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TRENDS

Angst and the Internet

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A record number of 3,695 participants attended the 47th annual conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators in New Orleans recently. At one point, it seemed as though every one of them was attempting to jam into the session "E-Mail or Paper?...", filling every seat in the capacious room, plopping down in the aisle, leaning against all available wall space, and milling in the hallway outside.

The full title of the session "E-Mail or Paper? How International Offices are Communicating with Students and Promoting Their Services Through New Technology," captures the current explosion of interest in the Internet, not only by educators, but by businesses and individuals worldwide.

An exhibit of the latest in elec-

Continued on page 22



Continued from page 1

tronics, communication, and computer technology in Saudi Arabia in April drew "tens of thousands of businessmen and computer enthusiasts of all ages," according to the Saudi government Information Office. Not a day passes without news of the Internet being published or televised somewhere.

This keen interest might more accurately be characterized as "angst" for those educators not yet connected to the Internet who fear falling hopelessly behind the advances in electronic communication and being left in the dustbin of obsolescence by their more youthful colleagues and competitors. After all, studies show that the typical Internet user is a fuzzy-cheeked, 21-year-old male...a description which fit few at NAFSA.

The basic problems facing users are two-fold: how to extract information from the Internet, and how to send out information over the Internet which will reach the targeted audience.

In "Taming the Internet" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 21, 1995, David S. Magier, a Columbia University librarian, termed the Internet as a mostly "unorganized mass of material—some of it wonderful, some of it awful, and some of it immensely popular. But this network of networks also is so big, amorphous, and changeable that you have to pity the poor researcher who wants to find something on a particular topic."

A prolific amount of terminology exists about electronic communication. During the NAFSA session, mercifully little of this jargon was used:

The Internet, also known as the Net, is the world's largest computer network. Each computer attached to the Net has a unique number, or address. The foundation for the Internet was laid in the late 1960s when the U.S. government and research institutions established computer communications for a project for the Department of Defense. By

early 1994, according to the book *The Internet* by Douglas E. Comer, there were over 22 million computers in more than 140 countries connected to the Internet, with a new computer being added every 30 seconds.

Browsers, which are free, can grab documents from services on the Net. A popular basic browser is Gopher, a system of menus that can lead you to the information you want. This software was invented by the University of Minnesota, whose mascot is the gopher. Gopher is also the name of a service.

World Wide Web, or the Web, is a service based on a technology called hypertext, or more accurately, hypermedia, which can link text, graphic elements such as photographs, drawings, and diagrams, as well as sound, and even video clips. The ordinary user of the Web doesn't need to know about the underlying technology. Although you can print a copy of a document, obviously sounds and videos can't be printed. Some of the more popular advanced browsers for the Web are Mosaic and Websurfer.

Home Page: This is your home site—your way of putting your own information onto the Web, requiring server software as well as some technical expertise. The term "page" is a misnomer, for your offering can be lengthy. The home page contains a description of what or who you are, the service or products you offer, or simply a description of your interests.

Presenting the NAFSA session on Internet use were John Pearson, Director of the Bechtel International Center at Stanford University; Ruth M. Sylte, International Opportunities Program, Center for International Education Student Services at the University of California, Irvine; and Parker Emerson, Advisor to Foreign Students and Scholars at Harvard University.

Pearson, serving as both Chair and presenter, defined the current status for institutions as one of moving from the printed form to electron-

ic type—what can we do electronically? He cited a survey of universities he made in December, which asked the question, "Do you use the Internet for electronic advising, newsletters, or World Wide Web pages?" By March, 85 replies were received.

Most offices at the time were using e-mail, and nothing more.

The majority, or 47 out of the 85 offices, had no distribution lists (e-mail addresses) for students and offices. Just four respondents had ceased publishing their newsletters on paper and were publishing only electronically. The NAFSA GOPHER was not being used often.

Pearson raised the following questions about the issues, worries and concerns of institutions using the Internet:

•How can you find e-mail addresses?

•How can we afford to communicate this way?

•Is the hardware very expensive?

•Are there legal issues? Are we liable if we make information available electronically?

•How do you update information?

•Are we going to lose the human touch?

•How do we preserve the confidentiality of information?

•Where are the experts on campus to set up World Wide Web services?

•If your office has a newsletter what is its purpose: to provide information or serve as a public relations vehicle? Does it look better in printed form? How do you reach people who are not on the Internet? How do you distribute it? Will the person who edited the paper form of your newsletter edit the electronic form?

Pearson left the exploration of answers to these questions to the two other panelists. First, Harvard's Parker Emerson confessed that his department as yet has no "home page" and

no distribution list. (A relieved and gleeful member of the audience was later heard to say, "Can you imagine? Harvard isn't on the Internet yet!"—which wasn't quite true.)

Emerson said there were three basic keys to his institution's joining the Net: 1. getting the decision-makers to make this decision when they don't know technology; 2. answering the question "why should we get online?" and 3. knowing the obstacles.

Emerson cited one of the great advantages of e-mail as the ability to send out flyers and application forms on e-mail, copying and pasting directly from Word for Windows. However, some of the advisors at Harvard fear that advising by e-mail, and sharing addresses, could create a flood of e-mail responses that they are not prepared to handle. Several of the advisors find it necessary to keep a formal e-mail footnote handy which reads, in effect, "This is your last message," referring respondents back to the main telephone number.

Harvard surveyed some of its medical researchers in the international scholar population on a variety of issues and discovered, much to their surprise, that the researchers' favorite way of communicating now is by e-mail and the Internet.

Before building a home page, Emerson advocates plenty of browsing, planning and training. The home page has a great responsibility to represent every aspect of your department fully and accurately, including such items as the office mission statement, office hours, staff directory, handouts, brochures, newsletters, as well as information put out by different departments.

The questions to start with are "Who is the target audience? What information are they seeking, versus what information do we want them to get? How will the office (the mission of the office) be seen on the WWW? How can we be assured that they will want to return to our WWW site?"

Finally, upgrading to the comput-

er equipment, the software and the site needed for input to the Internet can be very expensive. The Harvard International office is taking a simple, cautious approach by spending \$50 a month to own part of a commercial site leased from a facility on campus.

The master of the net turned out to be Ruth Sylte of the University of California/Irvine, who named the University of Minnesota and her own institution as educational leaders in electro-technology.

Sylte has been putting out a study abroad newsletter on the net every two weeks for the past one and one-half years, with a lead time of one to two months of preparation. The newsletter is not a one or two-page affair, either. A recent sample ran 10 pages long—quite a dazzling accomplishment.

Her newsletter, which has



TRENDS

become a fixture on the Net, has 3,000 subscribers and is credited with increasing student applications for study abroad by 50 percent this year, but it hasn't been easy.

After an initial stage of euphoria, Sylte said that "massive irritability" set in. Her system would crash. E-mail addresses change constantly and are not updated. She found herself liter-

ally living in her office for weeks at a time while trying to solve problems.

Sylte advises maintaining contact with other people who are trying to do the same thing you're attempting. She urges the need for a key staff person who is fluent in this technology. And she flatly pronounces Gopher as boring. People want to see graphics, for which World Wide Web is essential.

Help is on the way for users in higher education who want to zero in on specific, high-quality sources. Columbia University librarian David Magier is the driving force behind a collaborative effort led by his institution, the New York Public Library, and New York and Rutgers Universities to tame the Internet.

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, collection developers at the four institutions who have been trained in electronic searching are starting to categorize and evaluate Internet resources in eight fields: area studies, art and architecture, business, history, literature, music and performing arts, science, and social science.

Once the results have been put on the Internet, other institutions will be able to use them, even if their institutions had nothing to do with the indexing effort.

Other organizations such as the Research Libraries Group, the OCLC/Online Computer Library Center, and the Association of Research Libraries also have started to develop on-line catalogs for academic use.

With interest so keen on the part of the academic community, it seems probable that what is strange and uncharted territory to many today, will become familiar cyberspace turf in the near future—clearly marked and increasingly less expensive, with the "awful" material winnowed out in favor of the wonderful.

Ruth Sylte distributed the following list, which contains what she considers both the best of Web pages as well as the most useless.



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Continued from previous page

A Starter List for WWW Exploration

BASICS

Your own institution's home page	???
American Universities	http://www.clas.ufl.edu/CLAS/american-universities.html
Non-USA Colleges and Universities	http://www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/univ.html
NAFSA's Demo WWW Site	http://www.stolaf.edu/people/cdr/nafsa/
U.S. Federal Government Director Teaching and the Internet	http://www.fedworld.gov/ http://www.oac.uci.edu/indiv/franklin/doc/mfried/portfol.html

INTERNATIONAL

CIA World Factbook	http://www.ic.gov/94fact/fb94toc/fb94toc.html
County/Area Handbooks	http://lcweb.loc.gov/homepage/country.html
Federal Express	http://www.fedex.com/
Flags of the World	http://www.adfa.oz.au/CS/flg/col/Index.html
Foreign Language and Culture	http://www.speakeasy.org/~dbrick/Hot/foreign.html
Language for Travelers	http://insti.physics.sunysb.edu/~mmartin/languages/languages.html

STUDY, WORK and VOLUNTEERING ABROAD

Augsburg College Center for Global Education	http://aug3.augsburg.edu/global/index.html
Bond University	http://www.bond.edu.au/
Budapest Semester in Mathematics	http://www.stolaf.edu/stolaf/depts/math/budapest.html
CIEE: Council on International Educational Exchange	http://www.ciee.org/
Earthwatch	http://gaia.earthwatch.org/
Explorations in Travel, Inc.	http://www.xensei.com:80/users/explore/
KIIS HOME PAGE	http://www.berea.edu/kiis/kiis.html
The Klingon Language Institute	http://www.kli.org/
LEXIA Exchange International	http://www.mediacity.com/stanfordbarn/lexia.html
National Registration Center for Study Abroad	http://execpc.com/~nrdsa/
Peace Corps	http://www.clark.net/pub/peace/PeaceCorps.html
St. Olaf College	http://www.stolaf.edu/
UC Irvine's Center for International Education	http://www.cie.uci.edu/~cie/cie.html
University of Minnesota & the OSAD	http://www.isp.acad.umn.edu/istc/istc.html
University of Oslo's International Summer School	http://www.uio.no/iss/iss.html

TRAVEL

The Internet Guide to Hostelling	http://www.digimark.net:80/rec-travel/hostels/
The Lonely Planet	http://www.lonelyplanet.com/
Tourism Office Worldwide	http://www.mbnet.mb.ca/lucas/travel/tourism-offices.html
The Virtual World Tourist	http://wings.buffalo.edu/world/

AND FINALLY

1995 Best of the Net Nominees	http://nearnnet.gnn.com/gnn/wic/best.toc.html
Hot Links to the WWW	http://hakatai.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/links/wwwLinks.html
URouLette	http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/roulette.html
Useless WWW Pages	http://www.primus.com:80/staff/paulp/useless.html
The Webaholics Page	http://www.ohiou.edu/~rbarrett/webaholics/ver2/