The first time Ikyu Izumi, SEAS ’92, set foot on Columbia’s campus was for his graduation ceremony in May. Living in Japan, and traveling frequently for work, Izumi never thought it was possible for him to earn a degree from an Ivy League university without a significant life-style change. But an Internet search led him to the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science’s Columbia Video Network (CVN) program (www.cvn.columbia.edu), and through his application, Izumi received his MS in computer science.

CVN was established in 1986 to meet a growing need within the engineering community to offer working professionals a program that fits their schedule. Students who participate through CVN take the same courses as on-campus students, making it possible for remotely located students like Izumi to get an Ivy League education.

Since its inception, CVN has grown to include 60 distance learning programs, with enrollment levels as high as 1,300 students a year participating across the United States and in 21 countries, including China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Egypt, Lebanon and Jamaica.

“I stumbled upon CVN [to view the classes],” says Izumi, “but soon CVN moved to online courses available through the Internet.” But this was really very new. I take my laptop computer and books with me when I travel, including China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Egypt, Lebanon and Jamaica.

“Izumi isn’t the only one who thinks CVN is user-friendly. For the third consecutive year Forbes has included CVN in its “Best of the Web” listing, describing it as: “a gem of a program” — and is due to the dedication of our faculty and staff,” says Zvi Galil, dean of the Engineering School. “CVN is one of the gems in our crown.”

According to CVN staff, technology is what separates CVN from other distance learning programs. Students can receive videotapes of classes, participate in videoconferences, or— at 70 percent, students prefer—view lectures online.

CVN’s tri-screen system allows viewers not only to see the professors—talking, but also to view any slides, images or course notes that the professor shares with the on-campus students. A table of contents allows the student to access quickly desired slides from a particular class. Because actual classes are videotaped, distance learning students also hear questions posed by students on-campus as well as the professor’s response.

Online classes are the most expected and convenient way to view the lectures. Students can view classes from home, the office, even from the road. This is ideal for those, like Izumi, whose travel schedule precludes them from participating in a more traditional program.

“CVN offers flexibility without sacrifice,” says Grace Chang, “People are mesmerized by the Columbia name and the possibility of receiving an Ivy League education without relocating their family or interrupting their career. In this day you can’t hold on to the blackboard— you must think pro- siderably, and they absolutely need to view the videotaped classes but did not have the Internet access needed to view the web videos.

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Thus, CVN students are employed in high-tech, software and telecommunications fields, and most are sponsored by their employers.

“Companies appreciate the value our program offers,” says Evan Jacobs, CVN manager. “They want productivity and a high rate of return. They do not want their employees leaving work early or calling in sick for missing meetings to attend classes.”

In addition to the high-tech program offerings and the rigorous standards, customer service and faculty support are critical to CVN’s success.

“Our Engineering School faculty understands the needs of our graduate students. The technology exists to run a distance learning program, and CVN is one of the technology leaders in the world,” Jacobs says.

While participation is labor-intensive for faculty, most enjoy the opportunity to interact with students from around the world. CVN prides itself on quick turn-around time on student queries. Responses within 24 hours are expected. The students appreciate the extra effort.

“Many students become a distance education graduate student with Columbia and I had checked near- ly every single distance degree program in the country,” says student Randy McKiely. “I can definitely affirm that Columbia has one of the best degree programs in the country and by far the largest variety of course offerings.”

Forbes names Distance Learning Program Columbia Video Network “Best of the Web”