Information Technology in the News

United States Open University to Close

The United States Open University will cease operations at the end of the spring semester after failing to accumulate enough students to defer its increasing debt. The distance learning institution, a branch of Great Britain's Open University, had formed significant partnerships with other U.S. institutions. It had signed with a number of community colleges around the nation to allow students to complete their bachelor's degrees after obtaining their associate degrees. United States Open University also partnered with the University of Maryland–Baltimore County and Indiana State University to provide distance learning portions of their master's degree in information systems and bachelor's degree in business administration, respectively. United States Open University Chancellor Richard S. Jarvis said enrollment was hampered by the school's lack of accreditation, though approval from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools was imminent, he said. (Chronicle of Higher Education Online)

Fast Sharing of Databases

Researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago have built a “Web of Data” using infrastructure technology called DataSpace. The Web of Data is designed to facilitate file sharing between huge databases. Such information sharing is currently limited to using sluggish FTP technology or putting the data on tapes and mailing them out, noted Robert Grossman of the university's Laboratory of Advanced Computing. He said the project could reveal insights into data sharing over high-speed networks and lead to significant changes in data warehousing and distributed decision-support techniques. DataSpace, created by Grossman and colleagues, uses data-transfer-protocol software, open-source server software, XML, and remote data access and analysis technology. Researchers are now testing DataSpace software's remote data mining and analysis capabilities, as well as its interaction with large data sets. (InformationWeek)

Broadband Cowboy

The Dandin Group's Dewayne Hendricks is setting up at Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation a wireless network that could be a model of the kind of network he wants—one that may have to circumvent FCC regulations on frequency, power, and transmission technology to deliver high-performance broadband. Complaints or blockage attempts by the FCC may be negated if the tribe asserts its Native American sovereignty; more important, Hendricks hopes it will put public pressure on the FCC to open up the spectrum. The FCC is concerned that unlicensed access to the full spectrum would give rise to too much transmission interference. Hendricks is convinced that spread spectrum technology will make a common-use spectrum workable, with technologies such as ultrawideband and dense-packet networks shoring things up if spread spectrum comes up short. So far, Hendricks's team has set up wireless connections for Turtle Mountain Community College and a small group of other buildings. Turtle Mountain is one of four reservations whose colleges are being equipped for wireless as part of a $6 million National Science Foundation initiative administered by EDUCAUSE. (Wired)

Fake Web Degrees

Canterbury, Otago, and Auckland Universities in New Zealand intend to sue a pair of offshore Web sites for selling bogus degrees. The schools are targeting fakedegree.co.uk and fakedegrees.com, which operate in Britain and the United States, respectively. Canterbury Pro-Vice-Chancellor John Raine said the New Zealand universities are worried that users of these services could tarnish the institutions' international reputations by using the fake degrees to secure jobs or academic positions. The U.K. site offers a wide variety of forged degrees and diplomas for $500; the U.S. site sells them for $145. Fakedegrees.com posts a disclaimer saying that its products are to be used strictly for novelty value and that the site waives all responsibility for abuse.

More Libraries Filtered

Forty-three percent of libraries surveyed by Library Journal said they used filtering software in 2001, compared with 31 percent in 2000. American Library Association (ALA) Internet policy specialist Claudette Tennant said this trend is driven by a federal requirement for libraries to install such software on their computers, as dictated by the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA). Those that fail to do so risk losing federal funding for online access. The ALA and ACLU are trying to overturn CIPA on the grounds that it is unconstitutional, Tennant said. She added that other developments may be playing a role in libraries' increasing use of filtering software, including new software that customizes filtering for each patron. Tennant is also worried that those who champion mandatory filtering could use the Library Journal report as a vehicle to promote stricter federal and state legislation. The ALA is not opposed to Internet filtering in principle, as long as it is done on a voluntary basis. (Newsbytes)
Raine acknowledges that fake degree sites are probably here to stay and that employers should keep an eye out for such fraud. But he insists that the universities “will try to bring whatever pressure we can for these sites to be shut down.” (Australian IT)

NO LAPTOPS REQUIRED AT DUKE

Citing cost concerns and lack of faculty readiness, Duke University administrators have decided not to require freshmen to own laptops next fall. “The students were afraid they were going to spend a lot of money and the faculty weren’t going to take advantage of the laptops,” said C. J. Walsh, student government president. He also noted that Duke students think the level of on-campus computer access is adequate. Relatively few institutions require laptops for students, according to Campus Computing Project Director Kenneth C. Green. Only about 50 out of 2,000 four-year colleges make computer ownership mandatory for undergraduates, he noted, adding that the value of such programs has yet to be determined. (Chronicle of Higher Education Online)

VAST PHYSICS DATABASE

Particle physicists will be able to research a vast database courtesy of a distributed computer initiative involving U.S., British, and French universities. “In the past you wanted processing power, but now it’s network bandwidth,” explained physicist Nicolo de Groot of Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) in Great Britain. The archive will consist of over 145 terabytes of data on the behavior of subatomic particles called B-mesons collected at California’s Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). That archive will swell with an additional 300 terabytes over the next two years. A series of storage computers at RAL is connected to counterparts at SLAC and CNRS in France. The new system simultaneously locates specific data and the processing power required to analyze it. The computers share storage space and processing power through the use of tailor-made software, while calculations can be carried out with client software. “We’ll be able to run analysis in hours that takes weeks at the moment,” declared Manchester University’s Roger Barlow. (NewScientist.com)

ALL HAIL CREATIVE COMMONS

Stanford Professor Lawrence Lessig is planning to launch Creative Commons, a source of online intellectual-property licenses that copyright owners can use to codify how their works can be used. He and others have long criticized existing copyright rules as being too rigid and geared to benefit mainly uncreative interests, hampering innovation and by extension technological progress and economic growth. Creative Commons is an effort to restore more control to creative individuals. When Creative Commons
DIGITAL WATERMARKING FOR INTERNET VIDEO

Purdue University researchers have found a way to ensure that Internet-delivered video maintains its watermark and keeps channel disturbance to a minimum, protecting the content from copyright infringement and hackers. Purdue professor of computer engineering Edward Delp said the technique allows for resynchronization at the receiving end that can decipher and piece together Internet video streams that are often chopped and mixed up while traveling over noisy networks. The result, said Delp, is the integrity of the watermark and image, while the stream is still delivered in real time. Traditional methods of piecing together Internet-delivered content largely do not work for audio and video, he added. The technique also helps guard against hackers because of the way it controls channel disturbance, and it could be used to decipher terrorist messages embedded in Internet-delivered video. (NewsFactor Network)

A-B-C’S OF OUTSOURCING

Companies that wish to forge successful outsourcing relationships can avail themselves of the eServices Capability Model from Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science. “The . . .