tech watch

Information Technology in the News

TERAGRID TO RECEIVE $150 MILLION FROM NSF

■ The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced that over the next five years it will provide an additional $150 million to the TeraGrid, beyond the $98 million it has already spent on the project. The TeraGrid, which came online in late 2004, is a coordinated system of computing devices, storage capacity, and databases at eight member institutions linked by a high-speed network. John R. Boisseau, the director of the Texas Advanced Computing Center, one of the member institutions, said the TeraGrid is "providing a whole fabric for computational science." Scientists at member institutions have access to more than 40 teraflops of processing power and can move enormous amounts of data across the network in relatively little time. Arden L. Bement Jr., the director of the NSF, said the complex scientific problems that the TeraGrid is helping to solve are a key factor in "the development of the next generation of cyberinfrastructure." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/08/2005081901t.htm> [subscription required])

VERISIGN OFFERS PKI DISCOUNT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

■ VeriSign has announced a new program that offers discounts to institutional members of EDUCAUSE on its managed PKI service, which is used for authenticated user provisioning and digital certificates. The Identity Management Services Program (IMSP) is designed to offer higher education institutions discounted rates on a range of identity management services. George Schu, the vice president of strategic development at VeriSign, said the culture of academic institutions has led to generally open networks but that such networks pose security risks. VeriSign offered statistics obtained in a 2004 Gartner study indicating that 53 percent of colleges and universities have suffered denial-of-service attacks, and more than 40 percent have had their systems compromised by hackers. Addressing those risks, he said, is a significant undertaking for many colleges and universities because of the cost and complexity of such projects. (*Internet News*, <http://www.internetnews.com/security/article.php/3527646>)

COURT UPHOLDS UNIVERSITY BLOCK ON SPAMMER

A federal appeals court ruled in favor of the University of Texas (UT) in its dispute with White Buffalo Ventures over thousands of spam e-mails sent by the company to students of the institution. In 2003, White Buffalo, which operates an online dating service geared toward UT students, began sending thousands of messages to student e-mail addresses it had obtained through public records. After receiving many complaints from students, the university blocked White Buffalo's e-mails, a move the company said infringed on its First Amendment rights and its rights under the CAN-SPAM Act. A federal judge rejected that argument, and the appeals court supported that decision. The three-judge panel of the appeals court found that the institution is within its rights to place restrictions on commercial speech if such restrictions can be shown to legitimately benefit constituents—in this case, UT's students. Observers noted that the court's rejection of White Buffalo's CAN-SPAM argument is important in that it presents a significant roadblock to organizations that would try to use the law to make it easier, rather than more difficult, to send unsolicited e-mail. (*Inside Higher Ed*, <http://insidehighered.com/news/2005/08/04/ut>)

Legal Issues

UT TO RECEIVE $1.8 FROM BLACKBERRY

The maker of BlackBerry devices will pay the University of Texas System $1.8 million to settle a patent-infringement case over technology that allows users to enter text into telephone-style keypads. Under the terms of the settlement, Research in Motion, based in Canada, will also be granted a license to continue using the technology. Part of the settlement will fund research at the UT System's Arlington campus, where the technology was developed by George V. Kondraske, a professor of electrical and biomedical engineering, and Adnan Shennib, who was a graduate student when the technology was invented in 1987. The UT System is pursuing similar charges against more than forty other companies for illegally using the patented technology. The university, which earns between $11 and $14 million annually from royalties on patents it holds, has recently hired a vice chancellor for research and technology transfer and will soon appoint an associate vice chancellor to help protect its patents. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2005/08/2005080305n.htm> [subscription required])

NSF GRANT FUNDS STUDY OF ELECTRONIC VOTING

■ A team of researchers will use a five-year, $7.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study electronic voting. The grant will support a research center called ACCURATE, A Center for Correct, Usable, Reliable, Auditable, and Transparent Elections. Based

at Johns Hopkins University, the center includes researchers from the University of California, Berkeley; Stanford University; Rice University; the University of Iowa; and the California-based research firm SRI International. According to Dan Wallach, an associate professor of computer science at Rice, "The basic question is, 'How can we employ computer systems as trustworthy election systems when we know computers are not totally reliable, totally secure, or bug-free?'" The ACCURATE project is expected to produce technical standards for electronic voting and to develop secure voting systems that are easy to use. (*Washington Times*, <http://washingtontimes.com/upi/20050817-124413-4457r.htm>)

PURDUE TURNS TO PODCASTS

■ Purdue University has begun providing podcasts of lectures for certain courses. Purdue offers recordings for students who miss a class or who want to review specific lectures. Previously, recordings were available for about one hundred courses but only on audiocassettes. Starting this fall, recordings for lectures from some courses have been made available as MP3 files, allowing students to download the recordings rather than going to the library to check out tapes. Michael Gay, the manager of broadcast networks and services, said faculty who agree to have their courses added to the podcast service need only submit an online request form and wear a microphone while they lecture. Initially, almost fifty courses were signed up as part of the podcasting service, and Purdue officials hope that number will rise by the spring semester. Podcasts are available publicly, though in the future they may be restricted to campus users. Users of the service can download a specific lecture or all of the lectures from an entire course. As for the notion that some students might decide simply never to attend lectures in favor of listening to the downloads, Gay commented, "Most instructors agree that any

e-publishing

COLLEGE BOOKSTORES TEST ACCESS TO DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS

Ten colleges and universities are participating in a pilot project of selling electronic texts through the campuses' bookstores. Previously, electronic textbooks have typically been available only online or from individual publishers. Organizers of the project hope that by making the texts available from the campus bookstores, they will be able to accurately gauge student demand for the technology. Each participating institution will offer twenty-five to thirty texts electronically, though the books will also be available in paper form. Electronic texts will be priced one-third less than hard-copy textbooks. Students who choose the electronic option will download a copy of the text to a computer, where they can read it, print it, search it for keywords, or listen to an audio version of it. The electronic text will have restrictions, however. The text cannot be transferred to any other computer, it cannot be printed in its entirety at one time, and it will be available for only five months, after which point it cannot be sold back to the bookstore. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2005/08/2005080901t.htm> [subscription required])

student who thinks an audio recording is a surrogate for class is doomed to failure." Critics said podcasting programs favor students who can afford portable music players, but Gay noted that the podcasts are in a format that can be played on any computer. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/08/2005083101t.htm> [subscription required])