Elon plans FutureWeb 2010 conference, brings Internet inventors to Raleigh

Jack Dodson
News Editor

Vinton Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee — two men instrumental in developing the Internet — stood in front of packed crowds at the Raleigh Convention Center April 28 at the World Wide Web conference, while Elon University students, faculty and staff tweeted, blogged and recorded the events.

WWW, an annual event that brings together people from around the world to talk about the Internet, was based in Raleigh this year. Elon's Imagining the Internet Center had the opportunity to play an active role in the event.

The result was FutureWeb, a local conference stemming off WWW from April 28 to April 30 that dealt with the social implications of the Internet. Students worked with Imagining the Internet director and associate professor of communications at Elon Janna Anderson to organize and host.

Google, Lulu, Facebook, Microsoft, Mozilla and eBay were among organizations that sent representatives to the conference. Sessions at the event featured discussions by Internet leaders from around the world on topics ranging from intellectual property to open source.

"It was a big success for everyone involved," Anderson said. "Students, faculty and staff who attended not only got the education (from the events) but learned as they worked how to do real-time journalism."

Anderson led a team of volunteers from the university to bring guests, plan panels and cover the events as they happened. Throughout the three days, the FutureWeb group kept up a blog, a Twitter page, a Flickr page, a YouTube channel and full articles on the Imagining the Internet Web site.

She said the idea started about a year ago when she was contacted by an alumna who told her the WWW event would be held in Raleigh for 2010. Anderson was later selected to be on the steering committee for the conference and was offered the chance to put together the regional conference.

In order to plan the event and offer a chance to educate students on the future of the Internet, Anderson said she developed a class held during Winter Term 2010 that focused on FutureWeb and the concepts it addressed. Many of the students in the class worked throughout the spring to plan and provide pre-event coverage and attended all three days of the conference.

"It wasn't like your traditional class," said junior Kirsten Bennett, who was in the class and worked all three days at the event. "Most of my work was after the class ended."

Bennett said she worked throughout the current semester to reserve equipment, recruit more than 60 volunteers and help set up the conference. She said the event required a lot of people because frequently there were multiple sessions going on at once.

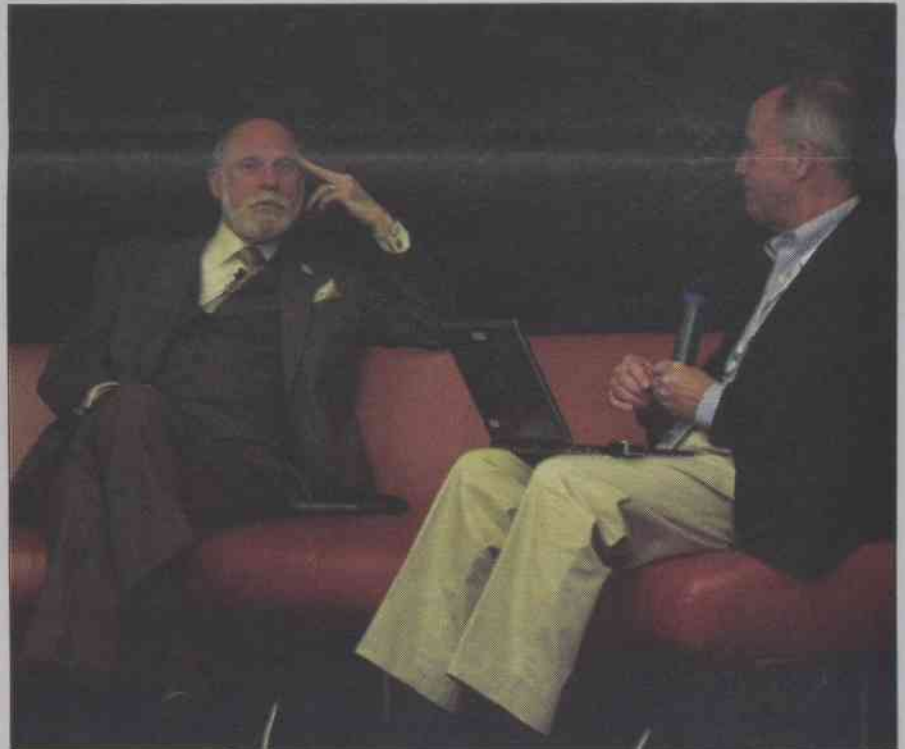"A lot of times we were in three rooms at one time," she said.

For her, taking the class was a crucial part in understanding how to cover the topics at the conference.

"I was nervous because before the class, I didn't know a lot about the Internet besides how to use it," she said.

In the class, though, she read the "Imagining the Internet" textbook, written by Anderson, which helped her understand the concepts of the conference better.

For Anderson, the highlight of the event came when she saw students interacting with Berners-Lee and Cerf. Bennett said she had her photo taken with Cerf.

"Our students being with those global leaders, those innovators of communications, was a thrill for me to see," Anderson said.

ASHLEY BARNAS | Photographer
Elon University student Morgan Little and alumna Olivia Hubert-Allen work at the FutureWeb 2010 conference in Raleigh, updating Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WordPress pages to document events at the conference, which ran from April 28 to April 30.

DAN RICKERSHAUSER | Photographer
Google Vice President Vint Cerf is interviewed at FutureWeb 2010 by Lee Rainie, director of Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF IMAGINING THE INTERNET
Chris DiBona, open source and public sector engineering manager at Google, speaks at FutureWeb April 30.

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During FutureWeb, Lee Rainie interviews Doc Searls, a journalist, blogger and fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society.