

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

## Ph.D. PROGRAM IN VISUAL STUDIES

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To Whom It May Concern:

We the undersigned wish to register our investment in teaching and researching digital culture, computer games, artificial worlds, and social networks on campus. Accordingly, students in our classes, lectures, labs, and seminars pursue assignments in, and related to, computer technology, communications, and games, including but not limited to programming, play, modification, and experimentation. To those ends, we need to be reassured that the wireless and wired campus network can provide minimal latency for voice over IP and massively multi-player online games as well as other gaming interfaces.

This seems no longer guaranteed. Over the past months, it has become clear to students and faculty in the new year-long course “Computer Games as Art, Culture, and Technology” (offered under the auspices of the Division of Undergraduate Education) that access to game servers is not always granted on campus. At times, neither faculty nor students in class or in lab could establish why the campus network acted the way it did. We would like to make it known to NACS and anyone shaping network policy on campus that access to such ports and services on campus is pedagogically necessary – particularly for the undergraduate degree concentration in game culture and technology now offered at UCI, which will further require local/remote access to computer games and MMOGs.

It has also come to our attention that a proposed University Policy on Stewardship of Electronic Information Resources threatens to curtail the exploration of networked computing that is essential and pivotal for our game-related research and teaching ("use of services not needed for the academic intended purpose or operation of the device - such services should be turned off"). While we obviously endorse the primary objectives, goals, and recommendations for safeguarding and supporting electronic information resources at the University of California, we are very concerned regarding a section on the blanket removal of "unnecessary services". To

us, it certainly appears to be alarmingly problematic that the policy does not indicate who on this campus would determine what "intended operation of the device" means. The university is an environment that should encourage exploration of technology, and it seems futile and ill-advised to enforce an undefined and vague compliance preemptively by turning off features of computing devices and networks before they can possibly cause any concern.

We assert that it is far too general and perilous for University policy to recommend turning off "services not needed for the intended purpose or operation of the device". Such a measure goes directly against the spirit of education, against the spirit of research and exploration, and against common sense. It is a gesture of disrespect to every member of the University community to turn off IT services due to the vague suspicion that they cannot be trusted to operate devices strictly as "intended" - especially when that intention is impossible to define. Who is to decide what the intended purpose or operation of information technology devices is? Vendors? End-user license agreements? Who is to decide what constitutes an unnecessary service? How would this decision be transparent to everyone? It is one thing for policy to reinforce a sense of responsibility and care in using information technologies. It is quite another to institute a policy that could allow for sweeping censorship as a minimum campus standard. It would in fact be a serious hindrance to students, teachers, and researchers, not just in computer science, engineering, digital art, communications, music... but in any areas of academia where computers are used, including teaching, research, administration. There are a lot of benefits that come from having open and flexible technology; these are perhaps too easily taken for granted. Surely it is evident from many concurrent information technology scenarios that there would be a large opportunity cost in content and hardware development if the policy succeeded in locking down systems.

In sum, a far-reaching and barely defined authority to suppress information technology would run counter to the overall aims not only of networked information technology as such, including confidentiality, integrity, and availability of electronic information, but also quite squarely counter to the aims of higher education. The university must preserve the freedom to understand, discuss, explore, and use the crucial technological devices its community members have at their disposal.

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