



Oxford Internet Institute

Press Release



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Oxford Internet Institute Joins Leading Global Research Consortium on Internet Filtering

The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) at the University of Oxford has joined the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), a programme established in 2003 to study state-sponsored filtering of the Internet. This worldwide initiative is a joint project undertaken by the University of Toronto, Cambridge University, and the Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, in addition to Oxford. "Berkman's partnership with the Oxford Internet Institute has provided all of us with many learning opportunities, not the least of which is an intensified global approach to our work," said John Palfrey, Berkman Center's Executive Director and a Harvard Clinical Professor of Law. "As members of the OpenNet Initiative we look forward to collaborating with OII on an issue of such significance to all of us, global Internet filtering." The ONI has previously produced reports on state-mandated filtering in, among others, China, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Tunisia, and Iran. These reports combine data derived from technical means with extensive contextual research to generate rich snapshots of the shifting state of Internet connectivity.

Research at Oxford University will be led by Jonathan Zittrain, the OII's Professor of Internet Governance and Regulation and the Berkman Visiting Professor of Law at Harvard. The OII will expand the Initiative's capacity for analysis of the social, political and cultural contexts within which state-sponsored filtering activity occurs. "Oxford represents an unparalleled crossroads of academic disciplines and world cultures, and it offers a wealth of resources with which to refine the study of Internet filtering," said Zittrain. "Internet filtering and surveillance is becoming more prevalent and more sophisticated, and this is a crucial time to both track its development and to debate the principles by which firms chartered in free societies should contribute technology and services for censorship by authoritarian regimes."

This opportunity for the OII comes at a time when issues of Internet censorship and surveillance – and the assistance of private firms for it – are high on the public policy agenda. ONI's 2005 report on filtering in China described that state as operating the most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world. Professor Bill Dutton, Director of the OII, welcomed the department's involvement in future country studies: "Too much debate about Internet filtering is data free. This research brings

needed empirical tracking of trends to bear on ideologically intense but uninformed and often ethnocentric debates over the nature of international filtering.”

The MacArthur Foundation has recently awarded funding of \$3 million to the ONI to support research at Berkman and its collaborating centres. This grant will significantly improve and expand the OpenNet Initiative’s capacity to conduct its research, including the development of tools designed to paint a frequently-updated map of filtering. ONI will produce four successive annual reports to illustrate differences among filtering regimes as they evolve, an open-access database for researchers at large to make use of the project’s findings, and an annual convening of experts on related topics.

Notes to Editors

(1) The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) is the world’s first truly multidisciplinary Internet institute based in a major university. Devoted to the study of the societal implications of the Internet, the OII seeks to shape research, policy and practice in the UK, Europe and around the world. For further information about the OII, see: <<http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk>>.

(2) The Open Net Initiative is a collaborative partnership among four leading academic institutions: the Citizen Lab at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto, the Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Programme of Cambridge University and the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. The OpenNet Initiative publishes its reports on the Internet. <<http://www.opennet.net>>.

(3) The Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School is a research program founded to explore cyberspace, share in its study, and help pioneer its development. <<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/>>

(4) The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is a private, independent grantmaking institution dedicated to helping groups and individuals foster lasting improvement in the human condition. Through the support it provides, the Foundation fosters the development of knowledge, nurtures individual creativity, helps strengthen institutions, helps improve public policy, and provides information to the public, primarily through support for public interest media. <<http://www.macfound.org>>.