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COD speeds things up with new Internet link

LINK: Installing system meant plenty of laying cable

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Want to download a full-length movie in one second?

Students starting classes at the College of the Desert today may now be able to do just that, thanks the school's recent upgrade to a new super high-speed Internet link.

The COD hookup is part of a valleywide initiative to keep Palm Desert's college campuses on the cutting edge of technology, made possible with a \$3.4 million grant from the H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation.

While COD plugged in two weeks ago, the one-gigabit system - able to download one billion bits a second - is already running at the valley campuses of the University of California, Riverside and California State University, San Bernardino.

"It's going to be way better because it's way faster," said Irena Sepsinac, 20, a business major at COD.

With the old system - which served the school's 10,000 students with a glacial 4.5 megabits - even basic functions could be slow and frustrating, Sepsinac said.

"We had students trying to download notes from a teacher's Web site, (and) the computer would freeze," she said.

Bina Isaac, COD's dean of information services, said the old system was so overtaxed, the school had been forced to ration out Internet use.

"We had to limit what (students) could download because we had to prioritize teaching labs," Isaac said. "Now they can download what they want and learn what they want."

COD is only the third community college in California to receive the super high-speed upgrade. The first two were Palomar Community College in San Marcos and Cuesta in San Luis Obispo.

The network was installed and is maintained by the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California - called CENIC - a nonprofit that runs special systems for universities and K-12 schools throughout the state.

Making Palm Desert a new link in CENIC's statewide network "was a worthwhile project," said Christopher McGuire, vice president for programs at the Berger Foundation. "This is something that is good for education for whole valley."

Installing the system meant laying almost 400 miles of fiber optic cable, linking Palm Desert campuses to systems at UCR and UC San Diego, said Jim Dolgonas, president of CENIC.

The one-gigabit speed is "the equivalent to transmitting an entire full-length movie DVD in one second," said Janis Cortese, the group's communication manager.

For Charles Rowley, UCR's chief information officer, having a system that downloads faster than a speeding bullet has opened up amazing opportunities for students and professors.

Marketing classes at the school's Palm Desert campus have been able to video-conference into engineering labs in Riverside to study product development at its earliest stages, he said.

At COD, Isaac anticipates the new system will be used for video-streaming or eventually podcasting lectures or other school events, improving the school's Web site and making it easier and faster for student and faculty to access school records on campus or at home. Plans to make the whole campus wireless are also in the works, she said.

"When (kids) come to college, we have to give them the freedom to experiment and learn," she said. "Now they have the freedom to do that."



Taya Lynn Gray, The Desert Sun

Marc Drescher helps College of the Desert instructor Denise Toland log on to her faculty page on the COD Web site. While COD plugged in two weeks ago, the one-gigabit system — able to download one billion bits a second — is already running at the valley campuses of the University of California, Riverside and California State University, San Bernardino.

WHAT THEY SAID

A teacher trying out COD's new high-speed Internet connection talks about how it will affect classrooms and students.

"I'm now teaching in a 'smart' classroom; it has all the equipment. It will greatly enhance what I do."

Robbie Certain
Early childhood education teacher

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