



From: EDUCAUSE

Re.: Broadband Perspectives from the Higher Education and Library Communities

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The Need for Broadband

Higher education institutions and libraries are increasing their efforts to provide quality education and services while accommodating the schedules of lifelong learners. Distance learning applications with the potential to accomplish this are becoming more sophisticated and increasingly require a broadband Internet connection to use them. For instance, the demand for high-speed bandwidth to run video on demand and peer-to-peer applications is increasing as these tools continue to become an integral part of the learning process. Unfortunately, many researchers and students, particularly those in rural and inner-city areas, do not have access to broadband service and are rendered a disadvantage when it comes to collaborating with their colleagues and accessing information in a more vibrant format.

Access to Broadband Networks

Broadband access today is advertised/presented to the public as simply having high-speed DSL or cable modem access to the home. Focusing primarily whether there is regulatory parity between broadband vendors/technologies neglects the development of alternative wireless solutions, and does not take (full) advantage of opportunities that next generation broadband technologies can provide. Equally important to access to the home is access to community institutions that provide a public conduit for communication and learning. Already, many states have developed education and research networks, providing varying degrees of Internet access to the K-20 community. [<http://www.statenets.org/>] Enabling such networks to connect to high-speed national backbones such as Internet2's Abilene [<http://www.ucaid.edu/abilene/>] is a first step in providing broadband access to underserved areas.

The Role of Researchers and Students

Traditionally, it has been the education and library communities that provide initial public access to new information technologies, which in turn has helped drive consumer demand for said services. University researchers and students also play an important role in accelerating the development of next-generation broadband technologies, and in creating the yet-to-be-seen applications that will drive demand for broadband. Already, high-speed networks are greatly accelerating the pace of discovery in a wide range of science and engineering disciplines as researchers are connected to supercomputers, vast online databases, scientific instruments, and each other.

Collaboration Between Communities Is Essential

Federal investment in the development of high-speed applications and networks is imperative if broadband is to succeed in the consumer market. The higher education and library communities are prepared to work with government and industry partners to: expand the research on alternative, low-cost "first mile" broadband solutions; increase support for nation-wide optical network testbeds for the research community; increase support for R&D and test-beds for broadband applications; and demonstrate advanced broadband to federal and state policymakers.

About the HEIT Alliance

The Higher Education Alliance for Information Technology [<http://www.heitalliance.org>] is comprised of 11 higher education and library associations with the mission of promoting our community's collective interests in Federal information technology policy.

