November 1995

Campus Watch

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**Campus Watch**

**Distance Education Yields a “Network of Information”**

Imagine a day when a college student is able to obtain a degree without setting foot on campus. That day might be closer than you think. Through the use of “distance education,” a network of interactive television classrooms, college courses can be taken almost anywhere within the state of Iowa. It’s all part of a fiber-optics network called the Iowa Communications Network (ICN). Upon completion, the ICN will have many applications, but its primary purpose will be to provide educational opportunities for everyone in the state.

“Right now in Iowa we have the most sophisticated level of distance education in the nation,” said Michael Simonson, professor of Instructional Media, who teaches a distance education course. Simonson predicts that within three years there will be more than 400 ICN sites within the state.

“The kinds of courses being offered in distance education tend to be ones that do not require a lot of lab work,” Simonson said. He mentioned that some lab work can be done on the World Wide Web using a technique similar to virtual reality. Because virtual reality labs are not entirely accessible, not everyone will be able to complete a degree program through distance education.

Marcia Bankirer, director of Extended and Continuing Education said, “Distance education gives those people who do not have access to a college campus the opportunity to obtain a university education. However, it will not replace campus life as we know it.”

What does change is the ways instructors teach their courses. Instructors need to do three things to succeed in an interactive television classroom: plan ahead, use more visualization and initiate interaction with the students, Simonson said.

“What we try to do with distance education is provide an equivalent educational experience for the distance learner as for the local learner,” he said. Distance education does have its drawbacks. “The notes can go too fast; and the video screen sometimes focuses on the instructor when it should be on the notes,” said Dale Molback, an Iowa State student who is enrolled in a televised course offered by the National Technological University.

Teaching a television course can be difficult at times, Simonson added. “It’s like playing the piano and singing at the same time,” he said. “Before you can instruct a distance education class through ISU you need to complete a training course,” Simonson said.

Experts are not sure if the ICN will save the state any money. Bankirer said the Iowa legislature has already spent $100 million on the ICN, and it will cost another $100 million to complete it. “The ICN will not necessarily save the state money, but will instead set up a network of information and services,” she said.

— by Bill Kopatsich

**Parking Systems Works to Improve Cramped Parking**

After much frustration among drivers, Iowa State is doing something to elevate the overcrowded parking situation on campus.

Rick Fox, a campus landscape architect and a coordinator for the parking study said, “We know a lot about the parking problems on campus, we just don’t know how to fix them.”

Rick and Associates, a consulting firm from Southfield, Mich., was hired to work with Facilities Planning and Management on a solution to the problem. Together they have held informal meetings with various campus groups, including the Memorial Union staff, residence hall students, and Government of the Student Body representatives.

“These meetings were used as a forum for people to express their opinions,” Kerry Dixon, a customer relations specialist and a coordinator for the survey, said. Using the forums and 1,600 surveys as a guide, the university wants to meet the demand for on-campus parking and improve user dissatisfaction with Iowa State’s parking system.

— by Elaine Ackert
New Laser Optical Fiber Could Transform Surgery

A new technology developed at Iowa State could make the surgical scalpel obsolete.

The new "ultra-low expansion" optical fiber will enable surgeons to use the laser more effectively and in more types of surgical procedures, such as in the treatment of infertility and performance of gall bladder and prostate surgeries.

The fiber was developed in collaboration with Full Spectrum Inc., of Ames. Associate professor of materials science and engineering Steve Martin, post-doctoral researcher Abdelouahed Souflane and former graduate student Sheila Grant worked with Dr. Gerald Shirk, a surgeon from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and president of Full Spectrum to develop the fiber.

Not only will the new fiber bring the benefit of laser surgery to more patients, it also has the potential for lowering medical costs by reducing the number of fibers and lasers used in surgery. It will reduce the time required for surgery, minimize bleeding and trauma to surrounding tissues and shorten patient recovery time.

"This development opens the door to the use of the laser in many surgical procedures never before possible and permits the full benefit of the laser to be realized," Shirk said. "Many major surgeries could become minor."

The fiber has been named by the editors of R & D magazine as one of the 100 most significant technologies introduced into the world market in 1995.

— by Tamara Freund

Diversity Class Creates a Feeling of Community

A controversy arose in 1994 as to whether Iowa State students should be required to take a diversity class in order to graduate. Yasan Gooding, coordinator for minority recruitment and retention for the College of Family and Consumer Sciences said the debate focused on two issues.

"Officials wondered how a diversity class would be graded and what kind of things could be tested for. They also wondered about adding more requirements when students say they already have to take so many credits," she said.

For the second year, the "Dialogues on Diversity" class, University Studies 150, is striving to help Iowa State students discover the different cultures and backgrounds of others on campus. The class aims "to create a feeling of community on campus so students can be comfortable with others and get involved," said instructor Suzanne Hendrich.

"90 percent of the students who have taken the class said they would recommend it to other students so they can gain knowledge about one another," she said.

The "Dialogues on Diversity" class does not have tests but grades on weekly assignments and class participation.

"A diversity class is not currently required for graduation but beginning with the 1997-99 catalog, incoming freshmen will be required to take a three credit diversity-related course," Hendrich said.

— by Tracy Deutmeyer