24 July 2003

Re: Educational Benefits of Broad Virtual Communities

This is the remnants of some notes for a meeting with President Osgood. This memo will n ever be sent. Its contents have been incorporated into [http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Rants/plans.2003.07.24.pdf](http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Rants/plans.2003.07.24.pdf)

Dear President Osgood,

This note is intended to provide an overview of a second set of points I intend to raise at our meeting of 24 July 2003. I have put my notes in memo form to help myself organize my thoughts and to clarify my positions.

Given that my research is primarily in educational uses of the Web and that my students often build tools that could be termed “Virtual Communities”, campus discussions of this issue can draw upon my expertise and should consider the effects on my scholarship.

This memo is intended primarily to address the educational benefits of broad virtual communities as I am particularly concerned that the destruction of plans and the introduction of new computing policy ignore many important benefits of virtual communities. An accompanying memo addresses some of the legal issues you’ve raised. That memo also provides references to other materials that speak to the benefits of virtual communities.

My concerns have to do with the limitations of the new policies. In particular, it seems especially inappropriate that virtual communities cannot include non-Grinnell members and that content posted within a virtual community cannot be made available more broadly or to search engines.

**Academia and Open Discourse**

Return to issues of previous memo.

**Multi-Institutional Courses**
Talk about multi-institutional courses, particular experiences with E-Commerce, alums who contribute ideas and projects to our courses, and so on and so forth.

Wikis and Other Open Learning Communities

Discuss the idea of Wikis, the current Glimmer project (AWES), and other related issues.

A Broader Grinnell Virtual Community

Reiterate the benefits mentioned elsewhere.

Summary

Virtual communities can play an important role in any education. Many virtual communities, but particularly Plans, can play an especially important role in the Grinnell education. Given that situation, it seems both reasonable and appropriate to restore Plans as we begin a broader campus conversation about the role of virtual communities.

Regards,

Samuel A. Rebelsky

Cc: Bill Francis, Jonathan Kensler, Jonathan Wellons, John David Stone