



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Information Technology

From the issue dated July 2, 2004

Student-Run TV Stations Join Forces to Share Programs Online

By JEFFREY R. YOUNG

Student-run television stations are popping up at more and more colleges, and their shows -- known to have an irreverent streak -- often gain a loyal following on the campuses.

Among some of the campus hits: *Missionary Positions*, a call-in show about religion and sexuality with a minister, a priest, and a rabbi as hosts, produced by students at Washington University in St. Louis; *IMPROVment*, a sketch-comedy show produced by the student troupe at Case Western Reserve University; and *Hoosier Date?*, a popular student dating show at Indiana University at Bloomington.

These shows may soon greatly expand their fan bases, thanks to a new effort by more than 40 student-run TV stations to share their programming -- and to offer their best shows online.

The group, called the Open Student Television Network, plans to start a 24-hour Internet broadcast this fall, featuring selected content from participating campus stations. The stations will also use the advanced data networks to transfer high-quality copies of their programming to one another, so they can broadcast them on their stations if they choose.

Station managers at member colleges are also doing some networking of their own, using an online bulletin board and holding regular telephone conference calls to share ideas and advice on running their stations on tight budgets. "A typical college TV station sort of operates in a bubble," says John Landers, a senior at Case Western who is general manager for Ignite TV, the student-run station at the university. "By working together, not only do we expose our content to the other schools across the country, we also get to learn from each other."

Kieran Farr, a senior at Indiana University and executive director of Indiana University Student Television, says that that collaboration is particularly helpful for his station, which started only two years ago. He says he is learning invaluable lessons from students at more-established stations.

Rating Shows

In early August, representatives from about 30 of the stations plan to meet at Case Western for a conference to share ideas -- and check out some of the shows offered by their peers. "We're going to be watching TV for probably the first three hours" of the meeting, says Mr. Landers.

The group has already set up a video "depository" on the Internet, where students at each television station can place digital copies of their best shows and watch shows submitted by others. The system lets users rate each show and post comments, in the hope that such feedback could be used to improve the programming.

Several managers of student-run television stations say they look forward to airing one

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another's programs. And the students who produce the shows are excited to get more viewers.

"Students are very lazy -- they need to be motivated to complete a project," says Mr. Farr. "If people know their work is going to be seen by 20 times as many people," it will push them.

And the effort should help station managers round out their schedules.

"There's a lot of air to fill," says Jon M. Kondrath, a senior at the University of Southern California and general manager of USC's television station, Trojan Vision. "We're running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and you can only produce so much programming." He says the station might run a block of shows from other colleges each day.

He says that some of the stations have tried to share programming informally in the past, but that they did so by sending videotapes through the mail, which was more difficult to coordinate.

Joint Productions

The new group is also considering jointly producing programs. For instance, they might sponsor a battle-of-the-bands show in which musical acts on several campuses send in performances, and then viewers vote for their favorites.

The network is backed by the CampusEAI Consortium, a nonprofit group of about 75 universities, led by Case Western.

"This is not just a silly student effort that's going to collapse in three months," says Prashant Chopra, director of research and development for information-technology services at Case Western. "This has long-term sustainability."

<http://chronicle.com>
Section: Information Technology
Volume 50, Issue 43, Page A29

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