

Information Technology in the News

FCC EXEMPTS HIGHER EDUCATION FROM CALEA

■ The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has issued a preliminary ruling that exempts colleges and universities from costly projects to reengineer computer networks to comply with the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act (CALEA). CALEA requires telecom companies to build their networks in such a way that federal officials with proper authority can eavesdrop on phone conversations and e-mail exchanges, and some have called for the FCC to rule that CALEA should also cover computer networks that carry Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone service. The FCC has not yet made a final decision on CALEA, but in the meantime it has issued a ruling that identifies certain entities, including higher education institutions, that would be exempt from CALEA for the purposes of VoIP phone service. Other exempted entities include libraries, hotels, and coffee shops. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/08/2004081301n.htm>> [subscription required])

UNIVERSITIES TO DEVELOP OPEN SOURCE FINANCIAL SOFTWARE

■ Indiana University (IU) and the University of Hawaii have begun work on a project called Kualu to build open source financial-system software for colleges and universities. Organizers of the project said that steep prices for commercial systems—as well as ongoing concern over potential market consolidation, which could lead to even higher prices and to systems not specifically tailored to higher education—are the major factors driving the project. Kualu will be an expansion of a homegrown financial system developed by IU and currently in use at its eight campuses. The National Association of College and University Business Officers

Security Matters

COURSES, PROGRAMS EMERGE IN HOMELAND SECURITY

Courses on various aspects of homeland security are springing up at college campuses all around the United States, and some institutions have devoted entire departments to the study of homeland security. Students at institutions including the University of Richmond and Rice University can take classes with titles such as “Rhetorics of Terror/ism, Homeland (In)Security, and the State” and “Jihad and the End of the World.” Meanwhile, Syracuse University has established a department called the Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism, and Ohio State University now offers the International and Homeland Security program. Other colleges and universities have established certificate programs in homeland security. The federal government’s Department of Homeland Security, which employs roughly 180,000 people and is the presumed destination for many students in these programs, funds both academic programs in homeland security and individual scholarships. Observers expect to see undergraduate and even graduate degree programs introduced in areas related to homeland security. (*Wired News*, <<http://www.wired.com/news/school/0,1383,64608,00.html>>)

SEVIS WORKS, SAYS DHS

Officials from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) praised the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), saying it is a significant improvement over the paper-based system it replaced. SEVIS tracks foreign students, keeping tabs on whether they arrive in the United States, their location, and their academic progress. According to a spokesperson from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), one of the departments that oversee SEVIS, the system has led to 1,881 investigations and 187 arrests of students who did not show up for academic programs, were expelled or suspended from those programs, or did not maintain a full course load. A recent report from the Government Accountability Office noted that problems with the system persist, such as slow response from help-desk staff, but the ICE spokesperson said that technology upgrades and fixes have addressed some of those problems. (*Federal Computer Week*, <<http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2004/0823/web-sevis-08-27-04.asp>>)

(NACUBO) will provide support and advice, though no funding, for the project. In a NACUBO survey last fall, nearly half of the respondents said open source was a viable option for financial systems. Also partnering on the project will be a company called RSmart Group. Although the software will be free to install, RSmart hopes to sell support services to colleges and universities that opt for Kualu. (*Chron-*

icle of Higher Education, <<http://chronicle.com/free/2004/08/2004083002n.htm>> [subscription required])

BROWSING THE WEB AS A LIBRARY

■ Marti Hearst, a professor at the School of Information Management and Systems at the University of California, Berkeley, has developed a prototype search

program designed to turn Web searches into something that approximates browsing the stacks of a library. The Flamenco search tool uses descriptions of archived items—in Hearst's tests, 35,000 images from an art collection—to display items grouped by criteria such as artist, period, medium, and subject. Users searching for representations of flowers in the eighteenth century, for example, could see results grouped by decade or by variety of flower. Hearst said the tool allows users to “compare and contrast, discovering new categories and relationships.” Bruce Horn, the founder of Ingenuity Software, is working on a tool that would allow a similar type of browsing on a computer, helping users find relevant resources that might be distributed in many places around a hard drive. (*New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/19/technology/circuits/19next.html>>)

RESEARCHERS RAISE THE BAR FOR DATA-TRANSFER RATE

■ Researchers at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) have set a new record for data transfer between the CERN facility in Switzerland and Caltech in Pasadena, California, 9,800 miles away. In the exercise, the group was able to transfer 859 gigabytes of data in less than 17 minutes, achieving a rate of 6.63 gigabits per second. Enabling such high rates of data transfer is vital to the success of CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC), due to begin operating in 2007. The \$10 billion LHC is an enormous particle accelerator that scientists hope to use to find the Higgs boson, a theoretical particle that they believe creates mass. The LHC is expected to generate 15 petabytes of data per year, and this data must find its way to scientists around the globe to be effectively analyzed. (*Internet News*, <<http://www.internetnews.com/infra/article.php/3403161>>)

REPORT TOUTS CAMPUS PROGRESS AGAINST MUSIC PIRACY

The Joint Committee of the Higher Education and Entertainment Communities has submitted a report to Congress highlighting actions taken by colleges and universities to combat Internet music piracy on their campuses. Higher education institutions have addressed file-sharing issues in different ways, with at least twenty offering legal music downloading services through Napster 2.0, Ruckus, RealNetworks, and others. Many colleges and universities include antipiracy messages as part of their student orientation and campus policies, while others use technology to filter or block file sharing over their networks. (*SiliconValley.com*, <<http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/9484951.htm>>)



MPAA CAMPAIGNS FOR TIGHTER CONTROL ON CAMPUS

Officials from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) have begun making phone calls and sending e-mails to non-IT staff at colleges and universities as part of its ongoing efforts to curb illegal trading of movies on campus networks. The MPAA has contacted seventy-nine schools, with plans to contact another sixty-one where, according to the group, online movie trading is common. James W. Spertus, the MPAA's vice president for antipiracy operations, said his organization is trying to shift the focus of antipiracy efforts away from technology solutions and toward education. In the phone calls, MPAA officials typically ask administrators about existing policies and educational programs concerning movie piracy and offer advice or materials that schools could use to teach students about the appropriate use of technology. Administrators at some institutions said they were uncomfortable with the thought that the MPAA's campaign was intended to influence campus policy. Others were less concerned by the phone calls, including Juan Franco, vice president for student services at Utah State University. Franco said that he did not feel pressured and added that if the materials the MPAA sends him seem useful, he will share them with students. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/free/2004/08/2004083103n.htm>>)

SCHOOLS ORGANIZE FIGHT AGAINST ACACIA

■ About fifty colleges and universities are working to develop a coordinated defense against Acacia Media Technologies, which is claiming patent infringement for Internet streaming technology and is demanding payments from at least one hundred institutions. According to Sheldon E. Steinbach, vice president and general counsel at the American Council on Education, work on the defense started about a year ago. After Acacia sent a second round of letters demanding royalties and threatening legal action against schools that refuse its offer, other institu-

tions were invited to join the group. Some colleges have agreed to pay Acacia royalties, as have a number of companies, but some observers, including the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Jason Schultz, are urging colleges and universities not to agree to the payments. Schultz advises waiting to see how the situation is resolved in court; still, he acknowledges that although fighting the patent claims is “the right thing to do,” paying the claims might be the “practical” thing to do. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/08/2004081101n.htm>> [subscription required])

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techwatch

SMU OFFERS WOMEN'S GAMING SCHOLARSHIP

■ Officials at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, Texas, have announced a scholarship program intended to draw more women into the field of developing video games. Data from an industry trade group, the Entertainment Software Association, indicate that 39 percent of game players are female and that women purchase about half of all games sold. Most game developers, however, are men. The Game Development Scholarship for Women is restricted to women attending an eighteen-month certificate program for game development at SMU. Officials of the certificate program, called The Guildhall, are working with WomenGamers.com and recruitment service Mary-Margaret.com to secure funding for the scholarship. Currently, tuition for the Guildhall is \$37,000. (Reuters, <<http://www.reuters.com/news/Article.jhtml?storyID=6081450>>)

NUMBER OF COMPUTER SCIENCE MAJORS FALLS

■ Despite the improving outlook for the high-tech sector of the economy, enrollment in most computer science programs at U.S. institutions continues to decline, causing some to worry about the possibility of a high-tech workforce shortage in coming years. Schools such as San Jose State University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Ohio State University have seen lower computer science enrollments, and according to the Computing Research Association, the number of computer majors last year was down 23 percent from the year before in the United States and Canada. Peter Lee, of Carnegie Mellon University, noted that far fewer applications were received this year versus last for his institution's computer science program, but he added that

the applicants were generally more qualified. No longer are students applying, said Lee, because they are simply lured by the prospect of high-paying jobs and stock options. Others noted that graduate computer science program enrollments, which remain strong, may soon begin to suffer due to increased restrictions on foreign students, who represent 43 percent of students in graduate computer science programs in the United States and Canada. (USA Today, <http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-08-08-computer-science_x.htm>)

INS AND OUTS OF ONLINE ROOMMATE MATCHING

■ Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are allowing incoming students to choose roommates through online applications that resemble online dating services. Some roommate-selection tools are homegrown, like that of Georgetown University; others are from commercial vendors, such as Web-Roomz. Most services allow students to review profiles, covering study and living habits, and to contact potential roommates by e-mail or other means. Georgetown's application also includes anonymous messaging and search tools. Some colleges and universities resist such roommate-matching tools, however, saying that part of the experience of college is to meet new people and to learn how to interact with those who have very different lifestyles. Many colleges still rely on a system of hand-matching students based on questionnaires. Jerry Dieringer, of Towson University in Maryland, which asks incoming students only if they smoke, said Towson has an "85 to 88 percent rate of satisfaction" among freshmen roommates. (Washington Post, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45058-2004Aug29.html>>)

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