REVAMPED STUDENT LOAN SITE A HIT

The U.S. Department of Education launched a revamped Web site for financial aid applications and saw a 59 percent increase in traffic in the first month. The redesigned Free Application for Federal Student Aid site (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/) features how-to worksheets, security measures to prevent submitting duplicate applications, and the ability to save an unfinished application and complete it later. Of financial aid applicants, 60 percent—or six million students—are expected to use the online system this year. (Federal Computer Week Online)

ARMY ONLINE UNIVERSITY EXPANDS IN SECOND YEAR

The U.S. Army’s e-learning portal, eArmyU.com, attracted 12,000 students during its first year of operation, and the army plans to increase the size of the program by almost 100 percent. The portal, which is managed by Pricewaterhouse-Coopers for the army, connects soldiers who enroll with college/university and certificate programs that are available through the program. Students get computers and Internet access from the army to complete their programs of study. The army hopes to add 10,000 students to the program by the end of fiscal year 2002. (GovExec.com)

SYLVAN LEARNING SYSTEMS TO ACQUIRE NTU

Sylvan Learning Systems has announced plans to buy distance education firm National Technological University (NTU). NTU students can choose from among nineteen engineering and technical degrees and over fourteen hundred courses from fifty-two participating institutions; students access the majority of the courses by satellite television. The university fell on hard times following a decision to create a for-profit company that offered corporate training courses using the profits from its engineering courses. The Sylvan acquisition will involve the phase-out of the for-profit company and will allow NTU to deliver the engineering courses it built its reputation on, according to NTU President Andre G. Vacroux. Sylvan already has a controlling interest in Walden University, whose online graduate offerings include degrees in business and psychology, and in Canter & Associates, which provides elementary and high school teachers with master’s degrees. The firm will have about 14,500 enrolled students once it adds NTU’s approximately 2,000 students to its base. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

SPEECH BOUND TO BE READ

Several Australian universities are participating in the Liberated Learning Project, using speech-recognition technology to instruct students who are either hearing-impaired or unfamiliar with spoken English. Lecturers use cordless microphones linked to software that translates speech into text, explained Sunshine Coast University’s Liberated Learning Project Manager Di Paez; the text is displayed on a screen for students to view. Paez said that a transcript of the lecture is also posted on the university’s Web site. The research that formed the basis of Liberated Learning was conducted at St. Mary’s University in Canada, said Paez. She added that her university is part of a global consortium that has been collaborating on speech-recognition technology with researchers at IBM’s T. J. Watson Speech Science Laboratory. Other Australian members of the Liberated Learning Project include Murdoch and Central TAFE. The Department of Education, Science, and Technology will earmark $500,000 in funding so that six higher education institutions can participate in the project by the end of next year. (Australian IT)

CASE WESTERN TAKES NOVEL FUNDING APPROACH FOR IT

Case Western Reserve University, which already operates its network on 5,000 miles of fiber-optic cable, will spend $25 million on hardware to upgrade the network. The project is partially funded through an arrangement with contractor Sprint, which will put 10 percent of all money it receives under the contract into a technology fund. The fund, jointly managed by Sprint and Case Western, can be used for additional purchases from Sprint. This solution was in part a response to the perception that investments in information technology are one-time expenditures. Another source of funding is a new $400 fee for students in dorms and in Greek houses. When complete, the network will feature 17,000 gigabit-Ethernet-over-fiber connections in almost ninety buildings. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

HARVARD TO REVIEW RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

Although Harvard University undergraduate and graduate students are currently required to spend a full academic year on campus, a committee is being tasked with evaluating this policy in light of “emerging online-learning opportunities,” according to Harvard CIO Daniel D. Moriarty. In an issue of the Harvard Crimson, Harvard University President Lawrence H. Summers said, “The question has arisen as lifestyles change and it becomes more difficult for mid-career professionals to come to the university for part of their career.” Harvard’s School of Information Technology in the News

EdUnited
of Public Health has set up a program that does not require a full year of residency from students pursuing a two-year master's degree in health-care management. Although online sessions and teleconferences are part of the program, the learning is not completely Web-based. Nancy M. Kane, the health-care management degree program director, believes that the residency requirement still has its uses and noted that students who have not spent some time on campus are not really receiving a Harvard education. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

MICROSOFT OPENS SOME SOURCE CODE TO UNIVERSITIES

Microsoft has announced plans to release more than one million lines of code to colleges and universities, in an effort to counter the tide of support for open-source projects, most notably Linux. The code to be released is part of Microsoft's .NET initiative, and the company hopes that college and university researchers will warm to using its products on campus. The move represents a significant shift for Microsoft, which has historically been extremely protective of its source code. Peter Lee, a computer science professor and associate dean at Carnegie Mellon University, said that given the current support among many faculty and students for open-source applications, Microsoft is making a smart and practical decision. The software maker is also hoping that its products can take back some of the ground lost on campuses to the Java platform, a product of Sun Microsystems. (Wall Street Journal)

ORACLE MAKES TECHNOLOGY DONATION TO UNCF

The United Negro College Fund (UNCF) will receive $10.1 million from Oracle Corporation to support information technology programs at the thirty-nine colleges and universities that participate in the fund. This gift increases the total raised by the UNCF Technology Enhancement Capital Campaign to $90 million over two years. Part of the donation from Oracle is in cash. The remainder will be used to purchase equipment and to provide training and certification programs for students and faculty. The program also will create a scholarship program for students to work at Oracle for eight-week internships. Each intern will receive a salary, housing and transportation assistance, and a $10,000 scholarship. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

RIT LAUNCHES GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GAME DESIGN

Three years ago, Carnegie Mellon University established the Entertainment Technology Center, which teaches skills applicable to creating video games. In January 2002, the Art Institutes of San Francisco began offering an undergraduate degree program in game design. Now, the Rochester Institute of Technology is offering a master's degree in computer game design. Students in the program are confident that they will be able to use their skills to create games, any company that needs graphic simulations could benefit from a graduate of the program. (New York Times)

ONLINE GROUP TO GIVE ADVICE REGARDING COPYRIGHTS

The Electronic Frontier Foundation and several law schools have created a Web site that offers a searchable database of cease-and-desist information. The site aims to help recipients of cease-and-desist letters better understand their rights, in an effort to protect First Amendment freedoms. Wendy Seltzer, a fellow at Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, said, "What we try to do with this site is to clarify what it is [let- ter recipients] have to worry about and what's more likely to just be someone blowing hot air." The goal is to prevent Web publishers from being intimidated into removing content from their sites unnecessarily. The Web site (http://www.chillingeffects.org/) will encourage others to submit their letters for annotation and inclusion in the database. Law students at Harvard, the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford will analyze and annotate the letters. (New York Times)

NO E-RATE TUITION FOR DISTANCE COURSES

Despite a recommendation by the Southern Regional Education Board, the e-rate tuition program for distance courses has not been adopted by any schools in the group. The board, representing higher education governing agencies for sixteen states, put forward the plan to offer distance courses at a rate less than out-of-state tuition, saying the change would attract many more out-of-state students for those courses because they are not limited geographically. Despite the plan's suggestion that states also raise the in-state tuition for online courses, all states in the group have deferred adopting the program, saying that their budgets are too tight to offer any discounts. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

SHOPPING ONLINE FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, approximately 700,000 individual scholarships are available from more than 25,000 providers. Many scholarships have very narrow criteria for eligibility, so getting the right applicants connected with the right scholarships can be a daunting task for both sides, which is partly why a significant amount of scholarship money is not claimed. But a new crowd of scholarship Web sites is letting
more students find more scholarship programs more quickly than they were previously able to do. Scholarships.com reports that its usage is double what it was a year ago. Some sites, such as FastWeb.com, are able to provide their services for free by selling users’ information to marketing partners, while other sites, such as ScholarshipExperts.com, charge a fee to users. (New York Times)

MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTION TOOL FROM SETON HALL

Software that helps faculty produce multimedia presentations from lectures is available for free from Seton Hall University. Other institutions have developed similar software, but Seton Hall may be the first to make theirs available online. Their tool, called SyncStream, allows users to synchronize an online slide show with a lecture recorded using RealVideo streaming-video format. Officials at Seton Hall said that such presentations are more interesting for students and that giving faculty a simple tool for producing multimedia means many more faculty will participate. SyncStream is available online at <http://tltc.shu.edu/initiatives/streaming/synostream.htm>. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

THE GROWING VULNERABILITY OF CAMPUS NETWORKS

Computer intrusion attempts on U.S. campuses are occurring with more frequency, while viruses and worms have the potential to wreak extensive damage. Michael A. McRobbie, of the Indiana University System, said factors such as these are squeezing colleges to make their computer networks more secure. Colleges whose computers either are pirated of sensitive information or are used as launching platforms for cyberattacks can be subject to negligence lawsuits, according to experts. McRobbie said a particularly popular method of attack is to convert campus computers into “zombies” that can be used to launch denial-of-service attacks. Some colleges have announced plans to improve computer security, and Congress has suggested that more money be earmarked for that very purpose. College officials argue that their control of network security is limited: students, faculty, and staff have come to depend on the unlimited, convenient access and collaborative programs offered by open networks, while technical managers are swamped by a flood of security advisories and patches. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

SOFTWARE PIRACY AMONG STUDENTS

A survey administered by Eric Chiang, of the University of Florida at Gainesville, and Djeto Assane, of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, found that 40 percent of 703 students at both universities admitted having pirated software on their computers. Science majors and students taking upper-division courses had a higher probability of stealing software than others, according to the study. Chiang noted that respondents generally do not fear prosecution, given that there is little enforcement of penalties for software piracy. Jenny S. Blank, of the Business Software Alliance, said research shows that 25 percent of the general public uses unlicensed software, and she is not shocked that the average is higher among university students. “Students have lots of time, lots of bandwidth, and not a lot of money,” she said. (Chronicle of Higher Education Online)

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OXFORD PRESS PUTS CONTENT ONLINE, FOR A PRICE

The Oxford University Press will put more than one hundred language and subject reference dictionaries online as the first piece of a larger project called Oxford Reference Online (http://www.oxfordreference.com). The Core Collection—a single, cross-referenced database containing all of the dictionaries—so far includes approximately 60,000 pages from the books. Following the path set by other reference books including the Oxford English Dictionary and Encyclopedia Britannica, Oxford Reference Online will be a subscription-based service. Fees are $250 per year for schools; fees for multiple-user accounts (for example, libraries) will range from $395 to $3,000 annually. (Wired News)

MERRIAM-WEBSTER WILL OFFER PAID ALTERNATIVE

Adding itself to the growing list of companies that offer premium content online for a fee, Merriam-Webster introduced a subscription service to complement its free online service, which remains. Subscribers have access to the complete, unabridged dictionary, including more than 470,000 entries, as well as features including etymology searches, word games, and a monthly newsletter. The free version contains fewer than half of the word listings as the paid site. (Cnet)