

The WiderNet Project: Outreach from Iowa to the World

Information is power, and the WiderNet Project is helping people around the world become more intellectually mighty.

The WiderNet Project, a service project within The University of Iowa's School of Library and Information Science, focuses on the improvement of educational technology systems by helping primarily universities, secondary schools, and hospitals worldwide furnish people with access to computers, digital information, and the Internet.

Cliff Missen, a UI visiting professor who directs the WiderNet Project, says there are over 300 eGranary Digital Library installations in 39 different countries.

An eGranary Digital Library is an "Internet in a Box" device that contains more than 10 million educational resources and is installed in hundreds of clinics and schools in low-bandwidth areas around the world. "Literally, every minute of every day, hundreds of people in the developing world die from a lack of knowledge," Missen said. "They don't know how to drill wells, they don't know about the germ theory. They don't know how to combat malaria using resources at their disposal. This digital library provides instant access to generations of knowledge."

The WiderNet Project is currently evaluating the use of its eGranary Digital Library through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation requested an in-depth evaluation of the eGranary Digital Library for other organizations

considering using it in health education throughout the developing world.

Iowa is providing on-line and paper surveys, focus groups, and log evaluations from eGranaries in the field.

To encourage people to take the survey, all participants have a chance to win a free hard drive for their organization.

In August, the first eGranary Digital Library was awarded to Daed Shokoh of the Jordanian Nursing Council in Amman, Jordan. Joubert Kumwenda of the Beit CURE Hospital of Malawi in Blantyre, Malawi, won a personal USB eGranary.

UI President Sally Mason, who drew the two winners' names in August, is impressed with the WiderNet Project's outreach efforts. "This takes outreach to a new level. This takes outreach all over the world," Mason said.

"This goes to places in the world where many other people and groups aren't. Talk about having a high impact in parts of the world where there's virtually little or no impact from anywhere else."

WiderNet is online at www.widernet.org



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