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The Software Engineering Research Laboratory (SERL), a component of UMass Boston’s Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, has reached an exclusive university marketing agreement with Object Design Incorporated (ODI), a Burlington, Massachusetts-based software design company.

SERL will market and provide technical support for ObjectStore, ODI's object-oriented data base, which will be offered to universities and colleges nationwide at a reduced price. Noted for the speed with which it can retrieve data, an object-oriented data base can store objects, such as pictures, sound, and other structured data rather than simply sequentially numbered and lettered.

In a similar agreement with software developers Interleaf Incorporated, SERL manages and supports the distribution of their Interleaf and Cyberleaf publishing software to universities at a nominal cost. Using Interleaf and Cyberleaf, SERL has published reports for the McCormack Institute on the faculty and assisted the Kennedy Library with the development of their collection index.

According to Professor George Lukas, SERL Director, such marketing agreements are beneficial to both commercial software developers and to universities. “Companies want college students to become familiar with their products so that they will be well-served in the future when they graduate,” says Lukas. “The university benefits by being able to offer our graduate students real problem-solving experience with innovative software applications.” SERL staff includes four graduate students who, in addition to working on SERL projects, offer technical support to university users of Interleaf, Cyberleaf and ObjectStore.

Recently, SERL undertook the challenge of providing the Registrar’s office with the university’s final exam schedule. “Prior to this, UMass Boston used to contract with an outside firm for this service,” says Lukas. “With over 1200 courses and over 11,500 students, organizing the exam schedule is a complex problem. However, using our own software, we were able to largely eliminate scheduling conflicts.”

SERL was established in February of 1994 in response to a UMass system-wide call to enhance outreach to the local business, educational, and government communities. In a relatively short time, it became an important link between the Computer Science faculty and the local computer industry. Since its inception, SERL’s staff and the Computer Science faculty together have developed software prototypes, evaluated database technology, and developed internet resources. For the first time this summer, SERL faculty will offer three customized industrial short courses on campus and provide private corporations with on-site courses.

“Through SERL, the Computer Science Faculty under the leadership of Dr. George Lukas is making an important contribution to the University mission,” says Dean of Sciences Christine Armett-Kibel. “Their work contributes directly to economic development by providing marketing and consulting assistance to software companies and at the same time providing challenging opportunities for graduate students in the software engineering industry.”

SERL reaches New University Marketing Agreement with Company
First Urban Environmental Fellow Helps Create the 1996 Blueprint

As part of a local initiative to environmentally improve the quality of life throughout the state, UMass Boston doctoral student and the first Urban Environmental Fellow Jean Cummiskey, has co-drafted the 1996 Environmental Blueprint for the City of Boston. The Blueprint was released to the public on Saturday, April 20, at the John Hancock Tower, as one of the various Earth Day celebrations across the city and state. "The Blueprint represents the meaning of Earth Day, which is to promote environmental awareness, and for City Hall this is a concern every day of the year," explains Cummiskey. "It is a snapshot of what happened in 1995 and outlines the City’s environmental agenda for ’96."

Cummiskey collaborated with Bradford Swing, Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Boston’s Environmental Services Cabinet, on writing and designing the publication. "As the first environmental fellow, Jean made a concrete contribution to the City’s efforts in articulating the environmental vision of the Blueprint," states Swing.

The Blueprint is framed around seven recommendations that were made through community reactions and comments to the 1995 Blueprint and the Sustainable Boston Conference, co-sponsored by UMass Boston’s Urban Harbors Institute. Cummiskey learned early on in her experience at City Hall that there was no resource available to network the ideas generated at the conferences. She therefore created a database of resources in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the city. In addition to the publications, the City of Boston also created the Urban Environmental Services Cabinet, on which Cummiskey collaborated with Bradford Swing, Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Boston’s Urban Harbors Institute and the City of Boston created the Urban Environmental Fellowship. According to Chief of Environmental Services Catherleen Douglas Stone, the fellowship was created to offer a UMass Boston student the opportunity to participate in programs that “educate the public about environmental issues.” In September, Cummiskey was chosen by the Mayor’s Office as the first Urban Environmental Fellow based on her professional experience and educational background in environmental policy.

Small Business Owners Benefit from Seminar

The twelve-week seminar, Managing the Growth of Your Business, was offered this semester by the Minority Business Assistance Center (MBAC) of the College of Management. Eighteen small business owners from Greater Boston participated. Each owner received an education in management training and created their own business plans.

According to Henry Turner, Director of the MBAC, the seminar focused on young businesses associated with the construction industry and was financially supported by the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) which allocates $180 million to support minority businesses in this field.

"The purpose of tailoring the seminar around a business plan is that the process of writing one helps people focus on goals and set objectives for their business," says Turner. "It helps define what is important to them."

Joyce Harper, owner of REJOYCE Plumbing in Dorchester, worked as a plumber for fourteen years before starting her own business six years ago. She cites the need for improving her business management skills as her reason for taking the seminar. "I came away from the seminar with useful, concrete information. For example, I learned what I should expect from a bookkeeper," says Harper. "It was also a valuable opportunity to network with other small business owners, because you can feel very isolated, trying to make decisions for your business on your own."

Cummiskey received her bachelor’s degree in art and political science from UMass Boston in 1976 and later earned a master’s degree at Tufts University in urban and environmental policy. Presently, Cummiskey is pursuing her doctoral studies in public policy and teaching Environmental Policy and Politics at Northeastern University. She will graduate this June from UMass Boston with a master’s degree in public policy.

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