

Information Technology in the News

KATRINA BOOSTS ONLINE EDUCATION

■ Educators at all levels—from elementary through college—are trying to figure out how to accommodate the estimated 200,000 students displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and some see the circumstances as a prime opportunity for online education to prove its worth. Advocates of online learning are working to get federal authorities to relax rules governing aspects ranging from obtaining teacher certification to using public funds to support online schools. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has committed \$1.1 million to the Sloan Consortium, an organization that works to improve the quality of online instruction, to provide space for 10,000 students in its program. A number of online programs for elementary and secondary students are hoping to persuade government officials to allow public funds to be used by displaced students in online programs. Julie Young, the chief executive of the Florida Virtual School, one of the nation's largest online public schools, said, "It's going to be an opportunity to show the power of online learning." Critics said online programs are a poor substitute for in-class learning. Nat LaCour, the secretary general of the American Federation of Teachers, said displaced students "need to be in classrooms with teachers who can provide nurturing experiences." (*Wall Street Journal*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB112622247296335918,00.html>> [subscription required])

CARELESSNESS CITED AS FACTOR IN COMPUTER PROBLEMS

■ An in-depth study of more than three hundred computer and network problems at thirty-six colleges and universities identified the carelessness of students and staff as one of the leading causes of such problems. Despite wide-

Security Matters

RESEARCH PROJECT WILL TRACK NETWORK ATTACKS

A research project will collect regular snapshots of computer networks from as many as ten colleges and universities in an effort to improve protections from and responses to Internet attacks. The Information Security in Academic Institutions project, an initiative of the Columbia University Teachers College, uses monitoring technology called DShield and has already been tested at three institutions. The other institutions in the project have yet to be named, and the system may eventually be widely available. The system will give network administrators data about the state of networks, allowing them to gain a better understanding of Internet attacks by comparing data from before, during, and after an attack. Steffani A. Burd, the executive director of the project, described it as "a 360-degree view of what's going on." The system will also pool data collected from participating institutions and make it available anonymously on the Web. This aggregation of data will allow a comparison between activity on the Internet generally and what's happening at campuses. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/10/2005100401t.html>> [subscription required])

IOWA STATE TO HOST CENTER FOR INFORMATION PROTECTION

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is providing the initial funding for a new Center for Information Protection (CIP) at Iowa State University. Corporations, security vendors, and academic researchers will work together through the center to develop solutions to short-term security concerns. The center has already attracted thirteen charter members, including Boeing, Cargill, Principal Financial Group, Palisade Systems, Iowa State University, and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The center's goal is to draw thirty corporate members and to develop security solutions in one year or less. Kurt Shedenhelm, the chief executive officer and president of Palisade Systems, said the new center differs from similar efforts in its quest for short-term fixes, compared with the five- and ten-year cycles of other initiatives. The NSF will continue to provide funding for three years, at which time the center can apply for further funds; organizers hope the center can be self-sustaining in five years. (*Federal Computer Week*, <<http://www.fcw.com/article90846-09-19-05-Web>>)

spread perceptions that issues such as viruses and loss of confidential data are largely the result of malicious behavior, those involved in the study found that careless actions by students or staff were the primary cause for 40 percent of the incidents studied. Virginia E. Rezmierski, an adjunct associate professor at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and leader

of the research, said she was surprised to learn that external factors didn't play a larger role in computer problems. Primarily, she said, the problems resulted from inadequate training to help computer users avoid trouble and from insufficient policies to deal with problems that do arise. Rezmierski said the results support her contention that many colleges and

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universities moved too quickly to implement IT systems without necessary “rules and policies about how we want to operate in a shared-resource environment.” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/11/2005110701t.htm>> [subscription required])

BLOGS ENLISTED FOR RECRUITMENT

■ A number of colleges and universities have begun including student blogs in the list of resources used in efforts to attract new students. According to David Hawkins, the director of public policy at the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, high school counselors and students want highly personal information as part of their recommendations and decisions about which college to attend. The personal, free-form nature of blog writing offers institutions just the kind of insight into the daily lives of students that prospective students are looking for. Lewis and Clark College, which highlights nine student blogs, advises bloggers to use discretion in what they enter in their blogs, which are not censored. “We tell bloggers, ‘Your mother is going to read this, and your grandmother is going to be reading this,’” said Mike Sexton, the dean of admissions at Lewis and Clark. (*Wall Street Journal*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB112675037631641431,00.html>> [subscription required])

COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXTENDS IT TO FARM WORKERS

■ The West Hills Community College District in California is using a \$447,752 distance learning grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use technology to try to bridge the digital divide in the Fresno area. The area is home to a large population of farm workers and packing-house laborers, many of whom speak little or no English. The Huron Technology Center offers a variety of distance classes to laborers for no charge. Many laborers whose first language is

campus infrastructure

MIT NETWORK MAPS WIRELESS USERS

MIT has launched an upgraded wireless network that spans the entire campus and includes tools that map user connections. As users connect to the network—with laptops, PDAs, Wi-Fi cell phones, or other devices—the network identifies which of the campus’s 2,800 access points is being used. The data are compiled into maps that show network users where the highest concentrations of users are connected. Researchers said the information can be used to understand where people choose to do their work if they can do it anywhere. The maps indicate, for example, that students prefer to work in lounges or cafes rather than study labs. Another feature of the new system allows users to voluntarily let the network display their identity on the maps. Users who so choose thereby allow the network to track them as they move around campus and to display that information to other users of the maps. Officials acknowledged that such a tool raises privacy concerns. “But,” said Carlo Ratti, the director of the lab that created the maps, “where better than to work these concerns out but on a research campus?” (*Mercury News*, <<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/business/technology/13073505.htm>>)

Spanish never learned to read and write that language. At the center, they can take classes in Spanish or English and can complete high school equivalency programs. Students have the option of pursuing their education beyond high school and can earn bachelor’s degrees through the program. Alternatively, they can take selected classes to improve particular skills or can enroll in classes that simply interest them for the sake of learning. Students can take advantage of the program at a number of locations in the area, and facilities are being upgraded to allow for video and audio conferencing with local universities, expanding the options available to students in the program. (*Fresno Bee*, <<http://www.fresnobee.com/local/story/11424054p-12168021c.html>>)

I2HUB SHUTS DOWN

■ I2Hub, the P2P service that ran on Internet2’s very-high-speed network, has ceased operation amid growing concerns over the liability of such services for copyright infringement by their users. I2Hub was launched in early 2004 on the academic and research network that connects more than two hundred locations.

Although the service made forays into legal activities, it was largely used by students at connected campuses to trade music and movies at speeds substantially higher than possible with commercial Internet services. After a number of i2Hub users had been targeted by the entertainment industry for copyright infringement, the service itself was cited by the Recording Industry Association of America in September 2005 as a possible target of legal action. The closure of i2Hub follows that of Grokster and also an announcement by eDonkey, the most popular P2P service, that it would change its business model to that of a paid downloading service. (*CNET*, <http://news.com.com/2100-1027_3-5952060.html>)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS BACKS WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY

■ The U.S. Library of Congress has launched an effort to create a vast digital collection of artifacts representing the cultures of the world. Librarian of Congress James Billington said the World Digital Library would be “a documentary record of other great cultures of the

world,” dealing “with the culture of those people rather than with our contacts as Americans with those cultures.” The new initiative will use as models the American Memory Project, which has digitized more than 10 million items representing “Americana,” and the Global Gateway, which—as a joint project with five national libraries in Europe and Brazil—highlights connections between those cultures and that of the United States. Initial funding for the World Digital Library will come from Google, which has pledged \$3 million for the effort. Billington said he hopes to attract other private funding for the project. (MSNBC, <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/10147556/>>)

ONLINE EDUCATION EXPANDS IN AFRICA

■ The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has announced a grant to fund online education efforts in Africa. The \$900,000 grant will support the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa consortium, which is working to develop an online portal that will offer a broad array of educational materials from institutions such as MIT, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and Chinese Open Resources for Education. According to Kuzvinetsa Peter Dzvimbo, the rector of the African Virtual University, which is part of the consortium, Africa is in great need of math and science teachers, and the new portal will be used in “teach the teacher” programs to educate new instructors in sub-Saharan Africa. The online resources will not be limited to teachers, however. First in Tanzania and South Africa and then spreading to other African countries, the portal will be openly available to anyone with Internet access. Dzvimbo said he hopes that eventually, teachers in Africa will join the online efforts alongside the U.S. professors and students who will be involved initially. (*Inside Higher Ed*, <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/11/17/africa>>)

HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONDS TO CALEA ORDER

The higher education community is preparing several responses to an order by the Federal Communications Commission to extend the provisions of the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act (CALEA) to Internet service providers, including institutions of higher education, libraries, and municipalities that provide Internet access. The order would require covered entities to configure their networks to allow law enforcement officials—with the authority of a court order—to tap into data streams remotely. Currently, such taps typically require the assistance of network personnel. Making networks compliant with the new regulations would in most cases require significant investment in new switches and routers, and higher education officials contend that the expense would not be justified by the number of taps placed on their networks. By some accounts, U.S. colleges and universities would incur costs of at least \$7 billion to redesign their networks. Those seeking an exception from CALEA for education noted that in 2003, just 12 of nearly 1,500 wiretap orders were issued for computer networks. Representatives of higher education are working on responses including appeals, possible lawsuits, and negotiations with federal officials. Higher education officials said that the objection is not with providing appropriate assistance to law enforcement but that lower-cost solutions would provide the needed capability without placing a large financial burden on colleges and universities and their students. (*New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/23/technology/23college.html>> [registration required])



STATE SUPREME COURT OKAYS TECHNOLOGY FEE

Overruling two lower-court decisions, the Texas Supreme Court has found that the Dallas County Community College District did not violate state law in the late 1990s when it raised technology fees. In 1998, students filed a class-action lawsuit against the district, arguing that state law requires the district to tie technology fees with bond payments, which the district did not do. The suit also contended that the fee was imposed under the duress of students. The trial court and an appeals court both found for the plaintiff and ordered the district to pay \$12 million to 150,000 students. The state's highest court overturned those rulings, however, saying that the district did not act improperly. The court also found that the fee was not applied illegally. Roger L. Mandel, an attorney for the students, said he would seek a rehearing on the question of whether the fee was voluntary. Mandel said that the district, in its argument before the court, did not provide evidence that the fee was voluntary. “The court,” he said, “came up with reasons completely on its own.” The district has since moved the disputed fees into tuition costs. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/12/2005120901t.htm>> [subscription required])

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