Virtual Campus Tour Guides: Purpose and Practice

Abstract

A virtual campus tour guide system is under development at a medium size university as part of an AT&T grant award. The guide is comprised of GSP-enabled cell phones, software to launch location-sensitive media elements, and web-based presentations related to various areas of the campus. In lieu of a printed map, this system allows for personalization including audio/video information in multiple languages. This session will discuss the current state of virtual tour guides in higher education, encourage dialogue on the optimal features and functions, and showcase the initial model and related data created by the presenters.

Proposal

The campus virtual tour guide system utilizes cell phone technology, through an AT&T grant, to provide a multilingual electronic alternative to the printed campus map in the form of multimedia, real-time presentations delivered on GPS-enabled cell phones. This format allows for frequent updates of student relevant information to be passed to the university community in an entertaining and timely manner. Multimedia presentations of information have the potential to draw participants into the more complex surroundings of the academic world as they walk through the physical structures of the university. For example, as a student comes up to the liberal arts building, their phone will present them with a sampling of the latest musical
compositions of their fellow students while displaying resources located inside the building. The Spanish and American Sign Language versions of the presentations allow the university to reach out to currently underserved populations. The system’s unique ability to merge the academic world with the techno-centric entertainment and marketing environment that modern students have come to take for granted is key to its design.

This round-table session will give participants an opportunity to discuss a) the integration potential of virtual tour guides for campus as well as for business/non-profit endeavors including a review of past projects b) the optimal features and functions of systems under development such as the reliance on dynamic web content and hardware approaches to cover both indoor and outdoor locations (i.e. combining 2D barcodes and GPS to trigger cell-phone media), and c) the design of the initial model and related data collected in regards to the presenters’ grant project. This system has the potential to impact the fundamental way students learn about a university of interest by changing the focus from two separate activities consisting of web-surfing and in-person tours, to one intertwined activity consisting of an on-site experience that relies heavily on electronic, location-dependent presentations.