

Information Technology in the News

USC CREATES ENDOWED CHAIR OF GAMING

■ Videogame maker Electronic Arts and the University of Southern California (USC) have created the nation's first endowed chair for the study of interactive entertainment. Bing Gordon, chief creative officer and cofounder of Electronic Arts, will serve as the first holder of the new chair at the USC School of Cinema-Television. Electronic Arts, which launched in 1981, is a leading producer of computer games, and Gordon has been involved in nearly every game the company has produced. Gordon previously co-taught a class at Stanford University on videogame design. The endowed chair will rotate every one to two years among leaders in the field, and each chair will serve as a visiting professor at USC. The USC School of Cinema-Television currently offers degrees in programs including writing, directing, and animation and digital arts. (CNN, <http://money.cnn.com/2005/02/08/technology/ea_chair/>)

REPORT URGES DEGREE PROGRAMS FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

■ A report from the Alliance for Higher Education Competitiveness identifies degree programs as the single largest factor that determines whether a distance education program is successful. In preparing the report, "Achieving Success in Internet-Supported Learning in Higher Education," the group conducted a survey of twenty-one distance education programs it deemed successful. Among those schools, 89 percent offered online degrees rather than just online courses. "It's easier to measure the progress at a programmatic level," according to the report's author, Rob Abel, president of the alliance. "The programmatic approach also gets institutions thinking about student-support services," Abel continued. Among the in-

stitutions profiled in the study is the University of Florida, which currently has more than 6,000 students enrolled in distance education programs. According to William H. Riffe, associate provost for distance, continuing, and executive education at the university, the program was a response to the growing numbers of students who wanted degrees from the university, which could not handle all of them. Riffe attributed his school's success to its having scaled the program effectively. The report also identified the for-profit institution Westwood College as successful. Shaun McAlmont, president of Westwood College Online, credited some of the success to the agility of the for-profit educational industry, compared to traditional higher education, which he said is slow to change. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i22/22a03101.htm>> [subscription required])

CRITICISM MOUNTS FOR FEDERAL STUDENT DATABASE

■ The U.S. Department of Education has proposed creating a national database of college students, but the idea has drawn heavy criticism for its use of Social Security numbers to identify individuals. The current system for reporting student progress—the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System—reports aggregate data for institutions and cannot accurately track students who start at one college or university and transfer to another. The proposed database would track individuals, offering more accurate data for graduation rates and other statistics, but some argue that those gains would come at the expense of student privacy. David Baime, vice president of government relations for the American Association of Community Colleges, said that despite the benefits to community colleges in particular from such a system, his organi-

Security Matters

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY OFFERS COURSE ON SPAM, SPYWARE

The University of Calgary, which gained attention in 2003 when it began offering a course on writing viruses, has now introduced a course devoted to writing spyware and spam. Although the virus-writing course prompted strong criticism, response to the new offering has been warmer. Some members of the computer-security community noted that such a course could give students a strong understanding of how to combat malicious computer code in practice. "If we're looking for an engineer to [fight] spam, then we'd rather have somebody who has already been taught about these things and who knows how they work," said Steve Purdham, CEO of SurfControl. Mark Murtagh, of Websense, echoed those comments. He compared computer security to a game of chess: "You need to be completely up to date on what's available to ensure you understand your opponent's potential next move." Pete Simpson, ThreatLab manager at Clearswift, disagreed, however, saying that such arguments "really [fall] flat for spamming tools." He said the course will tempt students to put their skills to harmful use. Students who do so risk failing grades and prosecution, according to the university. (*Silicon.com*, <<http://software.silicon.com/security/0,39024655,39127703,00.htm>>)

zation opposes the plan "primarily due to privacy concerns, expressed to us by our members." David L. Warren, president of the National Association of Independent

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Colleges and Universities, said, "The proposal takes us down the slippery slope toward Big Brother oversight of college students, and of those same citizens beyond their college years." (*Inside Higher Ed*, <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/03/23/unit>>)

STANFORD RESEARCHERS DEVELOP VIRTUAL SURGERY TOOL

■ Researchers at Stanford University are working on software they hope will allow doctors to assess the likely outcomes of surgical procedures before they are performed. For about ten years, Charles Taylor has been gathering medical data and writing algorithms for the application, which is intended to predict surgical variables, such as blood flow and the flexibility of veins and arteries, for individual patients. Doctors can use various tools to diagnose health problems, but because of differences from one patient to another, doctors cannot reliably predict how an individual will respond to a specific treatment. Taylor and his colleagues have used Stanford's supercomputer to process data related to predicting blood flow, and the team recently reported success in modeling the behavior of veins and arteries. According to the researchers, children born with heart defects stand to benefit enormously from the technology, which is expected to be available in about two years. (*Wired News*, <<http://www.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,66711,00.html>>)

TRADING COLOR FOR SOUND FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

■ Working with a graphics specialist and another student, a blind graduate student at Cornell University has developed a computer application that translates colors into sounds, allowing him to under-

stand colored maps of the atmosphere. Victor Wong, who has been blind since age seven, said he recognized the need for such a tool for his own studies, as well as for blind scientists generally. The application translates the colors of digitally created images into one of eighty-eight notes, with blue at the low end and red at the high end. Users manipulate a stylus on a tablet to "read" the images through sound. Wong believes that because he formerly could see, his "color memory" may afford him the ability to visualize the colors and use the application in a way that someone who has never been able to see could not. The software remains primitive, but Wong said he hopes it can one day be developed to give blind people access to photographs and other images. (*BBC*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4257961.stm>>)

NEW CAMPUS ONLINE TV SERVICE DEBUTS

■ A new online television network has begun operating, offering programs from thirty-three college and university stations around the United States. The Open Student Television Network is supported by the CampusEAI Consortium in cooperation with Internet2. CampusEAI, a member of Internet2, is an organization of more than 100 colleges and universities dealing with software and digital content. The network runs on Internet2's high-speed backbone, resulting in an extremely high-quality signal. For those who are watching the new network and are not connected to Internet2, the picture quality can be compromised, though the sound works fine. Supporters of the network said it provides a needed avenue to get valuable campus-produced programming to broader audiences. Amy Grill, a graduate student at Emerson University and the manager of Emerson Television Channels, said, "We've got all of



IT DOLLARS

KUALI PROJECT GETS BOOST

Organizers of the Kualo Project have announced a significant donation and the addition of four new members. The Kualo Project is an effort to develop open source software for financial systems in higher education. Original partners in the program—Indiana University, the University of Hawaii, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and the R-Smart Group (a company that hopes to sell support services to colleges that install the software)—will be joined by Cornell University, Michigan State University, San Joaquin Delta College, and the University of Arizona, each of which will pay between \$500,000 and \$2.5 million to join. Partners in the project have the opportunity to influence its development. The grant announced, totaling \$2.5 million, comes from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Software produced by the project will be released in stages over the next two and a half years and will be available for free. In addition, organizers said that the software will be modular, allowing an institution to install only the parts that it wants, without installing the whole system. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2005/03/2005032201t.htm>> [subscription required])

this content, and we're looking for ways to distribute it." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2005/03/2005031701t.htm>> [subscription required])

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