NEW MEDIA AT PENN

BY JOHN MACDERMOTT

Affordably priced, easy-to-use, multimedia tools have encouraged countless newcomers into what was once the almost exclusive domain of media professionals. Although some of the technical and financial barriers have been lowered, media skills and aesthetic savvy are still required for effective communication. The breakthrough technologies, which open new creative possibilities, also place new demands on those who use them.

Effective use of new media in education requires that knowledge proliferate with technology. This principle guides the development of Information Systems and Computing’s new media support services for the academic community at Penn.

New media activities at Penn

ISC’s support activities focus on the process as well as the technology of multimedia development. For example, the rapid growth of WWW publishing motivated ISC to examine how Penn information should be organized and presented on the Web. The new Penn Web provides a University-wide framework for publishing and accessing information. A new style guide for Web authors has been drafted (http://www.upenn.edu/style) and technical support services for information providers are being developed.

ISC supports the extension of new media technology into the classroom. As part of the Provost’s Classroom Facilities Review Committee, ISC worked to ensure that the six central pool classrooms renovated last summer allowed faculty to use multimedia courseware to its fullest capability. The rooms include networked computers, high quality audio and video systems, and carefully designed lighting systems. Several more classrooms are scheduled for renovation during the coming year.

ISC’s new media specialist works with School-based experts to advise and assist faculty initiatives. ISC has facilitated access to training; researched technical issues; and arranged for outside resources to help get projects going, and to help keep them moving.

A less tangible but equally important component of support is encouraging cooperation among people involved in new media. ISC coordinates the Interactive Technology Group (ITG), a group of people practicing, or simply interested in, new media technology at Penn. ITG meets monthly and operates an e-mail list and a Web site as forums for sharing information. The collective expertise of this group is perhaps the greatest new media resource on campus.

Penn’s membership in the New Media Centers (NMC) program enhances all of these efforts. NMC is an international consortium of leading universities and corporations that promotes the use of new media technology in education. In addition to providing an expanded forum in which to exchange information, NMC corporate members provide discounts on their products and improved access to technical support. Penn was accepted into the program in March 1995 as a recognized leader in new media. The relationship has already resulted in a wealth of new ideas on technical and logistical issues, as well as substantial savings on the purchase of hardware and software.

Additional information

For more information about new media activities at Penn, contact John MacDermott (898-3046 or macderm@isc). Additional information is also available on the Penn Web (http://www.upenn.edu/newmedia/).

JOHN MACDERMOTT is New Media Specialist for Information Systems and Computing.