich, Assistant to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, penned a letter to the editor addressing the criticism and calling the editorial "confused and factually erroneous" (Burich, 1980, p. 3). Burich explained that the Academic Council had not actually voted on the merits of the proposed associate degree program in March of 1979 but had instead declined to forward it to the state for approval at that time. This decision was later reversed in April 1979, which went unreported in the student newspaper. He clarified that the initial vote was influenced by concerns that state approval would require the college to implement the program. Burich made the point that regardless of state or council approval, Canisius intended to continue offering non-degree video cassette courses in addition to its audio cassette courses. Burich went on to assuage concerns about the funding of the program, emphasizing that the program was designed to generate revenue that would enable the program to support itself as well as the development of new and innovative programs for traditional students (Burich, 1980).

A few months later, the newspaper featured a front-page story titled "Diversity Essential in Continuing Studies" (Tirone, 1980). This article followed the appointment of Schmidtke as Dean of Continuing Studies in March. Schmidtke emphasized the need to align the educational needs of other communities with the resources of Canisius, stating the goal of his office "is to find out what the educational needs of the community are and what the resources of Canisius are, and then match them" (Tirone, 1980, p. 1).

Although the evening divisions awarded bachelor's degrees, Schmidtke clarified that the cassette program was not intended to lead directly to a bachelor's degree. Schmidtke stated that "it will never lead to a baccalaureate degree because our whole view is that this program is in no way substitute for the classroom" (Tirone, 1980, p. 1). His statement seemed to contradict the earlier proposal that suggested credits earned through the associate degree could transfer toward a bachelor's degree at Canisius.

This article also announced the launch of an 18-month pilot video cassette

program at the downtown branch of Marine Midland Bank, designed to bring Canisius courses directly to the worksite for bank employees as well as to capitalize on its location to attract other business professionals. The program started with an initial enrollment of 10 students. If successful, Schmidtke envisioned expanding the program to several locations throughout the Buffalo area. He acknowledged concerns about the lack of student-faculty interaction, stating, “We have to learn how to personalize media course instruction ... but isn’t it better to have good alternative than no alternative?” (Tirone, 1980, p. 1).

Tirone (1980) further explained that Continuing Studies included professional development for business professionals, bridge programs offering alternative entry for students who did not initially meet admission requirements, and a program that granted college credit for life experiences. These initiatives were part of a broader effort to address educational needs in the Buffalo community. Despite Schmidtke’s optimism that these diverse opportunities would increase nontraditional enrollment during an economic recession, projections indicated a decline in traditional student enrollment over the next decade. Canisius enrolled 2,539 traditional students in 1979, but anticipated only 1,995 by 1990 (Tirone, 1980).

While Schmidtke’s praise for the continuing studies program dominated the newspaper’s front page on April 25, 1980, a shorter, less prominent article addressed the status of the associate degree program. While awaiting the Board of Regents’ decision, expected by summer 1980, the Academic Council preemptively approved an audiovisual pilot program—not an associate degree—on April 10 (Nichols, 1980). The pilot program was promoted through newspaper advertisements similar to the one featured in Figure 3. The advertisement specified that the pilot program would establish three or four off-campus sites in business and industrial settings over the next 18 months, with the possibility of developing a learning center similar to the one proposed for the Eastern Hills Mall in 1973. The program would cater to employees at host sites. A special committee of the Academic Council was scheduled to review the program’s effectiveness in winter 1982 to assess its long-term viability (Nichols, 1980).

Figure 3

Canisius College Advertisement for Adult Education in 1980

If you think Canisius College is only for students just out of high school, you're wrong

Experts predict that by the end of the 1980's sixty percent of college services will be aimed at the "non-traditional" student. That's anyone other than the 18-21 year-old with a fresh high school diploma. That's the homemaker, businessman, military veteran, technical worker, doctor, secretary, government worker, retiree, who for his or her own reasons, decides to go back to school. It could be you.



We'll tailor an educational program to your needs

We live in a fast-paced world. Career and educational needs of adults change constantly. New jobs are created and others disappear.

Canisius has an extensive selection of programs for adult needs - programs that can update job skills or develop new ones, courses to broaden personal knowledge or lead toward a degree. We can develop a specialized curriculum tailored to your personal goals, and we can offer it to you in a personal learning environment featuring small classes and teachers genuinely interested in you.

Choose a subject that excites you from our 50 undergraduate fields of study - anything from art history to urban studies. Business men and women - consider boosting your career with a degree in accounting, economics, finance, marketing or management through our nationally accredited business school.

INVESTIGATE OUR SPECIAL INTEREST PROGRAMS. Adult students have found them very useful.

Gerontology Certificate - gives background perspective and develops particular skills necessary for anyone who wants to gain a better understanding of, or intends to work with our rapidly expanding senior citizen population.

Non-Collegiate Learning Assessment - analyzes prior work experience and credits that experience whenever possible toward an academic degree at Canisius College.

Cassette Studies - provides cassette tapes of selected courses to be used along with textbooks for persons whose schedules do not allow them to attend regular classroom lectures on campus. Courses are available in both audio and video.

Technical and Liberal Studies Degree - certain programs at local community colleges have been approved for acceptance as part of a baccalaureate degree in Technical and Liberal Studies. Please check the appropriate box and we will provide you with information.

SEE WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU - call the Adult Student Recruitment Office at Canisius or mail the attached card today for more information.
CANISIUS COLLEGE • 2001 Main Street • Buffalo, N.Y. 14208
716-883-7000, Ext. 224 or 341.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS ☐ BACHELOR OF ARTS ☐ Art History ☐ Biochemistry ☐ Biology ☐ Communication ☐ Education - Secondary ☐ English ☐ History ☐ International Relations ☐ Mathematics ☐ Modern Languages ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Religious Studies ☐ Sociology & Anthropology ☐ Urban Studies ☐ Visual Arts	BACHELOR OF SCIENCE ☐ BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION ☐ Accounting ☐ Economics ☐ Finance ☐ Management ☐ Marketing ☐ Business Education ☐ Chemistry ☐ Medical Technology ☐ Physical Education ☐ Physics ☐ CONTINUING STUDIES PROGRAMS ☐ Cassette Studies Audio & Video ☐ Criminal Justice ☐ Gerontology ☐ Non-Collegiate Learning Assessment ☐ Perspectives on Women	DEGREE PROGRAMS ☐ Humanities, B.A. ☐ Social Science, B.S. ☐ Technical & Liberal Studies, B.S. SPECIAL INTEREST PROGRAMS ☐ Computer Science ☐ Fashion Institute of Technology ☐ Military Science ☐ Nursing ☐ Pre-Dent, □ Pre-Med, □ Pre-Vet ☐ Pre-Engineering, □ Pre-Law ☐ Pre-Forestry ☐ Student Development GRADUATE PROGRAMS ☐ BUSINESS ☐ ADMINISTRATION, M.B.A. ☐ Accounting ☐ Finance ☐ Management ☐ Marketing ☐ EDUCATION, M.S. ☐ Administration & Supervision ☐ Counselor Education ☐ Special Education (Deaf/Hearing Impaired) ☐ Teacher Education ☐ PHYSICAL EDUCATION, M.S. ☐ RECREATION STUDIES, M.A. ☐ Please provide information for the programs checked.	ATTENTION VETERANS Canisius College programs are approved for veterans payments. Veterans discharged within the past 10 years may still be eligible for benefits. ATTENTION HANDICAPPED PERSONS Canisius College with its system of tunnels connecting most major campus buildings is particularly accessible for persons with physical handicaps. FINANCIAL AID Canisius College can assist you in acquiring all the financial aid you are eligible to receive. Canisius College does not discriminate in its admissions policies on the basis of sex, race, color, age, national or ethnic origin or handicap. Supplement to the Buffalo Courier Express
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Note. Advertisement published in the Courier Express, May 11, 1980.

The pilot cassette study program, prominently featured in the *Courier Express* advertisement (see Figure 3), stood out as a key innovation in Canisius College's outreach to adult learners. The career-focused shift in adult education can be seen in contrasting language between the advertisements over time (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The *Courier Express* advertisement in August of 1978, depicted in Figures 1 and 2, presented adult education and cassette programs as personal enrichment opportunities that could improve career outcomes. However, the *Courier Express* advertisement in May 1980, depicted in Figure 3, presented the Canisius adult education program as a solution for working professionals attempting to advance in a fast-paced, constantly changing economy where new jobs are created and others disappear. The advertisement goes on to highlight the flexibility of its cassette courses and assessment of work experience for course credit. The advertisement omits references to personal development and focuses instead on the value that these courses bring to career advancement.

By the following fall, the cassette program had enrolled 113 students, with 30 students participating in video courses and 83 in audio courses (Myers, 1980). Myers (1980) reported for *The Griffin* that the video students were all employees from four local businesses—Marine Midland Bank, Erie County Savings Bank, Rich Products, and Father Bell Computer Center—that paid their tuition. Canisius provided the video playback equipment at these business locations. In addition to standard admission requirements, applicants for the video program had to complete an interview to assess their maturity, motivation, and self-discipline (Myers, 1980).

Myers (1980) further clarified in the article that although the state had approved the program to award associate degrees, the Academic Council had yet to approve it as of October 1980. The program offered 40 courses across various disciplines, including macroeconomics, general science, literary arts, philosophy, management, and government. Students were assigned to a faculty mentor who provided guidance and evaluated their work. This mentorship approach, Myers clarified, was similar to the model used by Empire State College, a key competitor for nontraditional two-year students.

Finally, Myers (1980) noted that quality concerns persisted, with Dr. Duane Kofahl, the program coordinator, acknowledging that while the program offered high-quality content, it could not fully replace the classroom experience:

"The program offers quality content, but there is no substitute better than being in the classroom" (Myers, 1980, p. 4). Similar to Schmidtke's sentiment that a good alternative was better than no alternative, Kofahl attested to both the high quality of the traditional Canisius education that was not diminished by the existence of this program and the importance of offering this program to nontraditional students.

A New Associate Degree Program and the Expansion of the Cassette Program (Spring 1981)

The February 6, 1981, issue of the student newspaper featured two significant front-page stories that marked a pivotal break in the proposed associate degree program. The top-of-the-fold headline, "Associates Degree to Be Considered," implied further discussions about the original proposal. However, the article revealed a major change: the associate degree program would now be tailored for evening program students attending on-campus classes rather than the students in the cassette program (Arnone, 1981).

Below the fold, the other feature article discussed expanding the cassette program to include students with disabilities (Hirsch, 1981a). In the newspaper report, Arnone (1981) documented debates surrounding Canisius College's proposed associate degree program for evening students. The proposal, which had passed a preliminary vote and was scheduled for final consideration on February 11, was designed for students who had been out of high school for at least two years and aimed to improve retention by providing an intermediate credential on the path to a bachelor's degree. Supporters argued that the program would expand educational opportunities for adult learners and increase degree completion rates among evening students. Survey data from the Office of Continuing Studies also indicated strong support among responding evening students, although the response rate was relatively low (Arnone, 1981).

The proposal, the article clarified, generated concerns about both institutional reputation and academic quality. Some faculty and student representatives questioned projections regarding improved graduation rates and worried that an associate degree might discourage students from completing bachelor's degrees. Others expressed concern that the credential could be perceived as vocational and inconsistent with Canisius's liberal arts

mission. As Lauffenburger asked, “how will it be perceived, not by people at Canisius, but by people outside of Canisius?” (Arnone, 1981, p. 1). Questions were also raised about the transferability of credits earned through cassette-based courses.

Arnone (1981) further reported that supporters countered these criticisms by noting that numerous four-year institutions, including local four-year colleges such as the University of Buffalo, Niagara University, Buffalo State College, as well as some of the most prestigious universities in the country such as Cornell University, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, and Harvard University, already offered associate degree programs. Schmidtke maintained that the proposed degree would provide a stronger academic experience than comparable area community college programs and argued that Canisius faculty would benefit from educating students throughout the entirety of their academic pathway (p. 1).

An editorial in that week’s newspaper applauded the proposed curriculum for maintaining “a solid core of liberal arts studies” and “some academic quality,” marking a notable shift in *The Griffin’s* editorial treatment of the associate degree proposal (“Success of Degree,” 1981, p. 2). Nevertheless, according to the editorial, concerns persisted about how the program might affect the perceived quality of the institution: “The danger ... is in how this program is perceived by the community ... once it starts to move in one direction, it is hard to stop” (“Success of Degree,” 1981, p. 2). The editorial called for further research into strategies for ensuring the community understood that “a Canisius associate degree will maintain a higher academic standard than a community college degree” (“Success of Degree,” 1981, p. 2). Additionally, there were worries about accepting cassette course credits in the associate degree program and their potential impact on students transferring to Canisius for a bachelor’s degree, as these credits might not be recognized (“Success of Degree,” 1981).

While the new associate degree option was a significant benefit for evening students, it meant that the cassette program would not lead to a degree. Nonetheless, Canisius remained committed to growing the program. In a second front-page article published on February 6, 1981, Hirsch (1981a) reported that the college planned to expand the cassette program to “severely handicapped” students beginning in the summer of 1981 (p. 1). The article

reported that Canisius would collaborate with St. Mary's School for the Deaf, the Western New York Blind Association, and the Western New York Kidney Foundation. The article pointed to a county-wide survey, which revealed that the educational needs of students with disabilities were largely unmet, with existing programs focusing predominantly on manual and dexterity skills and none that offered access to liberal arts or general education opportunities. The program intended to provide a bridge for these students to a traditional college experience. The video cassettes would include sign language for the "deaf," and all courses would include Braille workbooks for the "blind" (p. 1). This initiative positioned Canisius as an unofficial coordinator of county services, engaging with several volunteer groups to improve educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Hirsch, 1981a, p. 1).

Hirsch (1981b) further clarified that the following fall, Canisius increased its new adult student enrollment to 267 compared to 200 in the fall of 1980 and 175 in the spring of 1981. At the time, Canisius was the only institution in Western New York with a dedicated recruitment office for adult students. The article mentioned Schmidtke's comments that the Continuing Studies program was not only a significant revenue generator for the college but also met a significant unmet educational need in the community. Schmidtke attributed the success of the program to Canisius's reputation for delivering rigorous evening classes. Additionally, the increase in adult students returning to school because of the recession, which hit Rust Belt cities such as Buffalo particularly hard, likely contributed to this growth. However, the recession may have had a negative impact on enrollment in the cassette program as employers were cautious about discretionary spending amid economic uncertainty (Hirsch, 1981b).

Integration of Cassette Courses Into the Traditional Student Curriculum (1984–1994)

Coverage of the cassette and associate degree programs in the student newspaper faded after the early 1980s. In 1984, the growth of the cassette program was highlighted in an article noting an increase from 60 cassette program students in 1978–79 to 266 students in 1983–84 (Arth, 1984). The article reported that up to 15 cassette courses, which were mostly introductory, could now be counted toward a bachelor's degree, reducing the typical completion

time for nontraditional students from 6–8 years to four years. The article acknowledged previous concerns about the program but did not mention any ongoing criticisms. It seems that the debate over whether cassette credits should count toward a bachelor's degree was quietly resolved, with little discussion or opposition.

While the discussion of the cassette program quietly faded from the student newspaper, the cassette program was reappropriated by traditional students as a flexible option for fulfilling credit requirements. A February 1986 article highlighted how courses had become a viable alternative for traditional students seeking to complete their degree (Feuerstein, 1986). At that time, the article noted, the program offered 13 video and 26 audio cassette courses. Harold Harden, director of lifelong learning and the directed studies program, emphasized that while the cassette courses continued to serve the broader Western New York community, they had also become a practical solution for traditional students: "Folks on campus use it for electives, or if they're shy on credit hours before graduation" (Feuerstein, 1986, p. 9). With 103 students enrolled in cassette courses that semester—primarily traditional students with only 10% in the Directed Studies Program—Harden explained, "Under the Directive studies Program you can obtain an associate's degree on just cassette courses," adding, "there are students who take only cassette courses. And then there are other students on campus day and evening division, who are taking regular courses in addition to cassette courses" (Feuerstein, 1986, p. 9).

In January 1992, leading up to the Super Bowl between the Washington Redskins and the Buffalo Bills, the student newspaper highlighted how 30 Bills players over the years had taken classes at Canisius, primarily through the cassette and evening programs, to meet their degree requirements (Smith, 1992). It was not until the Academic Council reviewed the program in 1994 that the cassette program was mentioned again in the paper. According to the student reporter, in addition to serving nontraditional students, "Students who are already enrolled in classes on campus may utilize the program with good reason ... seniors needing one more class to graduate, those withdrawing from a course but not wanting to fall behind or those who are at risk of losing financial aid for not keeping the minimum number of credits" (Karcher, 1994, p. 2).

After 1994, no further evidence of the cassette-based courses appeared in the college's newspapers or archival records. However, oral history from an

alumnus, now the university's Director of Accessibility Services, indicated that the final cassette course, Career Decision Making, continued as a core requirement for all students until 2010 (S. Bonerb, personal communication, September 26, 2024).

Implications and Conclusion

The innovative use of cassettes in 1973 at Canisius is more than an interesting chapter in the college's history. It offers a broader perspective on how educational technology is adopted and contested. This case demonstrates both the potential of new technologies to expand access and how opposition may emerge among some traditional students and institutional stakeholders when they perceive threats to institutional quality, culture, and identity.

This case also shows how emerging technologies can improve educational delivery in postsecondary programs while simultaneously revealing how institutional priorities can limit which students have access to the opportunities. The value of educational technology lies partly in its capacity to extend learning beyond the physical campus. However, that potential can only be realized when institutional stakeholders recognize such programs as academically sound and beneficial to the institution's reputation. Many of the arguments raised against the cassette program—including concerns about rigor, faculty workload, and institutional prestige—echo current debates over online and asynchronous education.

The Digital Expansion of Educational Technology

Today, technologies such as learning management systems (LMS), AI-driven tutoring, and open educational resources (OER) are helping to bridge educational gaps, offering flexible learning opportunities to those who might otherwise be excluded (Luckin et al., 2016; Watson & Watson, 2007; Wiley et al., 2012). Canisius has continued its commitment to innovation and serving students beyond its on-campus programs, launching its first fully online degree in 2006 with the support of Faculty Technology Services (FacTS) and Information Technology Services (ITS), now the Center for Online Learning and Innovation (COLI) (Canisius University, n.d.-c). The online graduate program

in Physical Education, for example, meets the needs of students who could not attend in-person classes due to their professional commitments (Sawicki, 2016). This program laid the groundwork for the current Desire2Learn (D2L) system, which supports flexible course designs for online, hybrid, and in-person learning. As of August 14, 2026, Canisius listed 19 graduate program offerings with an online format option; 13 included a master's degree option and 11 included an advanced certificate option, with five program listings offering both credentials (Canisius University, n.d.-d).

Nontraditional Students, Educational Equity, and Enrollment-Driven Programs

In offering flexible programs, whether hybrid or fully remote, enrollment-driven institutions like Canisius can extend their reach to nontraditional and working adults while also securing new revenue streams. The cassette programs and other early forms of extension education served the dual purpose of meeting the needs of nontraditional students while offering income to the institution. They offered the convenience of on-demand education that fit the scheduling needs of working professionals while generating income that supported institutional operations. These alternative revenue streams are becoming more important for enrollment-driven institutions as the number of traditional-aged college students is projected to decline over the next decade.

Revenue-generating motives can also have negative effects for some groups within the nontraditional student population. For instance, despite calls to use Canisius's adult education programs to serve African American residents in neighborhoods surrounding the institution, recruitment for its cassette programs focused on middle-class working adults and suburban housewives who had disposable income or employer-sponsored tuition support. The programs therefore risked reproducing racial and class inequalities even as they were framed as efforts to broaden access.

An Enduring Tension in Expanding Access

The commitment to educational access is not only a historical concern but an ongoing endeavor at Canisius and across higher education. Modern

educational practices should draw on these lessons to ensure that technological advancements democratize education rather than widen existing divides. The history of extension education at Canisius should not be reduced to a historical footnote; it offers important lessons about identifying target student populations and navigating institutional resistance. Institutional leaders can build support for new academic programs by demonstrating that they are rigorous, mission-consistent, and responsive to community needs.

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