Information Technology in the News

ORGANIZERS PLAN ONLINE MEDICAL SCHOOL

A group of more than fifty schools in sixteen countries are working to create an online medical school, in part to combat the “brain drain” that occurs when medical students go abroad for their education but do not return home later. The International Virtual Medical School is led by the University of Dundee in Scotland and includes Scotland’s other four medical schools at the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews. Organizers said that because degrees would be granted by individual participating schools, all of which are accredited, students should not have to worry about accreditation problems. Students would spend about 30 percent of their time in clinical settings during the first two years of the program and about 70 percent after that. U.S. schools participating in the project include Brown, Wake Forest, and West Virginia Universities and the University of Miami. (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2002/10/2002100901t.htm>)

NEW ATTRACTIONS TO DRAW STUDENTS INTO COLLEGE LIBRARIES

Many college and university librarians have modified long-standing policies and have upgraded facilities in an attempt to lure students into libraries, away from Internet-connected dorm rooms. For example, after years of being prohibited, food and drinks are now allowed in almost all areas of the University of North Texas library, which also has a Starbucks in a common area. The University of Richmond added more comfortable chairs and computer workstations to its library and saw an 18 percent increase in the number of students visiting the library. Samuel Demas, of Carleton College in Minnesota, said his institution has implemented art exhibits and literary events to draw students into the library. He said the events recalled a time when the library was the academic and social center of the campus. (Associated Press, <http://www.nandotimes.com/technology/story/529233p-4t9v803c.html> [registration required])

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX ONLINE ADDS DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

The University of Phoenix Online has received approval from its accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, to add three doctoral programs. The university already offers one Ph.D., in management in organizational leadership. The new programs are in business administration, education, and health-care administration. The university will also establish a School of Advanced Studies to support the new programs. The dean of the school said the new programs are in line with the university’s mission to provide working adults with educational alternatives. Some observers said the university’s move reflected its desire to “move up the educational hierarchy.” The university said it hopes to enroll 300 to 500 Ph.D. students over the next three years. Much of the coursework will be done online, though students will be required to spend two weeks per year on the university’s campus in Phoenix to meet with faculty advisors and mentors. (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2002/09/2002093008n.htm> [subscription required])
INITIAL MIT COURSEWORK GOES ONLINE

- In October, MIT began placing courseware online as part of its OpenCourseWare project (http://ocw.mit.edu/). MIT opted not to develop a for-profit learning initiative, as some other colleges and universities have, choosing instead to make its courseware open to the public online. MIT plans to put lecture notes, assignments, syllabi, tutorials, video simulations, and reading lists from over 2,000 courses on the site over the next ten years, though no credit will be offered for those who complete the assignments. Questions remain about technology tools for the site and about intellectual property issues, but a representative of the program said that so far, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Critics, on the other hand, say that the offerings are limited and that merely posting such resources online does not substitute for an education at MIT. Officials from OpenCourseWare agree that the experience of learning at MIT is not replicated by the program, but they hope that OCW will serve as a model for other institutions that want to disseminate resources online. (Wired News, <http://www.wired.com/news/school/0,1383,35937,00.html>)

THREE VIRGINIA SCHOOLS PARTNER IN NEW TECHNOLOGY CENTER

- Virginia has started construction on an $18 million, 90,000-square-foot academic technology center called the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, in Danville. It will be jointly run by Averett University and Danville Community College, both located in Danville, and by Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg. All three institutions plan to offer joint degree programs in technology areas, with both face-to-face and online classes. The center will provide equipment and facilities, including supercomputers, for student research. High-speed Internet cables that are being installed for the institute could also attract technology companies to the area. The center is scheduled for completion in 2003.

DUKE UNIVERSITY RECEIVES GRANT TO LIMIT COPYRIGHT EXPANSION

An anonymous donor has given $1 million to the Duke University Law School to fund efforts to find “the correct balance” between copyrighted material and that which is available in the public domain. The money will fund a new center that will consider laws such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and their impact on access to creative work. An official at Duke said the balance between the rights of intellectual property owners and the public domain has in recent years shifted in favor of copyright owners, to the detriment of having “a rich culture and an innovative society.” (CNET, <http://news.com.com/2100-1023-956637.html>)

PERCEIVED LACK OF QUALITY STILL HAUNTS ONLINE DEGREES

- Despite an increase from twelve to thirty last year in the number of institutions offering degrees that can be earned entirely online, graduates of those programs still face the perception of having a second-rate degree. Robert Tucker, president of InterEd, a company that tracks online education programs, said the reason is that people making hiring decisions usually come from traditional, resident programs and that they are generally skeptical of online education. A representative of the American Bar Association, which refuses to accredit online-only Concord Law School, said, “Some day, [proper] training may be online, but it’s not there yet.” Supporters of online programs say the medium of instruction is inconsequential to the quality of education. At the University of Maryland University College, which offers both residential and online programs, transcripts do not indicate which medium was used to obtain a degree. (Wired News, <http://www.wired.com/news/school/0,1383,54734,00.html>)

DISTANCE-ED GROUP NOW OPEN TO PUBLIC

- The Alliance for Lifelong Learning, a nonprofit distance-education company run by Stanford University, the University of Oxford, and Yale University, has a new name and is open to the public. Now called AllLearn, the company previously offered its courses only to alumni of the three supporting universities. The venture, similar to Columbia University’s Fathom project, will make about fifty distance courses available. Tuition for each course is $250, and each course will last between five and ten weeks. A spokeswoman from AllLearn said the group always intended to make the program available to the public. Others question whether the decision was made because the venture was not as successful as its founders had hoped. (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/free/2002/08/2002082001t.htm> [subscription required])

INTERNET USE SURPASSES LIBRARY USE ON CAMPUS

- A study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project indicates that more U.S. college and university students use the Internet for academic work than use the campus library. According to Steve Jones, head of the Communications Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of the study, students have come to regard high-speed Internet access as a utility, like water or phone service. The study showed that students use the Internet for research more often than they use the library but that they also use the
BLIND TO READ MAPS

A group of 11,000 engineers and other networking experts has won approval from the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to control the .org domain, the domain of many nonprofit groups and community organizations. The Internet Society, also known as ISOC, beat out eleven other groups in the bidding to become the new registrar for the domain, taking over for VeriSign, which last year agreed to give up control of several second-level domains in exchange for retaining control of .com. The Internet Society is expected to take over the domain in January. The group said it has established an oversight board and is working on the technical specifications necessary for the transfer. (San Jose Mercury News, <http://www.siliconvalley.com/mid/siliconvalley/4282701.htm>.)

NEW TOOL ALLOWS BLIND TO READ MAPS

With help from their professor, students in a software engineering class at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have developed a tool that blind and visually impaired people can use to read maps. The Blind Audio Tactile Mapping System (BATS) uses a trackball to move a cursor around on a map. As the cursor passes over different parts of the map, the system plays audio information so that the user can “read” the map. For example, names of places on the map are pronounced by a voice synthesizer. When the cursor goes over water, the user hears the sound of crashing waves; when it passes over land, the user hears horses galloping. The professor teaching the class in which the tool was developed said it could become an open-source application. It can be downloaded now from the project site: <http://www.cs.unc.edu/Research/assist/bats/>. (Wired News, <http://www.wired.com/news/school/0,1383,54916,00.html>.)

INTERNET SOCIETY

A faculty union in Massachusetts is working to establish a collective-bargaining agreement with the University of Massachusetts to ensure that its members are not overloaded with extra work when they teach in the university’s distance-education program. Understanding that distance-education programs often require significant additional work from faculty, the Massachusetts Society of Professors wants an incentive system to attract faculty rather than a coercion system, according to the president of the group. Professors are paid extra when they develop or teach distance-education courses, but other issues face negotiators, including enrollment caps and the potential for administrators to “eavesdrop” electronically on a distance-education course without the professor’s knowledge. (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/free/2002/09/2002091201t.htm>.)

STUDENTS PREFER PAPER TO ONLINE NEWS

Despite the inclination of U.S. colleges and universities to add computer technology to many aspects of campus life, most students still prefer printed campus newspapers over their online counterparts. Editors of campus papers, college and university officials, and analysts all report that when given a choice, more students will grab a printed edition than read the paper online. Those schools with significant hits on their newspaper Web sites indicate that a majority of those visitors are from parents, alumni, and others outside the campus community. Because of the lower readership, advertisers shy away from online papers, even when extra incentives are offered. Many campuses report making no money from online advertising; the University of Arizona noted that its online advertising revenue was $30,000, whereas revenue from print ads was about $1.3 million. (New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/19/technology/19PAPE.html> [registration required].)

G A L E G R O U P O F F E R S E - B O O K S W I T H N E T L I B R A R Y

Gale Group announced that much of its reference material will be made available online through netLibrary. Libraries with netLibrary accounts will have access to selected Gale content, including publishing imprints such as Macmillan Reference USA, Charles Scribner’s Sons, Thorndike Press, Wheeler Publishing, and Taft Group. According to Allen Paschal, president of Gale, initial offerings will include titles that do not already have a CD-ROM or Web version. Paschal said the Gale content would use the standard formatting and features offered by netLibrary, including full-text searches across multiple titles, but that individual titles would have no special customization. (Information Today, <http://www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/nb020930-2.htm>.)

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