



TECHNOLOGY

FIU, Global Crossing add Argentine university to fiber-optic net

BY PAOLA IUSPA

Florida International University and telecommunications company Global Crossing have secured a third contract to link South American universities via fiber-optic cable to US information and research tools.

Argentina's Red TeleINformatica Academica, or RETINA, will soon become the third institution from the continent to join the network, said Heidi Alvarez, assistant director for AMPATH at FIU.

The AmericasPath, or AMPATH, allows member research centers and universities in Latin America and the Caribbean to jointly participate with the US in the development of applications for Internet technologies, Ms. Alvarez said.

The applications, she said, are expected to help in the advancement of sciences such as astronomy, environmental studies, high-energy physics, material science, chemistry and geographic information systems.

"We are also working with NASA's international space station program," Ms. Alvarez said. "We want researchers in Latin America to be able to conduct experiments in space from their own labs. It would also be possible for an astronomer in Chile to control a telescope in Puerto Rico through the AMPATH network."

She said AMPATH provides room for high performance applications such as video-conferencing and voice communication, paving the way for long-distance education.

AMPATH, which began operating in June after a year of planning, was masterminded by FIU officials. But the idea only became feasible after Global Crossing donated \$25 million in cable and additional high-tech equipment over three years.

Global Crossing's terrestrial and under-sea cables can connect universities in the hemisphere to a consortium of 180 US universities, Ms. Alvarez said. She said the consortium is

known as Internet 2.

Cisco Systems and Lucent Technology also donated parts to make the connection possible, she said.

AMPATH equipment is now at 36 NE Second St. but in a few months will move to the Technology Center of the Americas, 50 NE Ninth St. It will be housed on the second floor of the six-story technology center, along with the Network Access of the Americas, or NAP. The Tier 1 NAP, the fifth in the US, is a switching station for Internet traffic, mostly in and out of Latin America.

The National Research Network of Chile, or REUNA, connected to AMPATH in June. Brazil's Rede Nacional de Pesquisa, or RNP — which serves 350 Brazilian universities — connected in August.

She said members pay \$155,000 a year for the connection, funds that FIU uses to maintain the network.

Representatives for Argentina's RETINA signed a

letter of commitment last week to join AMPATH, said Pablo Mlikota, Global Crossing vice president of corporate markets.

"The actual connection may be taking place within 60 days," he said.

Mr. Mlikota said Global Crossing also has a presence in Peru, Panama, Mexico, Venezuela and the Virgin Islands and company officials will soon start working on similar agreements with universities in those nations.

Emilia Perez-Ferreira, executive director of RETINA, a private organization that offers research groundwork for more than 40 universities in Argentina, said the alliance would level the playing field for Argentine researchers.

"It is going to put many research tools, which our colleagues around the world already use, in our hands," she said.

Ms. Perez-Ferreira said another high-tech company offered her organization a similar network in which US inbound

Internet traffic was going to be directed to a network access point in Chicago. She said she turned them down because she had already signed an agreement with Global Crossing, which has a regional office in Miami.

She said some universities in Argentina may need to upgrade their bandwidth to live up to AMPATH's high-speed connectivity or add applications to provide better audio or make interactive sessions possible.

Global Crossing, which reaches 27 countries and more than 200 major cities, provides a full range of managed data and voice products as well as other services such as network outsourcing, Mr. Mlikota said.

"We have a full set of products and services that carriers or private companies can purchase from us," he said. "We also have the capacity to connect a business in Tokyo to Buenos Aires through just one carrier."

Usually, he said, it takes three to four carriers to transfer data from one continent to another.