

CASPER: A Hypermedia Departmental Information System

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It is important for college students to have as much information available on their department as possible. This information should be up to date, and easily accessible and digestible. When students have a question, they should have the means to find their own answers quickly and easily.

To satisfy this need in our department we designed and implemented a hypermedia information system called CASPER - "Computer Assisted Studies Planning and Educational Resources." The CASPER software includes an Oracle database, a full colour Hypercard interface, and Quicktime movies. The CASPER hardware includes a Macintosh IIfx with a 13" colour monitor, a mouse, and a laserprinter. The student interacts with CASPER using only the mouse.

CASPER contains information about our department, its instructors, its courses, and equivalent courses at other universities.

CASPER helps the student find information about our department. A student can see a list of presentations and other upcoming events, or read a list of answers to commonly asked questions. The student can see a full colour map of the department and click on rooms to see who its occupants are.

CASPER helps the student find information on a particular instructor. A student can click on an instructor based on that faculty member's name, or their face from a set of full colour pictures. Clicking on a faculty member brings up information on that instructor including their name, title, phone number, office number, lab number, office hours, research interests, and teaching assignments for the current and future terms. The student can also play short full colour movies of the faculty members introducing themselves, allowing the student to see and hear them.

CASPER helps the student find information on a particular course. A student can click on a course from a list of all the courses taught in this department, or a list of all the courses taught this term. The student can see when and where the course is being taught, a sample syllabus for the course, and who the instructors will be for the next several semesters.

CASPER helps the student find information on equivalent courses at other universities. A student can click on a university and see which courses transfer to our department, or click on a course in our department and see a list of equivalent courses at other universities. This includes information on the equivalent course from the other university's Course Bulletin.

With all of this information available, CASPER helps the student choose which courses they will take in the coming terms. A student enters information about the courses they have previously taken, and the grades they have received. CASPER shows which courses remain to be scheduled, when those courses will be offered, and who will be teaching them. The student can then move term by term into the future scheduling courses. Once the student has created their plan of work they can print it out or save it onto a floppy disc. With the floppy disc, the student can return to CASPER at a future date and make changes to their plan.

CASPER has a friendly interface that makes the system fun to use, as well as informative - encouraging students to explore. CASPER allows the student to quickly and easily see related information. Clicking on an instructor's name or picture anywhere in the system brings up information on that instructor. Clicking on a term brings up a complete list of courses offered that term. Clicking on a course brings up information on that course. Clicking on a room number brings up the departmental map showing where that room is located.

In February 1993, CASPER was placed in our department's main office where it is always left running. Student reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. They find the system very easy to use the first time they sit down in front of it. Their only complaints have been that the system should contain even more information.