RCOS fosters creativity, support with open source

PAUL CHAN
Senior Reporter

The Rensselaer Center for Open Source Software was originally created with the goal of "provid[ing] a creative, intellectual and entrepreneurial outlet for the best and the brightest to use the latest open-source software platforms to develop applications that solve societal problems," according to Associate Professor of Computer Science Mukkai Krishnamoorthy. RCOS was initially funded by alumnus Sean O'Sullivan '85 for $2 million and has been offered every Fall since 2007.

Krishnamoorthy said, "[RCOS is an] environment in which students can learn about open source software while sharing knowledge, experience, and insight with each other ... RCOS [also helps] communities, humanitarian efforts (http://hfoss.org/) and non-government organizations to develop and augment software."

RCOS is currently funding a new Institute-endorsed web-based alternative scheduling application that will allow students to register for courses, view real-time data for course seatings, and make searching for courses easier. The Rensselaer Open Course Scheduler is currently available for testing purposes at http://coursescheduler.rpi.edu/.

"Adding these features takes effort, and so we're always looking for students interested in helping make the tool better through design, ideas, and code," stated graduate student Evan Patton, president of RPI's chapter of Upsilon Pi Epsilon, and current developer of the scheduler.

This project was started in Spring 2009 through the combined effort of multiple parties—UPE, International Honor Society for Computing and Information Disciplines; DotCIO, who is hosting the software client; the Registrar; and RCOS. Integrated Administrative Computing Services, responsible for RPI's Student Information System has been assisting by making scripts that the scheduler could understand.

There are many other projects that members of RCOS are involved in. One is called MobileNotifier, which creates a better notification system for iOS devices. Another project, Lightbulb, seeks to ease the use of technology for the general public. "Instead of a keyboard and mouse, Lightbulb lets you operate your computer with "Bulbs"—objects that are both easy to see and grasp—which are waved in front of the computer to control it," mentioned Peter Hajas '12. A third is Concert, a project which allows musicians to more easily organize musical ideas and practice sessions remotely.

A mentoring program allows new RCOS students to learn about the different conventions and standards of programming. Understanding convention will allow students to effectively communicate their ideas and allow everyone to understand how the software will work.

"I think the RCOS mentor program is phenomenal, and really plays to the strengths of RCOS. [My mentor is] a really smart guy, and it's awesome to be able to bounce my ideas off of someone skilled in the same area," said Hajas.

RCOS also plans on holding a lecture series for students where "students will be able to request talks and [members of RCOS] (and potentially others) will be able to sign up to give [the] talks," according to RCOS member Colin Sullivan '11. Forms for requests will be sent out soon.

RCOS meets every Friday at 4 pm in Jonsson Engineering Center 3117.

Student Senate committees provide project updates

DAVID HODSON
Senior Reporter

Grand Marshal co-terminal student Ben Hunt '11 and President of the Union Mike Spitz '11 led a forum Monday, giving a update on the plans of the Senate and the projects being pursued by each committee. The initial presentation covered the gift of the Class of 2010—a Green Roof, where the roof of the Rensselaer Union Bookstore will be covered in vegetation on top of a membrane—as well as the campus Tobacco Free Initiative, the proposed "Megalist," which is an opt-in e-mail list that is to include all students, and finally, the issues with *The Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilites,* which are in their final stages of resolution. The initial presentation was followed by a brief introduction by each of the committees of the Senate, each giving a look into their purpose and what projects they are involved in on campus.

The Academic Affairs Committee, which deals with student's academic issues, is currently working on the reform of BIOL 1010, informing students of their rights as members of the RPI community, and establishing a language class that operates on a for-credit basis.

The Community Relations Committee, responsible for strengthening relations between RPI and the City of Troy, is currently working to foster a greater degree of communication between all of the major organizations on and around campus.

The Finance, Facilities & Advancement committee, whose responsibilities correspond with those of RPI's Finance Division, is currently fulfilling its duties. The FFA committee is also working on campus planning and sustainability efforts among other goals.

The Rule and Elections Committee, who governs the cre-