

Information Technology in the News

INTERNET2 COMPLETES ABILENE UPGRADE

■ Internet2 has completed an upgrade to its Abilene network, raising the network's speed to 10 billion bits of information per second. Abilene's capacity for data transfer is four times as fast as it was before the upgrade and 15,000 times faster than a typical dial-up connection. According to Internet2, hardware and services for the upgrade were provided by Indiana University, Juniper Networks, and Qwest Communications. In addition to speed increases, the new network is capable of using IPv6, the newest version of the protocol used to transmit information. Officials from Internet2 said researchers are already working on projects that can take advantage of extremely high speeds of data transfer, including a project last year that transferred data from the CERN particle-physics laboratory in Switzerland to the California Institute of Technology at seven billion bits per second. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i25/25a03002.htm>> [subscription required])

UNITED KINGDOM TO REFOCUS DISTANCE PROJECT

■ The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) said it will begin a series of discussions aimed at "restructuring" the UK e-Universities Worldwide (UKeU), which has failed to meet expectations. UKeU was launched last spring, with the backing of twelve colleges and universities as well as that of government and industry, as a project to develop Internet-based education that would attract students from around the world. The HEFCE cited several problems with UKeU, including the fact that many UK universities offer online education outside the scope of UKeU. The council also noted that many of the students expected to take advantage of the online courses have instead gone to the United Kingdom and en-

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DATABASE TRACKS ACADEMIC REFERENCES ONLINE

Thomson ISI, which collects data on the use of academic work, will begin compiling data for online scholarship in addition to that in print. The new Web Citation Index will track online-only citations of scholarly writing as well as references in printed material to online-only sources. Statistics in Thomson ISI databases are generally regarded as highly influential, especially in the sciences, for promotion and tenure decisions. Though the Web Citation Index will be maintained separately from the company's other databases, some observers said the new index is likely to encourage scholars to publish online or to use preprint servers, which are databases containing work that has not yet passed peer review. Others commented that peer-reviewed journals will remain the primary vehicle for scholarship and that the new index will not have a significant impact on scholarly publishing. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/03/2004031204n.htm>> [subscription required])

CONTRACT AWARDED FOR NEW ERIC DATABASE

The Department of Education has awarded a \$34.6 million contract to build a new database system for ERIC, the world's largest education database. ERIC dates back to 1966 and provides access to educational content for educators, researchers, and the general public. The new system, to be built by Computer Sciences Corporation of Rockville, Maryland, will be designed to provide fast, direct, online access to ERIC's more than one million bibliographic records. Users will be able to search on a single Web site for journal articles, abstracts of documents, and, where possible, the full text of articles. The site will also include links to commercial sites where users can purchase full texts. (*Information Today*, <<http://www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/wnd040329.shtml>>)

rolled at colleges and universities. The HEFCE stated, "The new arrangements will place greater emphasis on public good rather than commercial objectives." (*BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3494048.stm>)

UNIVERSITY PLANS MIRROR CAMPUS ONLINE

■ A long-term project at the University of Illinois at Springfield will create an online "mirror campus" that will offer all of the institution's thirty-nine degree programs over the Internet. The university appears to be the first to create such a

mirror, which will not affect the offerings of the institution. Instead, students will have the option of taking any course on campus or online. Those involved with the project said one of its goals is to keep online education in the mainstream. The university expects to have eight degree programs online by this fall, with another eight online within three years. The remaining degree programs are expected to be available online in about ten years. Funding for the project comes in part from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which also intends to make grants to other institutions that want to pursue

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similar programs. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/04/2004040503n.htm>> [subscription required])

USC TO OFFER DEGREE IN VIDEOGAME DESIGN

■ Electronic Arts, one of the largest makers of videogames, announced a donation of \$8 million to the School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California. The university will use the money to create a master's degree program in videogame design and to fund an endowed faculty chair. The donation highlights the growing need among videogame manufacturers for skilled job candidates as the field of programming videogames matures to a level that warrants formal academic training. The degree program at USC is expected to start this fall and accept fewer than fifteen students a year. (*Wall Street Journal*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB107988471925261088,00.html>> [subscription required])

SIA ADDS TO UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PROJECT

■ The Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) has added the University of California at Los Angeles to four other universities participating in the Focus Center Research Program, which conducts research on semiconductor projects with support from twenty-five other universities. The SIA also announced that the research scope for the other four members would be expanded. The four original members of the program are Carnegie Mellon University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of California at Berkeley. The SIA also called on the government to increase the funding it provides to the program. Currently, government funds account for about one-third of the program's \$29 million budget. George Scalise, president of the SIA, said

the government should double its contribution, to \$20 million annually. (CNET, <http://news.com.com/2100-7337_3-5173459.html>)

OXFORD INSTITUTE TO STUDY EFFECTS OF IT

■ A sizable donation to Oxford University from the author James Martin will fund a new institute to study the social, environmental, and economic effects of computers. The James Martin Institute will research such topics as genomics and nanotechnology in an effort to gain "maximum benefit" from such developments, according to Sir Colin Lucas, vice-chancellor of Oxford. Martin, an alumnus of Oxford, is a respected author on topics regarding the social and commercial uses of computers and technology. His book *The Wired Society: A Challenge for Tomorrow* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Lucas said emerging technologies must be understood and planned for, rather than feared or avoided, if their maximum benefit is to be realized. (BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3515500.stm>)

SUPERCOMPUTER-ON-THE-FLY WORKS BUT MISSES MARK

■ A project led by a graduate student and a professor at the University of San Francisco was able to link several hundred computers together with open source software to create a temporary supercomputer, though it failed to produce the speeds the organizers had hoped for. John Witchel, a graduate student, and Professor Greg Benson linked 669 computers on loan from the university, from an online brokerage firm, and from individuals who had heard about the project. The two used Linux-based software to connect the heterogeneous group of computers in a gymnasium to form an ad hoc supercomputer, which was able to reach a computational speed of 180 gigaflops. Witchel and Benson had hoped

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MIT DEVELOPS, GIVES AWAY, DISTANCE-ED SOFTWARE

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has built a portal-development application designed to help institutions set up and manage distance-education programs. Called Caddie.net, the software, which can be downloaded free, allows users to build various portals for the different aspects of a distance-education program. Portals can be built, for example, for registration, course management, or online testing. Sean M. Rowland, of Hibernia College in Ireland, which has been using a similar tool from MIT for some time, compared the application to those sold by Blackboard or WebCT. "For me," said Rowland, "it's Blackboard that you can control yourself." Last year MIT launched its OpenCourseWare project, which offers free, online access to the course materials for more than five hundred MIT courses. Richard C. Larson, a professor of electrical engineering at MIT, described the Caddie.net project as being "very much in the spirit of MIT OpenCourseWare." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/03/2004032407n.htm>> [subscription required])

to have as many as 1,400 computers and to reach 550 gigaflops, which would have made the machine one of the top 500 supercomputers worldwide. The organizers nonetheless hailed the experiment as a success because it was able to link hundreds of disparate computers. (*internetnews.com*, <<http://www.internetnews.com/ent-news/article.php/3335691>>)

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