CECI to take over Athena research efforts

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Athena projects were directed by Neal H. Dorow, advisor to freshman engineering students. "Certainly we’re in discussions with IBM and DEC about future projects," he said. However, Lerman said he does not expect funding from large companies like IBM and DEC because "we’re not doing high-profile projects funded by multiple industrial partners but many small projects, funded by many research laboratories is funded." According to Lerman, CECI is also "in discussions" with Sony and Apple "for funding" but "in the early stage," he said, adding, "There’s been no commitment yet.

Lerman is hoping to get some initial funding by July 1. "If some funding ideas will be funded early on," and additional ideas will be funded by the time they finish up in 1994. The first research idea on Lerman’s list is "to continue the work on multimedia applications, including the development of Muse software, which began while Lerman was director of Athena. Muse allows students to create "interactive virtual worlds" by combining interactive multimedia applications. The student chooses a "scene" and is introduced to interactive ideas on how to write appropriate "scripts." The student hopes to further develop among other things, the software’s ability to relate video to sound and graphics.

In addition to the many other things on Lerman’s agenda, including scientific visual tools in which students could interact with visual concepts such as vector fields as they learn about them. Further down the road, Lerman hopes to develop educational tools to help in Kindergarten through 8th grade.

Lerman noted that CECI will eventually merge its developments with those of Athena. The newly-merged Athena and IS will "... marry technologies that working together will make Athena more tolerant to DOS, Unix and Macintoshes, he said.

Now that it is entirely supported by the institute, funding for any research or upgrading of service for Project Athena has been cut by 14 percent for the upcoming academic year, to $37,500.

IBM and DEC said they do not want to continue funding Athena as a "for-profit" project, but the board of directors of Athena is MIT’s responsibility. They helped us to create it, now we should pay for it," said Murman. IBM and DEC feel the "costs are way below library services, he added.

Yet, Wrighton still hopes to obtain "some funding" for what he terms the infrastructure of the service so that the service will "like very much to secure additional support" for more workstations and improvements of the service segment.

Athena has become a prototype

Wrighton said he was extremely pleased with the results of the eight-year experimental phase of Project Athena. "AFAIK, it’s been a remarkable achievement. It went significantly much research-oriented to something that provides a variety of services even for those who don’t have a major in the MIT community, " Wrighton said. Working with Athena has become a prototype because many other institutions are using, and some of Athena’s research partners are now commercializing products and techniques developed over the past few years.

Murman also noted how pleased he was with the "success in becoming more user-friendly. So, now a person who knows nothing about Athena can get started (as I did)," he said. Wrighton was also pleased that Athena’s experimental period was over and that continuing would have to be done under CECI. "It’s like the Apollo missions that lead to the moon," he said. "You set a goal, you take a giant step forward, trying to achieve something, and it’s time you take on new direction. We’ll set up a computing environment that will be open and complete, and it’s time we raised the curtain on Act II," he said.