EDITORIAL

In just one month, DEOSNEWS has become an international service with 130 individual subscribers from U.S.A., Canada, Australia, England, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Netherlands. In addition, DEOSNEWS is available on local bulletin boards at Penn State University and in the Australian Open Learning Information Network (AOLIN).

In this issue of DEOSNEWS we have chosen to review the Distance Education Database, another international service. We hope you will find the review useful and that you will try out the data- base before the next issue of DEOSNEWS is posted in the last week of May.

THE ICDL DATABASE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

A review by Morten Flate Paulsen May 1991

The International Centre for Distance Learning (ICDL) at The Open University in England, provides an online database as well as a CD-ROM for distance educators world wide. The Centre, at the University's Institute of Educational Technology, has funding to provide an information service to the Commonwealth of Learning. It is, however, available to everyone.

The project has received a grant of 1 million UK pounds for the period April 1989 - March 1992. The online database will be available - free of charge - to everyone during this period, but subscription charges are likely to be introduced for institutions in developed countries after March 1992. The CD-ROM will be made available to institutions in developing countries at no cost, and subscriptions will be available for institutions in developed countries.

THE DATABASE

The database comprises information about distance teaching institutions worldwide; a bibliographic catalogue of the ICDL literature collection; and information on individual courses taught at a distance by Commonwealth institutions.

Searching for information is done via simple menus and search- words. The menus allow you to select the subset of the database you would like to access, and the searchword will identify your topic of interest. It is possible to limit the search to informa- tion headings, such as author, institution, or course title; or to include the complete records in the search. The system does feature the boolean

operands OR and AND, as well as truncated words for advanced searching.

As an appendix to this review, I have included examples of infor- mation stored in each of the three database domains. Example 1 lists the information available on one of the 250 registered institutions; example 2 shows the available data from one of the 2,500 indexed documents; and example 3 presents one of the 7,000 searchable course and programme entries. The number of accessions apply early May 1991, and they seem to increase daily.

ONLINE ACCESS

You need a microcomputer with communication software and a modem to access the online database. If you lack datacommunication skills, you need help from someone with online experience.

Using a four-page flier about the database, the Procomm communi- cation software, and Telenet; I had no difficulty getting online. The only obstacles were some occasional noise and the communica- tion costs. Internet communication is free, but overseas tele- phone charges from U.S.A. to England are about $1 per minute, and communication via packet switched datanetworks, such as Telenet and Tymnet in U.S.A. and Datapac in Canada, is not much cheaper. The total Telenet charge adds: a $24 recurring monthly charge, and a usage charge comprising $10.00 per hour and $12.00 per kilo segment transferred (one kilo segment is about 1.000 lines of text).

To access the database, you must set the parameters in your local communication program to: 8, N, 1, remote echo, and full duplex. Then you can connect directly via a long distance telephone line or via a packet switched datanetwork.

The telephone numbers for direct access are (+44 908) 270733 or (+44 908) 271188 for 2400 bit per second modems (V22bis). When connected, you will see a welcome message and the prompt:

PAD> Then, you must respond by typing: CALL OPEN.ACS.VAX When you are asked for a username, type: ICDL

If you use a packet switched datanetwork, the network user address (NUA) is 2342 8440015630. When you are asked for a username, type:

ICDL

Access is also possible via Internet:

- Telnet to sun.nsf.ac.uk - currently 128.86.8.7 - Login as janet - in lower case; there is no password - Enter the NRS name of the Open University VAX cluster when prompted, i.e. uk.ac.open.acs.vax - When asked for a username, type: ICDL - The 'DTE' number for the VAX cluster on JANET is 000041500030 (UK.AC.OPEN.ACS.VAX) - Again when asked for a username, type: ICDL

THE CD-ROM

I received a package with a CD-ROM disc, a MS-DOS floppy disc with the Compact Disc Retrieval Software, and a comprehensive user manual. In addition to the materials received, users need an IBM-compatible pc and a CD-ROM drive with the Microsoft MS-DOS CD-ROM Extensions.

When I finally got access to the necessary equipment, it was very easy to access the database. I just inserted the Compact Disc Retrieval Software in drive A: and started the program by typing the command ICDL. Then, the database main menu appeared.

My main impression of the CD-ROM is very positive. My only problem appeared when the attached printer was out of order. I found no way to log the information I needed into a file, and I had to go home without the retrieved information.

ONLINE ACCESS VS. CD-ROM

If an institution has to chose either online access or CD-ROM access, it should consider cost, convenience, and currentness. The costs of a modem and a CD-ROM drive are comparable, so it is more important to compare the communication costs with the price the ICDL will charge for the CD-ROM. In my opinion the CD-ROM is more convenient to use than the online database is, because the datacommunication can be troublesome. On the other hand, the online database is continually updated, while a CD-ROM can just be updated a few times a year.

CONCLUSION

I found both the CD-ROM and the online database uncomplicated to access and friendly to use. The database is obviously a valuable resource for distance educators around the world. A database is, however, dependent on the quality of its contents. I have not tried to do any quality analysis on the data, but I hope The Open University vouch for quality. My only complaint about this database is its preoccupation with the Commonwealth of Learning. I hope someone will make it possible to gather more information from the rest of the world and make it a truly international database.

A more important concern, however, is the accessibility of the database. Today, very few distance educators have access to a CD- ROM drive, and the cost of international communication inhibit many prospective users from accessing the online database. We can just hope that future dispersion of CD-ROM technology and reduced communication costs will make it easier for distance educators to access this valuable database.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information contact:

Director Keith W. Harry (e-mail: KW_HARRY@VAX.ACS.OPEN.AC.UK) or Data and Communications Officer Nazira Ismail (e-mail: N_ISMAIL@VAX.ACS.OPEN.AC.UK)

ICDL c/o The Open University, Walton Hall Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA United Kingdom

Telephone: (+44 908) 653537 Fax: (+44 908) 653744 Telex: 825061 OUWALT G

APPENDIX

EXAMPLE 1. ONLINE INSTITUTIONAL SEARCH

In November 1990, I started a search among the 206 registered institutions, where I could select one

of the following regions: Africa, Asia, Australasia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America, Caribbean, and Latin America. The option North America let me view 40 Canadian and 22 U.S. institutions. I chose, however, to view the information on Open University, since the ICDL database is located there. The following is a copy of my log file:

NAME Open University

REGION Western Europe - United Kingdom

DESCRIPTION The Open University was established by Royal Charter in 1969 as an independent and autonomous institution authorised to confer its own degrees. The University aims to provide a second chance to adults who have not received higher education, and to contrib- ute substantially to continuing education in the UK. The Univer- sity is located on a 70-acre site in Milton Keynes, Buckingham- shire, and has offices in 13 regions covering the whole country. Three programmes are operated: undergraduate (leading to a B.A. or B.A. (Hons) degree), postgraduate (taught and research), and continuing education. A range of free-standing self-study packs are also available.

Enquiries regarding any of the University's courses in the database should be addressed to: The Director, European and International Development Office, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UNITED KINGDOM. Telephone: (+44 908) 274066. Telex: 825061 OUWALT G. Fax: (+44 908) 653744.

ADMISSION No educational qualifications are required for admission to undergraduate courses, but students must be at least 18 years of age and resident in the UK. Undergraduate-level courses are now also open to residents of Belgium, the Republic of Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The normal minimum entrance requirement for postgraduates is identical to that which applies in UK conventional universities. The age and residential re- quirements of the programme also apply to the continuing educa- tion programme, but in the case of professional and updating courses in this programme, stipulations are made concerning required levels of previous knowledge. Admission enquiries should be addressed to The Open University, P.O.Box 625, Milton Keynes, MK1 1TY, UK. Open University, P.O.Box 625, Milton Keynes, MK1 1TY, UK.

SERVICES A wide variety of courses are offered by the Open University, and their respective components are similarly varied. The printed materials which form the core of the University's taught courses may be supplemented by one or more of the following: audio cassettes, radio broadcasts, video cassettes, television broad- casts, slides, home experiment kits, computer conferencing facilities, access to databases, field trips, summer school, and weekend or day schools. Tutorial and counselling services avail- able in the University's 250 study centres are optional. Students are encouraged to form self-help groups on lower-population courses. A student newspaper, Sesame, is published regularly and circulated to current students. The Open University Students Association organises study-related and social activities, clubs and societies.

REGISTRATION Degree-level courses run from February to October each year. All new students need to apply for a place during the preceding year. To register as an undergraduate student it is necessary to apply by the end of September at the latest for courses starting the following February. New students have the opportunity to withdraw from their course before final registration.

STATISTICAL SUMMARY During the course of a year, the University enrols a total of more than 150,000 students. It employs more than 3,000 full-time staff and over 5,000 part-time tutorial and counselling staff. The annual budget of around 70 million pounds is derived princi- pally from central government, with additional funds from student fees and from other public and private sources. Over 150 under- graduate courses are available in 1990. Many of these courses are also available in the continuing education programme along with many other specialised short courses. Around 100 free-standing packs have also been produced. More than 100,000 students have graduated with B.A.degrees.

DATA ENTERED 14 September 1990 kwh

EXAMPLE 2. CD-ROM LITERATURE SEARCH

The January 1991 CD-ROM literature database had 2331 searchable documents registered under one of these subjects: access to education, assessment, audio teleconferencing, business adminis- tration and education, career guidance, collaboration, colleges of advanced education, computer mediated communication, and computer science. The following is a copy showing the information about one document I found relevant for this review:

Accession number 20009503 Author(s) Harry, Keith Title The International Centre for Distance Learn- ing Journal/Collection Educational media international Volume/part/date vol.27, no.2, June 1990 Publication year 1990 Pages 115-18 Abstract The aim of this paper is to describe briefly the current international climate regarding information work in distance education; then to outline the resources and activities of the International Centre for Distance Learn- ing (ICDL), which is located on the campus of the Open University in the United Kingdom; to identify ICDL's links with international organizations, working in distance education; and to describe in some detail ICDL's data- bases on the literature of distance education and on institutions and courses and their accessibility to users outside the Univer- sity. Document type Journal article Language(s) English Institution of author(s)) Open University, United Kingdom

EXAMPLE 3. ONLINE SEARCH FOR COURSES

In November 1990, there were 3218 searchable courses registered. The following is an example of course information copied from my logfile:

CODE AND TITLE M216, Computer Architecture

INSTITUTION Murdoch University

COURSE LEVEL Degree and Postgraduate

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OTHER ACADEMIC INFORMATION This course covers the following areas: Computer systems organiz- ation - Central Process Unit (CPU), memory, Input/Output (I/O), peripherals. Data representation - bits, bytes, words. Coding- systems - binary, hex. Digital logic, digital arithmetic, digital storage and accessing. Control and I/O. Symbolic coding and assembly systems, addressing techniques.

Assessment methods include assignments, tests and final examin- ation. Entrance qualification required is Secondary School (to University entrance). Mature age students have alternative entry.

Entry requirements for the Diploma in Computer Studies are (a) a degree in any discipline from a recognized university or C.A.E.; (b) some experience with the use of computers would be an advantage. A diagnostic test may be required as part of the entry selection process or to determine eligibility for exemption from M104 Principles of Computer Science.

M104 Principles of Computer Science is a prerequisite to this course. This is a required course for the award of the Diploma in Computer Studies; and the Bachelor of Science (Ordinary) in Computer Science.

Language of instruction is English.

MEDIA AND METHODS EMPLOYED Specially written materials, including guides for self-paced study, supported where possible and where appropriate by audio and video cassette tapes, special audio-visual equipment, face- to-face tutoring, telephone tutoring.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION This is a 1 semester course (15 weeks). A total of between 10-15 hours of study per week is required. It is a 3 credit course.

All degree programmes are divided into 2 parts and require 72 credits in total. Part I (24 credits) consists of University foundation courses, prerequisites for Part II, and general electives. Part II (48 credits) consists of required courses, programme electives, and general electives. Diploma programmes require 24 credits in total and in general are divided into required and elective courses.

Murdoch University is a member of WADEC (the Western Australian Distance Education Consortium). Copyright in all external mode course materials is held by Murdoch University and enquiries regarding access to, or purchase of, materials should be ad- dressed in the first instance to the Director of External Stud- ies, Murdoch University.

FIELD OF STUDY CLASSIFICATION 06-03-30 COMPUTER SYSTEMS DESIGN

DATA ENTERED 13 February 1990 ---