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Open network gives student work shot at TV

By Eric Chen

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College senior Gopal Shah has Hollywood ambitions, and Shane Walker thinks he can help Shah fulfill them.

Walker, a former movie producer, is working to showcase student films through a service called the Open Student Television Network.

Launched last year, the network broadcasts student productions from a consortium of colleges and universities nationwide. Penn does not participate.

However, students who don't attend participating schools may also receive airtime on the network, allowing their work to be shown at other schools.

For students like Shah -- who wrote a short screenplay -- the network will be an excellent way to get exposure, Walker said.

Shah's film *Zeyen and Nazia*, which will screen at the Ivy League Film Festival next month, may also air on the network.

"It's a channel for the creation generation," said Walker, the network's vice president of programming. "It's not just TV and film, it's dance, music, theater, drama. It's art."

The station delivers its content digitally through Internet2, a nationwide computer network between universities that is faster than the average broadband connection, Walker said.

Students at the 40 schools involved with the network -- which include Harvard and Yale universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology -- can watch programming on both their computers and their TVs.

The network offers a daily lineup featuring 12 hours of news shows, sitcoms, films, music videos, game shows and more, Walker said, adding that all programs are student-produced.

Because it's an official sponsor of the Ivy League Film Festival, which will be held at Brown University, the network will also show some of the festival's entries.

Daniel Brown, a Brown senior and executive director of the festival, was both pleased and surprised by the network's commitment to the festival.

Walker likens the network to the "minor leagues" of the entertainment industry -- a place for aspiring students to break into the business.

At Harvard, students produce the soap opera *The Ivory Tower*, which parodies and reveals the world of sex at the Ivy League, according to the show's Web site.

Brigham Young University has a team of animators who submit their creations to the network.

Penn's student-run television station, UTV13, has expressed interest in the network and will be discussing future involvement with it, said College sophomore Jason Miller, president of UTV.

The Open Student Television Network is a non-profit company that is owned and fully funded by the CampusEAI Consortium, a non-profit group dedicated to increasing access to technology at universities.

Unlike other entertainment outlets such as cable TV or film festivals, the network allows students to retain full property rights for their work, Walker said.

Officials also plan to expand into the United Kingdom, Australia and Belgium, Walker said.

But at some schools participating in the network, students have been slow to tune in.

David Staudt, a Harvard junior, said that the network is an "awesome" idea but added that he doesn't know anyone who watches it yet.