

Information Technology in the News

DUKE FRESHMEN TO RECEIVE IPODS

■ Duke University has announced a plan to give each of its 1,650 incoming freshman this fall an Apple iPod as an experiment to see how the devices affect teaching and learning. Each iPod will come with orientation information and an academic calendar installed. Duke will set up a Web site from which students can download course materials, lectures, audiobooks, and other academic content to their iPods. Although the project is not designed to discourage copyright infringement, according to Tracy Futhey, vice president of information technology at Duke, having “an easy-to-use legal alternative” could provide students with an incentive to limit illegal file trading. The project is estimated to be costing Duke \$500,000, and students will keep the iPods. After the school year is over, school officials will evaluate the educational benefits of the program. (*Wired News*, <<http://www.wired.com/news/digiwood/0,1412,64282,00.html>>)

LAMBDA RAIL ADDS SIX MEMBERS

■ Developers of the National Lambda Rail, a fiber-optic network being built by a group of research universities, announced the addition of six new members: the Louisiana Board of Regents, the Oklahoma State Board of Regents, the Texas Lonestar Education and Research Network, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, Cornell University, and the University of New Mexico. With the additions, the network will cover most of the United States. The National LambdaRail network—which has a speed comparable to that of the nation’s fastest network, Abilene, operated by Internet2—will transmit data at four separate optical wavelengths, giving it four times the capacity of Abilene. The Na-

GAO ISSUES REPORT ON SEVIS

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has issued a report on the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), noting several improvements but highlighting a number of outstanding problems. SEVIS is the federal government’s technology system to track foreign students, in an effort to limit fraudulent entry into the United States on student visas. According to the GAO’s latest report, general levels of service for the system are improved, and several errors in the system have been fixed. The report faults the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), however, for failing to maintain adequate monitoring procedures. The report notes: “Without formally monitoring and documenting key system performance requirements, DHS cannot adequately assure itself that potential system problems are identified and addressed early.” DHS officials accepted many of the findings in the report but denied that its monitoring is deficient; DHS is resubmitting certain data to the GAO to be reassessed. (*Federal Computer Week*, <<http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2004/0614/web-sevis-06-18-04.asp>>)



FINAL RULES RELEASED FOR SEVIS FEE

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has finalized its rules for fees that foreign students must pay to enroll in the mandatory Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The final regulations, which closely mirror the draft released in October 2003, require most visiting students and other academics to pay a \$100 fee, paid by mail or by credit card online. Some students, including those working as au pairs or camp counselors, will pay only \$35. Students must pay the SEVIS fee before applying for their visas. Some colleges and universities had objected to the amount of the fees, which are intended to offset administrative and enforcement costs of the system. Other objections focused on the available methods of payment, which some said would constitute still more barriers for foreign students. DHS said that it would consider other collection options for future implementation. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/07/2004070202n.htm>> [subscription required])

tional LambdaRail will reportedly expand its capacity to as many as forty separate wavelengths, and groups of users may one day be able to lease individual wavelengths on the network. Thomas W. West, president and chief executive of the National LambdaRail, said the organization is selecting new members based on location in order to create full coverage for the country. Institutions must pay \$5 million over five years to join the National LambdaRail. (*Chronicle of Higher*

Education, <<http://chronicle.com/free/2004/06/2004060301n.htm>>)

APPEALS COURT SAYS ISPs CAN READ E-MAIL

■ A federal appeals court has upheld a lower-court ruling to dismiss charges against Bradford Councilman, who was charged, under the Wiretap Act, for reading others’ e-mail. Councilman operated an online bookselling company called

Interloc and offered some customers “@interloc.com” e-mail addresses, making the company an ISP. Councilman is alleged to have made copies of e-mail that came from Amazon, in an attempt to gain competitive advantage. The appeals court ruled that the e-mails were saved, if only momentarily, in a computer’s memory and were technically not intercepted. Because the Wiretap Act applies to intercepted transmissions, the court ruled that it does not apply in this case. The court admitted that the law may be “out of step” with current technologies but said that, as written, the Wiretap Act does not prohibit Councilman’s actions. Andrew Good, one of Councilman’s attorneys, said many ISPs, including employers and educational institutions, look at incoming e-mail, such as when they perform virus scans. Finding Councilman guilty, said Good, would make all such actions by ISPs illegal. Privacy advocates disagreed, however, and said the decision sets a dangerous precedent for reading electronic conversations, including Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone calls. (*CNET*, <http://news.com.com/2100-1028_3-5253782.html>)

ADMISSIONS SOFTWARE AIMS TO PRESERVE DIVERSITY

■ In response to two Supreme Court rulings concerning the use of race in admissions decisions, an assistant professor of computer science and software engineering at Auburn University has designed software that allows admissions officers to comply with the rulings while maintaining diversity among student bodies. The Supreme Court ruled that colleges and universities can use race on a limited basis but cannot impose quotas or award extra points to certain ethnic groups. The application developed by Auburn’s Juan E. Gilbert groups applicants with similar qualifications and backgrounds, allowing admissions officials to select students from the various groups. Gilbert said the approach allows

colleges and universities to select heterogeneous groups of students. Gilbert acknowledged that the system could result in fewer minorities chosen than if the application were not used, but he said that is preferable to deciding not to consider race at all in the admissions process. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i45/45a02702.htm>> [subscription required])

SAKAI PROJECT RELEASES VERSION 1.0

■ The Sakai Project, an effort spearheaded by four higher education institutions to offer an alternative to commercial course management software, released Version 1.0 of its open-source application, as well as the source code. The Sakai Project was launched less than a year ago with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the four institutions leading the project: the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Indiana University at Bloomington, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Stanford University. Commercial products, from companies such as Blackboard and WebCT, have drawn fire for their rising costs and the difficulty of customizing the applications for specific campuses. As an open-source application, the Sakai Project aims to address both issues, though all involved concede that open-source projects are far from free, requiring substantial time to install and maintain. Three of the founding institutions have pledged to begin using the application by fall 2005, and one will begin this fall. Leaders of the project have launched the Sakai Educational Partners Program, which currently includes forty-four members who pay \$10,000 per year to have early access to the software and to participate in its development prior to releases. Developers hope that the project can become self-sustaining within three years. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*,

e - publishing

HOUSE COMMITTEE ENCOURAGES OPEN-ACCESS PUBLISHING

The U.S. House Appropriations Committee has issued a report urging the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to offer free, public access to research funded by the NIH. Though not a requirement, the recommendation gives supporters of open access a significant boost and has left publishers scrambling to try to change the report before it is approved by Congress. The report encourages the NIH to make research available free within six months of publication and directs the NIH to report back to the committee by December 1, 2004, on how it plans to comply. Some academic groups and librarians have long been pushing for such an open model for scholarly publishing, especially with the sharply rising prices of many academic journals. After the report was issued, the Association of American Publishers (AAP), which said that it was not consulted for input in the writing of the report, began working to persuade members of Congress to reject the open-access language in the report, particularly the request for a report on compliance. Barbara Meredith, of the AAP, said that establishing open-access publishing for all government-funded research is “not in the best interest of business and readers.” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/prm/daily/2004/07/2004071902n.htm>> [subscription required])

<<http://chronicle.com/free/2004/07/2004071502n.htm>>

SIX MORE SCHOOLS TO OFFER NAPSTER ON CAMPUS

■ Six institutions—Cornell University, George Washington University, Middlebury College, the University of Miami, the University of Southern California,

EDUCAUSE review

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techwatch

and Wright State University—will begin providing Napster online music services to students this fall, joining Pennsylvania State University and the University of Rochester. Terms were not released, and conditions of the service vary by campus. At some schools, for example, all students can access the service, whereas at others, the service is restricted to on-campus students. Student demand for the service was cited by several institutions as a driving factor, and many schools also expressed a desire to offer a legal alternative to P2P file sharing and discourage copyright violations. Other companies—including CFlix, which provides movies as well as music, and Ruckus Network—are also working to sign up colleges and universities for their services. Meanwhile, Virginia Tech has signed a site license with Apple Computer so that its students can purchase songs from the company's iTunes service without being part of a subscription service. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, <<http://chronicle.com/free/2004/07/2004071901n.htm>>)

IBM COMPETES WITH MICROSOFT FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

■ A new initiative from IBM aims to offer alternatives to Microsoft products in academic settings. Because Windows computers are so common, many academic programs focus on teaching software development using Microsoft's operating system and development tools, according to Haym Hirsh, chairman of the Computer Science Department at Rutgers University in New Jersey. But Hirsh added: "We don't want our students to come out knowing only one way to do things." Under IBM's new program, interested colleges and universities will be given access to software and development tools, including open-source products as well as

proprietary IBM products such as the DB2 database and WebSphere Internet software. Institutions will also have access to course-development assistance from IBM's in-house training programs. Officials from IBM said the program involves more than simply the promotion of IBM hardware and software; they note that it responds to demand from academic interests to have a broader range of options for teaching computer science. (*Wall Street Journal*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/O,,SB109027258344267723,00.html>> [subscription required])

HARVARD ONLINE FACEBOOK GOES NATIONAL

■ Students at Harvard University have created an online facebook that has proven so popular that it has been expanded to more than thirty other colleges and universities. Facebook.com is a Web site that mimics the printed facebook at many colleges—booklets with names, pictures, and other information about students—with additional features that the online medium allows. Facebook.com is restricted to college students and alumni. Students who register with the Web site can include as much information as they choose and can change that information over time. They can assemble lists of friends and send electronic "pokes"—quick messages to say hello—to other registered users. Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student, began developing Facebook.com in January, and after the project's success at Harvard, Zuckerberg extended the site to a number of institutions around the country. Costs to run the site, initially quite low, have run up to \$3,000 per month, but so far the site remains free, earning enough money from ads to stay afloat. (*Wired News*, <<http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,63727,00.html>>)

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