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## **Microsoft deal with university causes flap**

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The University of Waterloo is reeling over criticism of a funding deal with Microsoft that requires students to use a new Microsoft language in a first-year programming course.

Yesterday, university president David Johnston posted a letter and fact sheet on the university Web site to defend the Microsoft-UW alliance.

E-mails and postings — including more than 700 on an international Web site — continue to fly as UW students, alumni and others expressed their concerns about a \$2.3-million donation to UW from Microsoft Canada announced Wednesday.

A few critics have even said they're reconsidering their donations to the university, saying it was a mistake for the university to be "in league" with Microsoft.

Johnston and Sujeet Chaudhuri, dean of UW's engineering faculty, were caught off-guard by the virulent response.

"I was surprised at the worldwide reaction," Chaudhuri said yesterday.

"Once you go on Slashdot (a Web site calling itself "news for nerds"), it's all over the world.

"I understand the apprehension," he said. But "to say we have sold our souls ... that is not true."

The criticism centres around a new Microsoft language, called C# (pronounced "C sharp"), which will be in two curriculum areas as part of the Microsoft funding agreement.

"The \$2.3-million partnership, coupled with the mandatory course changes, sets a dangerous precedent for the autonomy of the university over its own curriculum," said a letter to university officials from the University of Waterloo Engineering Society, representing about 8,000 students.

Microsoft's C# language is to be used as a tool in an online introductory module that high school students can access to "bring their programming skills up to speed" before university.

C# will also be used in a first-year electrical and computer engineering course which teaches programming concepts, algorithms and data structures.

The curriculum integration is worth \$728,000 of the total \$2.3 million over five years given to the university by Microsoft Canada under its new Education Innovation Alliance Fund.

Johnston said the C# Microsoft language will not be used in the first-year course exclusively. In fact, C# will be only one of four languages used in the course, he said.

This issue is sensitive for two reasons: the general "skepticism" that some people have about computer software giant Microsoft, and a nervousness whenever a corporation is viewed as entering the classroom, Chaudhuri said.

Chaudhuri stressed that the Microsoft C# language will be "the tool" used in only 40 of a total of 2,000 units in students' courses over eight terms.

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