Sharing the Challenge of Networked Information

A major program element for the Coalition for Networked Information is to present regional conferences regarding networked information issues. This programmatic theme is developed and delivered in conjunction with CAUSE and is targeted for constituents of CAUSE, Educom, and ARL who may not have had the opportunity or the time to attend national meetings on networked information and associated technologies.

There have been four regional conferences held since June 1994, with over 900 individuals in attendance. In addition to people from the CAUSE, Educom, and ARL constituencies, these conferences have drawn a fair number of faculty and administrators (for example, from the budget and purchasing offices).

The topics of the regional conferences reflect many of the topics discussed at the CNI Task Force Meetings. Networked information development and technologies with a particular emphasis on collaboration of higher education technologists and librarians are the overarching themes.

Although CNI is sponsored by CAUSE, ARL, and Educom, the entire funding for CNI and its programs comes from the 212 institutions that pay annual membership fees to be part of the CNI Task Force. The semi-annual meetings of Task Force representatives always have a programmatic theme of current interest to the entire networked information community. For instance, one recent program topic was research activities on emerging concepts regarding new ways to search networked information.

This particular topic demonstrates the rapidity of change in networking technologies and the availability of information on the national and global networks. When CNI was formed in 1990, a major concern was that there was not very much information available via the networks. Many of CNI’s earlier efforts focused on ways to create and promote network information resources. Now, much of the work in this area proceeds from the hypothesis that there is too much information available on the electronic network. Accordingly, different methods of sifting and finding the information “needle” in this data “haystack” on the network are required.

While new search techniques are being developed, examination of the costs of distributing electronic information is a second major activity now under way at CNI. Where might there be savings in an environment where information is electronically available, and where will new costs have to be incurred?

A final example, from among CNI’s current topics that have been covered at national meetings, is the ongoing debate of how existing print-based copyright law and practice needs to be adapted to the networked information environment. CNI has been an informed participant in this national debate on reasonable property rights and reasonable use of information when such information is readily available on the network.

These topics and many more regarding CNI’s and higher education’s broad agenda in networked information form the menu for CNI/CAUSE regional conferences. The evaluations and comments of participants in these conferences confirm the usefulness and importance of these issues to higher education professionals in their work at their institutions.

CNI is pleased that the cooperative open-registration regional conferences held in conjunction with CAUSE have been so well received. More of these types of local programs are in the planning stages. Information about these activities is available on the CAUSE Web server under Professional Development. If you have suggestions for conference themes or sessions, please contact Joan Lippincott at CNI (joan@cni.org).

CNI offers a wealth of information on topics related to the challenges of the networked information environment. The CNI World Wide Web server, in particular, now offers an alphabetical index to the Coalition’s archives, including most of the reports and white papers generated by CNI Working Groups, as well as summaries of the Coalition’s Spring and Fall Task Force Meetings for the past several years. Take advantage of this excellent set of resources by visiting the CNI homepage (http://www.cni.org/CNI.homepage.html).