

# Assessing the Academic Networked Environment: A CNI Project

## Background Information

Nine institutions are participating in CNI's Assessing the Academic Networked Environment Project, which has been developed to field test measures of the impact of networks and networked information resources on higher education institutions. To accomplish the project's goal, the participating institutions are engaging in a coordinated field test of the assessment measures included in Charles McClure and Cynthia Lopata's *Assessing the Academic Networked Environment: Strategies and Options*, published by CNI in 1996.

The participating institutions are:

- Brown University
- Dartmouth College
- Gettysburg College
- Johns Hopkins University
- King's College London
- Mary Washington College
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- University of Washington
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Each participating institution has put together an interdisciplinary team comprised of such departments as the library, computing center, academic administration, instructional design center, and others. Each team is designing and implementing its assessment program and focusing on aspects that are of most concern to the local institution. Another of the project's goals is to encourage the participants to develop skills that will assist them in working together as an institutional team, facilitating future work on collaborative projects.

The nine teams held their first working meeting on April 2-3, 1997 in conjunction with CNI's Spring Task Force Meeting. The teams began to

plan campus assessments of the networked aspects of such areas as: teaching and learning; information resources/library; support services; infrastructure; and campus computing labs.

Some of the specific issues that the institutions are addressing include:

- How has access to and use of networked information resources and services affected teaching and learning?
- How and where are users connecting to the network?
- What is the frequency of use of information resources on the library web?
- How effective are electronic help services compared to print or in person help services?
- What are the annual information technology expenditures on the campus?

The institutions are employing a wide array of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, to assess the use and impact of networks and networked information on their campuses. These include surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation, and analysis of electronic system logs.

The project will result in an annotated compendium of the assessment measures that were tested in the course of this project, including commentary on their utility and value, and a description of the methodology used to collect and analyze the data for specific measures. A project report will synthesize major findings and best practices from the project. These materials will be available on CNI's website for broad use by the academic community.

Christopher Peebles, Associate Vice President, Indiana University, is a Visiting Fellow with CNI and one of the project coordinators. He has also engaged campus communities in the issues of assessment in the site visits he has made to the participating institutions. His graduate assistant, Sam McDonald, is providing support for the project. Peebles' assessment program at Indiana University, which tracks the growth and costs of network use and network services, is also serving as a model for the measures being developed by the participating institutions.

Charles McClure, Distinguished Professor, Syracuse University, serves as an advisor to the project. Gerry Bernbom, Special Assistant for

Digital Libraries and Distance Education, Indiana University, is the project facilitator. Joan K. Lippincott, Associate Director of the Coalition, is also a project coordinator.

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For further information on the project, visit CNI's Website at <http://www.cni.org/projects/assessing/>