Personalized News Service To Include Comics, Advice

Fishwrap, from Page 1

learn something about what photographers people view and don’t view,” he said.

In addition to their entertainment value, comic strips may also provide the same kind of feedback. “We want to try some new interfaces [for viewing comics on-line], and see how people react,” Chesnais said.

“What are the new degrees of freedom that [the reader would have]? Would it still be exciting, and would it still be funny?”

Mark P. Hurst ’93, creator of the comic strip Firehose Tavern, is working to include comics in the paper. “Right now [Fishwrap] has a lot of news feed coming in, but there are no features,” he said.

Hurst hopes that the first personalized Firehose Tavern will be available on-line by the end of the term. He suggested that cartoons of the future may be constructed on the fly, to incorporate news on the user’s personalized topics.

Hurst is also talking with Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert, and the creator of Dr. Fun, a full-color comic from the University of Chicago, to try to expand the comics section. Chesnais is also exploring the possibility of adding an advice column in the near future, adding that many users have requested this feature. Travis P. Merriett, associate dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, and his staff have volunteered to research questions and write answers, Chesnais said.

Students will be able to solicit and receive advice addressing their problems on an individual basis, according to Merriett. “An advice column has its place in print, but in an individualized paper, it’s even more valuable.”

Most of the advice provided will focus on academic issues, but other topics could also be addressed, Merriett said.

“We are still working on the exact format of it, though,” Chesnais said. “Hopefully this will make students more aware of the wealth of services here.”

Long-term effects

While the personalized system currently has about 70 users, both Chesnais and Driscoll emphasize the long-term implications, both for students, and the development of the news media. “Students who really dive into the project will get short- and long-term benefits,” Driscoll said.

“They’ll get hometown news without going home. They’ll be briefed on entertainment opportunities in the area during the month. And in the long term, they’ll contribute to a very important piece of research with their feedback.”

“The readers of Fishwrap are better equipped to make immediate use of this service” than the general public, Driscoll said. “The industry isn’t up to it,” and there aren’t enough Athens on every corner.”

“Some of the things that people will be asked is: What do they want to read in the news? What do they think they ought to be able to read in the news? And what do they not want to read in their news?” Chesnais said.

“Just that alone is a wealth of information for the news industry.”

Students can access the Freshman Fishwrap from most Athena stations by typing “add fishwrap”, “fishwrap &”. The system is not currently accessible from VAX stations.