

Wireless on trial: New Wireless Network Helps College Students communicate on the move

An innovative wireless network, designed specifically to provide students with a new way to communicate on campus, is helping to shed light on how people will use wireless devices in the near future. An exciting project trial, using advanced wireless technology to improve communication between students and their union officers at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), commenced on 9th February. The aim is to uncover the secrets of creating successful wireless solutions by carrying out research that brings together the expertise of psychologists, technologists and designers from three Irish Institutes of Technology. The trial is being run by the Nomad group, a unique research consortium, comprising the Software Technology Research Centre (SToRC) at Dundalk Institute of Technology, who created software that has been specifically designed to support the activities of the student union, the Telecommunications Software Systems Group (TSSG), based at Waterford Institute of Technology, who delivered the wireless network and system platform, and Dun Laoghaire IADT.

The greater ability to communicate has been seized upon by the students according to Mark McNally, final year student on the BSc. Psychology Applied to IT. McNally explains that students “are availing of such functions as the forums and SMS services to discuss relevant issues. The online forums are also enabling much greater levels of communication between different students, thanks to the fact that they do not require students to be in the one venue or even on-line at the one time.” The flashing blue lights of PDAs have become a common sight as students communicate with one another as well as access relevant information from any location on campus such as recreational spaces and even corridors. As such, students are no longer dependent on access to library and computer lab facilities to retrieve information.

The Nomad Research team are optimistic that carefully designed technology can help establish allegiances between individuals and groups with the ultimate aim to develop systems to enhance social capital; a term used to describe the sense of belonging that individuals have within a group. “We are not purely interested in technological gadgets or short term novelty value”, says Dr. John Greaney, Lecturer in Psychology, “but in designing successful technology that can enhance people’s quality of life by fulfilling their needs.” Greaney, co-founder of Dun Laoghaire’s Centre for Creative Technologies and Applications with Dr. Mark Riordan, Head of Technology, saw the need to combine expertise in the study of human behaviour with technological excellence in order to create innovative software that people will be motivated to use. To that end, Dun Laoghaire IADT linked up with SToRC who have expertise in software development and software project management and TSSG whose experience in telecommunications software and associated platforms made them natural partners for such a project.

Further details on the Nomad research group and developments in this research can be accessed at <http://www.nomadireland.org>.