Dear SST student (prospective subject):

My name is Dr. Lois Delcambre, and I am a faculty member in the Computer Science Department at Portland State University. I, along with my colleagues at Portland State University, am beginning a study on the use of tools that allow you to use what we call superimposed information. We invite you, as a student at SST to learn about our tool called Sidepad, try it out during a period of about ten weeks, and provide us with your feedback by filling out an anonymous questionnaire. Your parents or legal guardian will also receive a cover letter that will explain how they can allow you to take part in the study.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to learn how to use Sidepad (through an introductory presentation at SST during Friday seminar and through use of a Sidepad User Guide, available on the WWW), try it out in your school activities including your work on your science fair project, if you feel that it is appropriate, and fill out a questionnaire that will ask you for your opinions and suggestions regarding the usefulness of superimposed information in general and the Sidepad tool, in particular. It should take about 30 minutes to learn how to use the Sidepad tool and about 30 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. You are welcome to use the Sidepad tool as much as you would like during the study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may choose to withdraw at any time without any penalty.

If you prefer not to participate in the study, or if at any time you decide to withdraw from the study, then you can simply stop using Sidepad. When we come to SST to have students fill out the questionnaire, you can simply indicate on our questionnaire that you decided to withdraw or to not participate in the study. The questionnaire will have a very obvious option for you to indicate that you have withdrawn. Since you will be filling out the questionnaire, no one in the room will be able to tell that you have withdrawn from the study. You can also choose not to fill out a questionnaire or not participate in the meeting, if you prefer.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study beyond the normal risks associated with using computerized tools such as a Web browser or a word processor. Such normal risks include time spent understanding how a tool works, frustration if the tool doesn’t perform as documented or as expected, and inconvenience associated with inadvertently losing information that you have created using the tools (such as losing a file in the case of a hard-drive crash). You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study; on the other hand, you may find that using Sidepad is directly useful to you as you work with computerized information. Your participation may also contribute to our general understand of superimposed information, guide our research directions in the future, and, ultimately, contribute to widespread availability of superimposed information features in commonly used tools.
Your participation in the study and the information that you provide will be anonymous. We will not collect any information that can identify you (such as your name or other personal identifying information) and we will not capture any of the data you create using Sidepad. That is, the URLs or other files that you use, the marks that you create, and the comments and other information that you create will not be accessible to anyone involved in this study.

We will collect two kinds of anonymous data.

1. The Sidepad tool will collect statistics on how often the various features of the tool are used. See attached document for details.

2. At the end of the study (after your science fair projects have been completed), we will administer an anonymous questionnaire during Friday Seminar to receive your feedback and suggestions on the notion of superimposed information and on the Sidepad tool.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, based only on your interest and on the informed consent of your parent or legal guardian. None of the researchers at Portland State University and none of the teachers at SST will know whether you are participating in the study or not. You and your parent’s or legal guardian’s decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the researchers or with the School of Science and Technology in any way. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-4288. If you have questions about the study itself, contact Lois Delcambre at the Computer Science Department, Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science, 120 Fourth Avenue Building, 1900 SW 4th Avenue – Suite 310, Portland State University, (503) 725-2405.

Sincerely,

Lois M. L. Delcambre, Professor
Computer Science Department
Sidepad Information Sheet

Sidepad is a computerized scratchpad tool that allows you to easily create what we call “marks” where each mark is an encapsulated address that references small bits of information in other documents, files or web pages. Marks are exactly like “Bookmarks” or “Favorites” in a web browser except that you can organize them into groups and add comments, within the Sidepad tool.

You are being asked to take part because we are interested in whether students find the notion of superimposed information and the Sidepad tool useful as they are conducting research, including informal gathering and organizing of information.

As part of the study, we are interested in your opinions and suggestions regarding the notion of superimposed information the Sidepad tool. We believe that the information we collect will help us to better understand the usefulness of superimposed information, in general, and in educational/research settings.

The Sidepad log file will contain information such as how often a mark is created, how often a comment was inserted, how often a user double-clicked on the mark to re-visit the original information, and so forth. The Sidepad log will not contain any user-identifying information and the Sidepad log will not contain any of the actual content from the original base documents or web pages. The Sidepad log won’t even include the URLs or other information about the original information that you use. Here is some sample log data that was generated by the Sidepad tool. The log contains NO information about the person who was using the Sidepad tool and it contains NO information regarding the data they actually created. Rather, it simply contains a list of the features that were invoked such as creating a mark, renaming a mark, navigating to a source document, and so on.

! Log opened at 2005_11_4_16_59_16 >>>Sidepad

2005_11_4_16_59_18 Context menu Item Markless item created 2
2005_11_4_16_59_23 Context menu Node Renamed 2
2005_11_4_16_59_25 Context menu Item Created using recent fodder
83C39C478B6E7AB2A486B69B8C3BFFD8
549848B6E7AB2A486B69B8C3BFFD8
2005_11_4_16_59_29 Context menu Node Renamed 4
2005_11_4_16_59_35 Context menu Item Navigate to source 4
83C39C478B6E7AB2A486B69B8C3BFFD8
2005_11_4_16_59_41 Mouse Link Link created 3 4
2005_11_4_16_59_51 Toolbar Document Saved document as file
5858DA46ED10475FE57FBCA6366C31

! Log file closed at 2005_11_4_16_59_57

If you compare the use of Sidepad with using a Word processing tool such as Microsoft Word, the log would record each time you used the cut, copy, paste, insert, open, close, reformat, etc. features but would NOT capture the any of the actual data that you typed,
inserted, deleted, pasted and so forth. This kind of log gives us an idea of how the tool features are being used. But the log provides no information about the user nor about the data used. Note that if you withdraw from the study, your log entries, created up to the point that you withdraw, will NOT be deleted from the log. We have no way to identify who created any of the log entries, so we won’t be able to delete your log entries. The Sidepad log files will be sent to the Portland State University research team on a regular basis by a student coordinator at SST, to be determined.