tech watch

GIVING THE WEB THE NEW COLLEGE TRY

■ A recent survey of 10,000 high school students revealed a university's Web site is the third most important source of information for prospective students, subordinate only to a campus visit and a conversation with a current student. College administrators have acknowledged the importance of the Internet in attracting students and building a school's reputation and are taking steps to ensure that their Web sites are as attractive, organized, and informative as possible. Many of the university sites feature virtual campus tours, course catalogs, student testimonials, listings of scheduled academic and extracurricular activities, and e-mail links to professors. Educators believe university Web sites are important and efficient communication tools that will eventually replace traditional brochures and guidebooks. (*Washington Post*)

UNIVERSITIES MASTER WEB-BASED ADMINISTRATION

■ Penn State University, Ohio University, and Washington State University have each realized substantial efficiencies since implementing Web-based document management and knowledge management (KM) systems. At Penn State, the Accounting, Human Resources, Administration, and Physical Plant offices were the first to adopt new KM and document management systems. On average, 80 percent of job applicants now submit their applications and resumes electronically to the Human Resources office. The remaining paper and fax applications are imported or scanned into the system. As a result of the new system, Penn State now interviews applicants and fills positions much faster than before and has reduced the number of employees handling the applications. Washington State University's admissions department is in the process of implementing a document management system to handle the 10,000 undergraduate admission applications it receives every year. Washington State is using a system that includes scanning, queuing, and workflow technologies that enable the school to simplify and reduce the amount of paperwork involved in the application process. Ohio University is now transferring its 140,000 legacy documents to Web-based storage and access systems. (*Imaging & Document Solutions*)

NEURAL NETWORKS MAY TRANSFORM COLLEGE PLANNING

■ Johns Hopkins University is testing the use of an artificial neural network to determine which applicants are likely to enroll in the school. The neural network is a statistical model that imitates the ability of neurons in the human brain to learn patterns. By looking for patterns in student data, the neural network finds the common characteristics of applicants who enroll at Hopkins. Admissions officers could use the neural network to predict which students are likely to enroll and which are not, using the information to decide how many students to accept to ensure a full class. Richard Reeves, who invented Hopkins' neural network last spring using StatSoft's Statistica software, says 50 percent of universities will use neural networks in ten years. Although colleges already use statistical models to predict how many students will enroll, tests at Hopkins showed that the traditional model had an error rate of 6 percent while the neural network had an error rate of 3 percent. The technology used in neural networks has been available for many years, but only recently have hardware and software become powerful enough and cheap enough to make neural networks viable for common use. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*)

Abstracts Copyright © 2000 Information, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland

---

ARE UNIVERSITIES PIRACY PLAYGROUNDS?

University students and employees are becoming increasingly involved in software piracy, according to the Business Software Alliance (BSA) and the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA). Illegal copying of software costs the industry nearly $3 billion a year, according to the two groups, and it is estimated that 38 percent of the 615 million new software applications installed around the world in 1998 were pirated. Piracy is particularly prevalent at universities because the institutions are extremely wired, with most students and employees enjoying unlimited Internet access, and because of widespread ignorance of copyright laws. Experts contend that students need to be told that there are limits to what they can do with software that has been legitimately purchased and that software can be legally copied only one time for "backup" measures. Copyright experts say college IT administrators should choose one person on the staff to be in charge of piracy issues. That person should create and enforce regulations relating to software piracy based on current law, highlighting the fact that students could face expulsion or suspension from campus as a result of breaching policy. (*Security Management*)

Legal Issues