

# Concept Paper

## **Computers for Social Justice: A Proposal for Collaboration between Gallaudet University and the D.C. Public Schools**

### *...and possibly an Interdisciplinary Course?*

#### **Background:**

The concept for this project was inspired by Jonathon Kozol's talk on campus in which he discussed the fact that our society will pay \$18,000 per year to educate an upper middle class child, while spending only \$8,000 per year to educate a poor child—and the grave consequences of this unjust and immoral reality. After that talk, the three of us (Kevin Cole, Thor Halvorsen, and Margaret Vitullo) had a long conversation about concrete ways that we might be able to work for social justice in the public school system. This concept paper is the result of that conversation.

#### **Vision:**

That as Gallaudet University becomes a model institution for the use of technology in education, the lessons learned and equipment generated will benefit not only our institution and the students enrolled here, but also the local community that surrounds our campus, helping to overcome educational injustice in multiple settings at multiple levels.

#### **Mission:**

To assist in overcoming the technological and educational barriers created by unequal funding for public schools that results in students in the public schools surrounding Gallaudet University having limited access to computers and technology.

- To assist in overcoming the technological and educational inequalities found in public school systems in the District of Columbia by transforming computers that are no longer useful to Gallaudet for running Windows programs into highly functional Linux-based computers. These computers will then be given to under-funded public schools, along with appropriate training, so that students in those schools can gain the knowledge, skills, and experience with computers that, in today's technology-dependent job market, will help them prepare for educational and economic success.
- To build better relationships between Gallaudet University and the surrounding community by fostering a collaboration that is mutually beneficial and mutually educational.

## **What will be necessary for this mission to become a reality?**

### **I) Gallaudet University support**

- A) An institutional frame work that will allow this project to become part of the educational culture of Gallaudet University. One option would be to start an Interdisciplinary Studies Course with Computer Science, the Business School, and Sociology.
  - i) Sociology would contribute information about how social inequality is manifested and perpetuated through the public school system. Jonathon Kozol's books would be part of the required reading.
  - ii) The Business School would contribute information on planning and sustaining a non-profit organization. Tom Baldrige, in the Business School, has expressed great interest in the project and would like to involve the Business School in some way
  - iii) The Computer Science Department would contribute information about hardware and software, open-source code, and the value of understanding what goes on behind the graphic interface we have all come to expect when we turn on a computer.
  - iv) In addition, we are fortunate to have a Linux expert on campus working in GRI. Kevin Cole has also been working with an organization in Virginia that is setting up Linux computers and training students to use them in a local high school. Because of his tremendous background knowledge and experience, Kevin would need to be included in the IDS course as an adjunct instructor or a teaching assistant of some kind.
- B) Support from the appropriate administrators for this concept, including but not limited to the Dean of College of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Technology, Dean of Student Activities, and perhaps the Community Service Program (Carl Pramuk is already aware of and supportive of the project). *Question: Does this project also require the direct approval of the Provost and the President?*
- C) Donation of "decommissioned" Gallaudet computers with all of their components intact, but all data removed from the hard drives. Need to find out who has the authority to give the computers, and how the process of "decommissioning" computers could be changed so that they would become available to this project.
- D) A physical location for the project. This location should accommodate the secure storage of computers, components, tools, and software.

### **II) Collaboration from the Public Schools and the larger community.**

- A) We have had initial contacts with the Director of Experience Corp. This is a non-profit organization currently working in the D.C. Public Schools. They are interested in exploring how we might collaborate in this endeavor.

- B) We have had initial contacts with the Northern Virginia Linux Project. This project's goal is parallel to the goals outlined in this proposal. The director of the Northern Virginia project is willing to work with us as a mentor and collaborator.
- C) We will need to develop a survey/feedback mechanism for determining the needs of participating schools and then later determining if those needs are being met.
- D) This project could benefit from collaboration with the larger community in several ways. One possibility would be to partner with an organization such as the Capital P.C. Users Group and their Project Reboot—a project that currently refurbishes old computers and gives them to non-profit organizations. Another partnership could be with Howard University. The Chair of the Sociology Department at Howard knows a little bit about this project, and is interested in helping out in any way she can. This kind of collaboration could help students at both universities gain a better understanding of the intersectionality of oppression based on race, class, gender, and physical ability.

### III) **Technical Issues**

- A) Finding enough of the “additional equipment” – i.e. routers, Ethernet cards, network hubs, etc.
- B) Establishing exactly how to install Linux on the computers and which version of Linux will be the best.