INS ACCELERATES IT PLAN TO TRACK FOREIGN STUDENTS

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) appears to have the needed funding from Congress and support from colleges and universities to move forward with automating its paper-based system that tracks foreign students. Congress is ready to set aside $36 million to create a nationwide computer system, and most educators no longer oppose the 1996 Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act requirement that forces institutions to collect fees from international students to pay for the system. Colleges and universities changed their stance on the act's Student and Exchange Visitor Program following the terrorist attacks on the United States. The INS successfully completed a pilot project for the program in 2000, and agency insiders believe a nationwide computer system for tracking foreign students could be deployed in the first half of 2002. (Federal Times)

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICES TURN TO THE INTERNET FOR NOTIFICATION

Many colleges, frustrated with the pace of postal mail even before September 11 and the anthrax crisis, are adding or switching to electronic notification of admissions decisions. Yale University will soon start informing applicants of their acceptance on a secure Web site that can be accessed using a password. The faster applicants receive notification, the earlier they can visit the campus to make use of student programs that are offered shortly after the letters are sent out, said Richard Shaw Jr., dean of undergraduate admissions and financial aid. Electronic posting is particularly helpful for students who live overseas, noted Tufts University Dean of Admissions David D. Cutino. He added that some parts of the world have slower postal service than the United States and that in some areas service is nonexistent because of strikes. Dartmouth College sends its notifications by e-mail even though there are security risks; Dean of Admissions Karl M. Furstenberg said that the threat “is not significant enough” not to notify applicants by e-mail. (Chronicle of Higher Education Online)

TEAMS FACE CYBER CHALLENGE OF “BATTLE OF THE BRAINS”

The competitive nature of computer programming was on display at the annual “Battle of the Brains” competition sponsored by IBM. Colleges and universities throughout Northern California and the Pacific Northwest were allowed to enter three teams of three students each in the contest. As a test of their computer science skills, the teams were required to solve eight real-life programming problems in five hours. Such problems included calculating the file download size of a Web page and estimating the hourly frequency of hacker attacks on a server. Stanford University teams took first and fifth place this year, while second, third, and fourth place were won by the University of California at Berkeley. These teams will participate in the 2002 World finals in Honolulu. (SiliconValley.com)

UNIVERSITIES MANDATE MOBILE USE

Colleges and universities in the United States as well as overseas are flirting with or deploying handheld devices throughout the student population. Dartmouth College has implemented a Handspring Visor program into its department of psychology and brain sciences; iPaq handhelds are required for all freshmen in the University of Duluth’s engineering, computer science, and IT departments; and the University of South Dakota (USD) has mandated that the incoming class of 2003 and others carry Palms. Handheld programs can be particularly beneficial.
WHY COPYRIGHT LAWS HURT CULTURE
Speaking at the Darklight Digital Film Festival in Dublin, Lawrence Lessig, Stanford technology law professor, said that American copyright laws no longer serve artists, acting instead for the advantage of copyright holders. This control is causing culture and intellectual history to decline and is stifling technological innovation, he concluded. People now need permission to create derivative works of copyrighted material, shifting the power to build culture into the hands of the property owners, Lessig said. He believes digital and Internet technologies have the potential to diversify and open up culture, giving artists more control over their creations and breaking the power of monopolistic companies. Already, corporate copyright “hoarders” are fighting technological breakthroughs such as peer-to-peer communications programs that bypass copyright controls, Lessig noted. Furthermore, Lessig declared that the younger generation of “netizens” is characterized by indifference and noninvolvement in politics, significantly handicapping efforts to change the system. (Wired News)

for colleges from a marketing standpoint, furthering their tech reputation. USD, for example, touts its Palms as a cheaper way for students to access the Internet than buying more costly PCs, noted Vice President of Academic Affairs Don Dahlin. USD faculty members are optimistic that the devices will be used for a wide variety of academic applications, especially in the sciences. (M-Business)

HOW TO TAKE OVER THE CLASSROOM
Companies complain that universities are not producing students competent enough to fill much-needed IT positions. Academics such as University of Maryland CIO Jack Scuss argue that it is not their business to churn out graduates with hot skills. However, educators and companies can work together to produce the kind of graduates that CIOs are looking for. For example, UPS teamed up with Georgia State University to find a way to quickly infuse the company with Web layout and development professionals. The result was a twenty-one-week training program that handed out two certifications. The instructors were supplied by the school, while UPS contributed the facilities. IT and computer information systems initiatives backed by business schools are also making an attempt to create training programs that fulfill industry objectives. Instructors can take a leave of absence in order to update their knowledge and attain new skills in the real world, after which time they can return to the university and teach what they have learned to their students. (CIO)

CANADIAN SUPERCOMPUTING NETWORK BRINGS TOGETHER SEVEN CLUSTERS
Seven colleges and universities in Ontario have teamed up to form the Shared Hierarchical Academic Research Computing Network (SHARCNET), which officially became operational on November 16, 2001. SHARCNET will provide supercomputing resources for a variety of initiatives, including research into genomics and cancer treatments, design of fuel-efficient aircraft wings, insurance modeling, and quantum gravity theories. More than 25 percent of Canada’s supercomputing power is wrapped into the $26.4 million SHARCNET. Its primary clusters are located at the University of Western Ontario, the University of Guelph, and McMaster University; the University of Windsor, Fanshawe College, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Sheridan College house the remaining clusters. According to a list compiled by the Task Force on Cluster Computing of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, SHARCNET is even more powerful than supercomputers at Caltech, Princeton, Cornell University, and the University of Cambridge. (Chronicle of Higher Education Online)

NATIONAL VIRTUAL OBSERVATORY TO PUT UNIVERSE ONLINE
The National Science Foundation has earmarked $10 million for the development of a National Virtual Observatory (NVO), a single, searchable database of astronomical knowledge culled from observatories. The current total volume of astronomical information comprises roughly 100 terabytes, and scientists predict this number will swell to over 10 petabytes by 2008. Caltech computer scientist Paul Messina said that a single repository for this vast amount of data is essential: "[Otherwise] we will end up like shipwrecked sailors on a desert island, surrounded by an ocean of salt water and unable to slake our thirst." The goal of the project is to be able to conduct intricate computations by using the NVO to leverage the computing power of seventeen research databases. (Newsbytes)

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