Academic TECHNOLOGY NEWS

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Blackboard Enhancements Implemented

by Larry Gilbert

The Blackboard course management system was adopted for campus-wide use more than two years ago. Since that time, more than one thousand courses and more than ten thousand students have used Blackboard for on-line support of coursework, marking one of the most rapid and successful adoptions of academic technology at Western. Throughout this time, Blackboard has operated as a completely separate software program, with no relationship to other critical information systems used by faculty and students. As opposed to being a "transparent technology" that facilitated teaching and learning, Blackboard thus sometimes used processes that got in the way. For example, faculty members had to manually create course titles and course IDs that then didn't match with the Registrar's course information, while students had to search for specific courses within Blackboard and enter their own (often disparate) personal information. These and other manual processes created a lot of work for both faculty and students. In addition, Blackboard information was often inaccurate and usually did not match official Western course and enrollment data.

To correct these and other problems, ATUS and Administrative Computing completed a major software integration project that enhanced Blackboard by:

- Automatically populating Blackboard courses with official 'CRN' numbers identical to those used by the Registrar.
- Automatically populating each Blackboard course with its official enrollment list.
- Synchronizing the above information so that it stays current and always matches official course and enrollment data.
- Automatically loading each student's official campus email address so that communication with all students is more reliable and predictable.
- Automatically linking students from their official course listings in personal MyWestern accounts directly to their related Blackboard course materials.
- Creating a Course Wizard for faculty that allows for easy transfer of materials from a Blackboard course in an earlier term to a Blackboard course in the current term.

All these enhancements were completed without removing any of the capabilities that faculty previously had available for administration of their Blackboard courses.

Anyone who used Blackboard before the start of classes or during the first two days of classes this quarter knows that there were problems getting the Blackboard-MyWestern integration up and working. These problems were related to a major software change made by an external vendor that allowed so-called "single sign-on" between MyWestern and Blackboard, and were not related to the other enhancements noted above. "Single sign-on" means that a student can log in to their MyWestern account, see a list of their courses, and then go directly to their Blackboard information without logging in again. The start-up problems with Blackboard occurred when a vendor delivered software that had major bugs that needed to be corrected before the above software enhancements could occur. For that reason, some of the improvements noted above were not available until the middle of the second day of classes. We apologize for the inconvenience that we know was caused to faculty and students by these vendor problems. At the time of the writing of this article, most problems have been eliminated, but we are still experiencing occasional short-term crashes of the MyWestern system. We are working intensely with the vendor to eliminate all such problems. The good news is that all of the noted enhancements to Blackboard (including single sign-on) are working and being used by faculty and students every day.

ATUS developed these improvements to Blackboard administration after receiving many suggestions and comments from faculty. We encourage you to continue to let us know how Blackboard is working or not working for you, so that we can make continual improvement in our course management system.

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Shared Lab Agreements Defined

by Rob Galbraith

ATUS worked with the Academic Technology Committee to define three categories of student computer labs at Western: 1) General University Labs (GULs), 2) Shared Labs, and 3) Departmental Labs. General university labs are managed by ATUS, departmental computer labs are managed by colleges and departments, and shared labs are operated in a cooperative manner by both ATUS and a college or department.

ATUS and Woodring College recently entered into Western's first Shared Lab Agreement for operation of the Miller Hall 66 and 72 computing labs. ATUS is also working with the Sociology Department on such an agreement for the Arntzen Hall 01 computing lab.

The purpose of a Shared Lab Agreement is to define the mutual rights and responsibilities of a college/department and ATUS in the shared operation of one or more student computer labs. In general, this Shared Lab Agreement defines how students from outside the college or department may use the shared labs in exchange for specified operational support from ATUS. The agreement also defines how college or department utilization and scheduling will be given priority.

Role of ATUS

In a Shared Lab Agreement, ATUS identifies a single ATUS point of contact for communications, requests and decisions regarding the shared labs. ATUS also provides software management, printer supplies and equipment maintenance, as well as assistance with operation of the computer lab. Specific services provided by ATUS include: scheduling of group use of the lab with a defined priority for department/college activities (including scheduled classes); provision and update of software consistent with curricular software found in general university labs; assistance with purchase and licensing of college or departmentally purchased software; configuration and backup of software images; special software installations for classes; maintenance of computer equipment and networks; monitoring and control of printing, as well as account management, Help Desk support, server management, and provision of repair parts, printing supplies and server space.

College or Department Role

The college or department also provides a single point of contact for communications, requests and decisions regarding the shared lab. This contact is the primary liaison with the ATUS point of contact in identifying and finding solutions to lab operation issues. This contact person provides scheduling information, software requests, server management requests, account needs and other requests for support to ATUS in a timely manner. The contact has responsibility for identifying the need for college/department-specific software and for obtaining legally licensed copies of such software. Other lab management functions are shared as described below.

Shared Responsibilities

Standards

Campus-wide standards for configuration of computers, desktop layout, logins and network resources must be adhered to in a shared lab so that students and faculty will receive the same functionality that they are accustomed to in the general university labs and classrooms. Beyond this basic functionality, departmental software and networking resources are added as needed to meet specific departmental curricular requirements.

Scheduling

Scheduling is developed in a cooperative, shared mode prior to the start of each quarter. Resulting lab schedules should allow for sufficient time outside of scheduled classes and events for students to complete assignments (typically a minimum of 60% of the total hours of operation of the lab). The remaining 40% of the hours of lab operation shall be available for the scheduling of classes and other events that require scheduling of the entire lab for academic activity. The college or department works with ATUS to schedule college or department computer-based classes on a priority basis each quarter, prior to the scheduling of other non-college or department classes. Ad hoc classes and sessions are then scheduled through the ATUS lab scheduling process on a first-come-first-served basis. ATUS may schedule occasional activities for other departments in the lab. Previously scheduled academic activities are never bumped. ATUS maintains the schedule for the lab and posts it weekly at the lab entrance, as well as at other locations across campus.

Software

Shared general use curricular software will be provided by ATUS. This includes the operating system, Microsoft Office, network software, and other curricular software typically found in general university labs. Department-specific software is identified and provided by the college or department. ATUS designs, tests, installs and backs up standard software images for the lab to allow quick restoration of a malfunctioning computer.

Servers and Server Management

Lab servers must meet campus-wide standards for maintenance, software configuration, uptime, and login/authentication. In general, this means that shared lab servers should be operated and maintained in a manner identical to the operation of servers for general university labs. Whether existing servers or campus-wide servers are used, all shared lab servers are placed on a four-hour uptime schedule, with notification of server downtime available through University Police to staff on-call at all times. ATUS and the college or department must decide whether ATUS staff, department staff, or a combination of both will maintain the lab servers.

Equipment Purchase and Upgrades

Shared labs typically have existing equipment. ATUS may purchase some peripheral equipment needed to meet general university lab standards. ATUS will collaborate with the department in seeking funds for replacement equipment via the Student Technology Fee, grants or other sources.

Shared Lab Agreements are good for Western's students because they increase the amount of free time in computer labs wherein any student can complete computer-based assignments. Such free time is increasingly scarce on campus as use of labs for class activity continues to increase. Shared Lab Agreements can be good for ATUS and colleges and departments, too, in that they encourage sharing the obligations of operating and maintaining heavily utilized computer labs. If you have any questions about Shared Lab Agreements, please contact me at 650-3368 or email rob.galbraith@wwu.edu.

Targeted Messaging with MyWestern

by Andrew McGlone

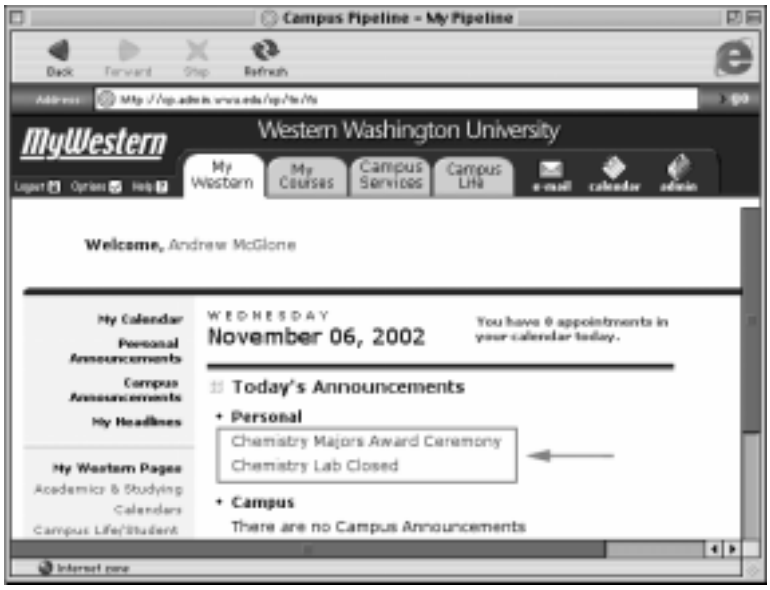

Illustration 1.

As faculty or staff members at WWU, one of our top priorities is creating relationships with students. The Web can be used as a breakthrough tool to create stronger relationships with students, but it can also cause confusion if we broadcast outdated information or communicate a 'one-size-fits-all' message when customized or personalized messages would be more effective.

These Web shortcomings can be turned into relationship-building advantages through a solution called *targeted messaging,* available within the MyWestern student web portal. Targeted messaging facilitates better relationships with your students in three key ways:

- First, by transforming the Web from a "one-size-fits all" communication medium into a medium that communicates personalized announcements: information to the right people at the right time.
- Second, by replacing the often difficult process of publishing an announcement to a web page with a process that makes it much simpler to post recent, precise and official content that keeps your students informed.
- Third, by delivering your messages to one location every time (i.e., the MyWestern portal), confusion is eliminated and users become reliant upon looking in one place for the information they need.

Additional features making targeted messaging in MyWestern the best option to manage your communication with students include:

- Ability to assign an expiration date on a message during message creation.
- Perpetually up-to-date audience list – once a student declares a major, enrolls in a class, or acquires any other attribute which you are targeting (e.g. number of credits, financial aid criteria, etc.) he or she is now added to your targeted messaging list without the need to contact the Registrar, wait for printed mailing lists, or prepare complex physical or electronic emails.
- No more worrying about having the correct e-mail address. As the message is not e-mail, but a targeted piece of content, any student on your list will receive the message once they login to MyWestern.
- No more worrying about how to put the message on the web. Your text message just appears in MyWestern in the appropriate targeted places on the Web. Targeted messaging thus allows you to focus on your message, not the intricacies of web technology.

What Exactly Is Targeted Messaging?

At its most basic level, targeted messaging is technology within MyWestern that creates a smooth, logical process for managing the creation, distribution and personalization of text messages which appear within MyWestern web pages. Students view My Western messages on the first page available after logging into MyWestern.

Targeted messages are displayed for select students determined by the sender. Students in a specific major, for example, could be sent a message that only students in that major will see. These targeted (i.e., personalized) messages appear as Personal Announcements on each student's personal MyWestern home page.

In the first illustration, Andrew McGlone is a WWU student who is also majoring in Chemistry. In this scenario, a representative of the Chemistry department has targeted two messages to Andrew personally:

1. The Chemistry Majors Awards Ceremony
2. The Chemistry Lab is closed for maintenance on Friday.

Who Can I Target?

With targeted messaging, faculty and staff can send messages to students based on audience attributes such as class standing, major, or enrollment in a course. Tell us about the group you would like to target and we will do our best to find a way to target students with the designated attributes.

In the second illustration, we have elected to target this message to "Admin"(s) as well as students majoring in Chemistry.

Illustration 2.

How Do I Start Using the Service?

To learn more about this service, contact ATUS Web Services at 650-6355 or send e-mail to webhelp@wwu.edu. We will be happy to schedule an appointment to demonstrate this service as well as brainstorm strategies to use targeted messaging to streamline your workflow.

The Web allows WWU to communicate with more people more quickly and cost effectively than ever before. At WWU we are transforming the web from a one-size-fits-all communication tool to a more personal way to build relationships with students.

Wireless Computing Wildly Successful

by Larry Gilbert

Personal use of wireless computing at Western is taking off! Last year, the Student Technology Fees funded a 'pilot' project to test the response to a new wireless network and wireless laptop computers in the Library. It was called a 'pilot' project, because we really didn't know what the response would be. Well, the verdict is definitely in – the program was wildly successful. Hundreds of students used the wireless computers in the Library thousands of times last year, with use growing rapidly throughout the year.

That program was so successful that ATUS, the Library, SMATE, and the Viking Union joined in devising a second Student Technology Fee project to expand wireless access across campus. Funding received was used to expand wireless network coverage throughout most of the rest of the Library and Red Square, as well as to SMATE, the SMATE courtyard, Parks Hall, public areas on the lower floors of Artnzen Hall and Environmental Sciences, and much of Haskell Plaza on the south end of campus. In addition, late last year President Morse provided special funding to expand the wireless network throughout the Viking Union. (For detailed coverage maps, see http://www.library.wwu.edu/services/wireless/wirelessmaps.shtml).

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Time for Student Tech Fee Concepts

The Student Technology Fee (STF) has had a dramatic impact on quality of student and faculty technology for teaching and learning at Western. A number of projects highlighted in this newsletter itself owe their very existence to STF funding (notably the many computer lab projects, the digital video project, and the expansion of wireless technology).

As always, ATUS stands ready to assist you in the conceptualization and preparation of your STF proposals. We are especially pleased to work with you on the development of collaborative proposals that involve more than one group working together to solve mutual problems that affect many students. Such collaborative proposals nearly always seem to get the positive attention of the STF Committee. Give Larry Gilbert a call at 650-2272 if you have any ideas for collaboration for 2003.

Woodring College Focuses on Integrating Technology

by Susan Kincaid, Chair
Woodring Technology Committee

University colleges and departments often have faculty "technology committees" to help with allocation of resources, technology standards, and similar issues. The Woodring College of Education is taking a different approach by having its technology committee focus on the integration of technology into the curriculum. In fact, the integration of technology into teaching and learning is the major charge recently given the Woodring College Technology Committee by Dean Salzman.

Woodring has long been committed to preparing students to enter a world of rapidly changing technology as evidenced by the Technology Plan adopted by the college in May 2001 (available at: http://www.wce.wwu.edu/Intranet/Docs/TechnologyPlan.pdf). The plan was based on four major goals and included specific objectives, rationales, and implementation strategies. The four goals were:

- Student competence in technology will be integrated into course and program curricula.
- To increase student access to education, to enhance learning aligned with directions of the field, and to enrich student learning, faculty and staff will make effective use of technology on a regular basis, e.g., faculty will model the use of technology when teaching.
- The university and college technology support structure will sustain effective and timely achievement of technology goals and objectives.
- Provide advanced learning in instructional technology at the undergraduate and graduate level for educators.

The Committee is concerned with the current uses of technology by students and faculty as well as the professional use of technology by teachers and practitioners who are graduates of Woodring. The integration of technology into the curriculum allows teachers to model the use of technology while allowing students to practice the use of technology in assignment completion. It also presents the opportunity for dialogue around ethical issues related to the use of technology in teaching and practice, as well as dialogue about social issues such as the *digital divide*.

The Committee is working to develop college wide technology standards by conducting a series of surveys. The survey instruments are based on the technology standards developed by the International Society for Technology in Education (available at: http://www.iste.org) and adopted by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (available at: http://www.k12.wa.us/). Since these standards are required of all teacher education programs in Washington State, it is hoped that they can be adapted and broadened to include the other degree programs offered by Woodring (Adult and Higher Education, School Administration, and Human Services).

The Committee will use survey data to develop a baseline of current usage and needs in order to measure future progress toward goals and standards performance. In addition, the data will be used to set program admission and exit requirements related to technology. Information will also be collected to determine the training needs of faculty and staff.

Students Learn WWU Trivia, Win MyWestern Prizes

Celebrating the release of Email Central and associated tools for students, a completely online contest was delivered at the beginning of the school year using the Campus Announcements service available on MyWestern. Questions were posted via MyWestern every morning from October 14th thru October 24th.

Topics ranged from the founding of the University to the membership of the Faculty Senate. Each question was comprised of an item of WWU Trivia which could be found on WWU's website. Students could then use any means necessary to locate the answer to the question. Students sent answers via their MyWestern e-mail account to the university webmaster. The first ten students to reply correctly to each question won their choice of MyWestern prizes, such as a Frisbee, mouse pad, stadium cup, stress ball, highlighter, or post-it pad. Over a thousand students participated in the contest yielding 100+ winners of MyWestern prizes. Michael Lemmon, a senior at WWU remarked, "It was fun. I learned something I didn't know about Western and won a stress ball. With midterms on their way, I'm going to need it."

New Digital Video Editing Lab in Use "Eight Days a Week"

by Noel Newell-Andriff

ATUS collaborated with the departments of Communication and Journalism to obtain funding from the Student Technology Fee (STF) program for a greatly enhanced digital video editing lab for students. This new facility was just completed at the south end of the back hallway of Miller Hall, in MH 171. As with all STF projects, priority for use of the facility will always be given to students completing required work assigned by faculty members.

MH 171 is a specialized general-university lab available 24 hours each day; special arrangements must be made to enter the building to use the lab after normal building hours. Five digital video editing workstations provide appropriate technology to students who have either chosen or were assigned to create a video program for a class project. Advance scheduling is required, with priority scheduling given to Journalism and Communication students who need the facility for video editing or multimedia publishing directly related to their academic work. Any other faculty member or student may also use the facility for required academic work. Appropriate training by Video Services staff is required before any individual may access the facility.

During winter quarter, students in a new Journalism class, J497 Editing Digital Media, will use the lab to create projects that incorporate video, audio and still photography with text. Carolyn Dale, who will teach the class, says it builds on the current J309 Editing class, which concentrates on just text and images for print or electronic delivery. The new lab supports more advanced work with digital media that could not be supported well on campus before the advent of this new facility. The students in J497, for example, will explore how best to tell complex stories using the variety of digital media available in the lab. Students' final projects will be stored on CDs, but the long term results will probably also show up in student media, according to Professor Dale. As the journalism students become more acquainted with incorporating video and audio into their news stories, she predicts they will use these formats more readily in the online versions of both the Western Front and the campus magazines, benefiting the entire student body.

Communication 442, "Video Workshop," taught by Jeri Forsberg and Mark Miller, provides students with experience in producing the WWU cable television show, "Western View." Incorporating practical application of techniques used in television production, the students use digital technology, graphic materials, design and staging concepts to produce the weekly program. The new lab provides a state-of-the-art environment for teaching students advanced editing and graphic skills using software such as Final Cut Pro, Adobe After Effects and DVD Studio Pro, all of which are widely used in video publishing and editing institutions across the nation.

There is an exciting array of equipment in the new facility. Two easy-to-use iMac stations, labeled George and Ringo, are equipped with programs for video editing as well as DVD creation and burning. Initial training on these programs takes only about 10 minutes. Two other stations, labeled John and Paul, are Macintosh G4's with dual processors and dual 15" flat screen monitors. These high-end stations allow for intricate editing, animation creation and production of complex interactive DVDs. The orientation and basic training on even portions of the software offered on these machines can take a minimum of 30-45 minutes. One additional editing station, an older Macintosh G4 named "Pete," has some of the same complex editing and animation programs, but does not have DVD burning capability. Each of the above stations is equipped with a digital VCR, a standard video monitor, high-speed Firewire connections to external digital video devices, and headphone amplifiers for up to three headphones per station for sound editing. All stations (except Pete) are equipped with iMovie and iDVD, Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, and After Effects. They also have Fireworks and Flash, providing a complete suite of advanced digital multimedia tools.

To reserve time in the new digital video editing facilities, please call Video Services at 650-3302. We'd suggest that faculty first contact me, Noel Newell at 650-6193 to discuss how specific classroom projects can best be accommodated in the facility. We will assist you in determining which combination of facilities will best meet your goals and schedule orientation and training as needed. Since digital video cameras from seven different academic departments are loaned from ATUS Classroom Services for curricular work, we expect the facility to be very busy. Check on availability as early as possible. As with general university computer labs, the digital video lab reservation schedule is posted outside MH 171 so that students can budget their time around scheduled class time.

Let us know what ideas you have for effective use of this exciting addition to Western's multimedia capabilities.

"On Hold" at the ATUS Help Desk? Not For Long!

by Rick Nichols

To provide a higher quality of service to the campus community, ATUS implemented a new Help Desk phone system last spring. The Automated Call Distributor (ACD) system enables callers to hold a short time for the next available consultant, an improvement over the previously available option of only leaving a voice message. To minimize the hold time for any caller, the system is currently set so that only two callers can be in the hold queue at a time. If you call when the queue is full, you will have the option of leaving a voice message which will be returned as soon as a Help Desk consultant is available.

During the first two weeks of fall quarter, the Help Desk fielded over 2000 calls, a 15% increase over last year. During that time, unfortunately, some callers experienced wait times that were unacceptably long. In investigating these incidents, it was determined that the ACD system was not limiting the number of callers in the queue as expected. This caused wait times for some callers that far exceeded our expectations. We are sorry for the inconvenience generated by these delays. The telephone switch programming problem has been resolved, so we are now able to promptly answer your calls.

If you have any comments about our Help Desk phone system or service, please contact Rick Nichols at 650-7928.

Remote Access with MyFiles

by Tim Place

ATUS and Technical Services have installed new software called MyFiles that allows faculty and staff to access files stored on campus network servers while at home, or from any computer connected to the Internet. Students will access MyFiles from the MyWestern portal beginning January 2003.

MyFiles utilizes Netstorage software from Novell, allowing a user to access his or her network files from a web browser. No software installation is necessary on the computer being used to access the files. To use this new service, type http://www.wwu.edu/myfiles into your browser address bar. At the prompt, enter your WWU Network username and password, then click OK. You will then see a page that shows the network drives you usually see at your office workstation.

Files must be stored on a network server such as your U: drive or P: drive in order to be accessible with MyFiles. The files on the C: drive on your desktop computer itself is not accessible remotely. In MyFiles, your personal U: drive will be listed as Home@wwu.edu. If you do not see the network drives that you expect, please contact the ATUS Help Desk at 650-3333 or your departmental technical support. Files stored on servers other than Galaxy and Zodiac may require that additional information be entered at your login to MyFiles.

When you click a folder in the left pane of the MyFiles window, the files contained in that folder will appear in the right pane. Double-click the file of your choice to open it in the browser for viewing. Use the File menu to download a selected file for editing, or to upload an edited file to the server.

Because this is a secure site, you may experience a Security Alert when accessing the MyFiles login page. To install a security certificate which will eliminate this message in the future, go to http://www.wwu.edu/depts/techserv/cainstall. Please call the ATUS Help Desk if you experience difficulties.

MyFiles is perfect for accessing a few needed files while away from your office. A full description of MyFiles access can be found at http://west.wwu.edu/atus/helpdesk/myfiles/. The page also provides a discussion of a few "gotchas" that result from some browsers and operating systems and information about additional options for remote file access.

Computer Labs Get Summer Facelift

by Rob Galbraith

This year the Student Technology Fee Committee paid for 171 new computer lab workstations for use in seven projects around campus. The computers were purchased collectively in order to obtain substantial discounts that in turn allowed for the purchase of more computers for students. This year's standard computer configuration consisted of a 1.8 GHz processor, 256MB of RAM, a 40 gigabyte hard drive, an Iomega Zip drive, a DVD-ROM drive and a 15" flat panel monitor. These new computers brought our workstation hardware up to a level that allowed the installation of the Windows XP operating system and Office XP on all general university lab workstations, providing a more stable, secure operating system that will permit students to use up-to-date high-end software applications, such as SPSS, PageMaker, Photoshop, and MATHCAD.

Haggard Hall

The full upgrade in HH 154 and HH 245 labs meant that older computers removed from these labs became available for 1) upgrades in the Miller Hall computer labs, 2) a new mini-lab in Old Main 330, and 3) kiosk computer stations around campus. The older computers moved to these new locations from Haggard also accommodated the Windows XP upgrades noted above.

Miller Hall

The oldest lab computers on campus, located in MH 61 & 65, were replaced with machines coming out of Haggard Hall. These computer labs are dedicated to open-access student use and are never scheduled for classes. The computers in this area are configured with software to allow students to do many high-demand tasks such as activating computer accounts, accessing library information systems, accessing MyWestern and email, browsing the Internet, and working on projects and papers using Microsoft Office software. Having a desirable, dedicated space for students to accomplish these tasks lessens the demand in other labs which are also in high demand for the use of specialized instructional software. The availability of newer computers with more capable software has greatly increased student use of these previously outmoded facilities.

Old Main 330

Five of the computers coming from Haggard Hall, plus a new printer, were used to create a new student-use mini-computing lab in Old Main 330. This mini-lab is available to students exclusively for work on papers, email, internet research or online registration. Because this space is accessible to the student services offices located in Old Main, such as the Registrar, Student Fiscal Services and Student Financial Resources, it is a handy location for students working in or passing through those offices to access their online resources. Since several new classrooms have recently been added in Old Main, this is also a place where the growing number of students attending classes there can complete computer work before or after classes.

Kiosk-Style Computer Stations

The remaining computers removed from Haggard Hall were used to create stand-up computer stations in locations around campus where pedestrian traffic is high. Two of these stations are already in use in the east lobby of Haggard Hall. Look for additional stations coming soon to the Arntzen Hall concourse, the Environmental Studies ground floor atrium, the Miller Hall corridor outside MH 161, the Science Lecture Hall lobby, and the Biology, Chemistry, and Parks Hall student lounges. The computers are on standing-height tables and use is limited to 15 minutes per session. They can be used by students to make a quick check of either email or an internet resource or to add a last paragraph or correction to a paper.

Arntzen Hall 02

A joint STF project between ATUS and the Theatre Arts Department allowed the upgrade of the existing General University Lab (GUL) in AH 02 with 13 new computers (including the teaching station) and a new projector. The printers for this lab are shared with the AH 01 lab next door. Theatre Arts has preferred scheduling in the lab. The lab is fully equipped as a GUL, but also contains theater design software to allow theatre students to learn and develop skills in set design, lighting design, scene design, costume design and stagecraft.

Carver 116

Flat screen monitors and fans were added in this newly minted lab (2001) to help mitigate some of the heat buildup problem in this room. PEHR has priority scheduling in this lab where their course-specific software is installed.

Departmental Lab upgrades

ATUS also assisted with STF lab upgrades for Sociology in AH 01, for Huxley College in AH 16 and for Engineering Technology in ET 340.

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Custom Computer Saves Time, Money

by Fred Robson

Most of us in the computer maintenance shop remember saying that all you're ever going to need is a 486 computer and a 200 MB hard drive with maybe 16 MB of RAM. Well, times have certainly changed. We can now order a new computer with a 2.8 GHz processor, 512K L2 Advance Transfer Cache, enormous hard-disk drives, multiple supplemental mass-storage devices, and many other advanced options that are difficult for the average computer user to decipher.

ATUS has worked very closely with Purchasing Services to select both standard and advanced versions of desktop computers from our major computer suppliers (Dell and Gateway) and negotiated special prices that you are unlikely to be able to beat for the same quality of equipment. The WWU standard desktop computer has a 2.4 GHz processor (the 2.8 GHZ mentioned above is a lot more money) with 256 MB of RAM, CD/Read-Write device, and a compact and easy-to-read flat panel monitor (the flat monitor saves both space and energy). This standard computer is available from Gateway or Dell for less than $1,400, a price well below even our generous educational discounts. We often get asked why we purchase only corporate models of Dell and Gateway computers when consumer model computers sometimes cost less. The reason is, although consumer models may be less expensive initially, they most often cost the university far more to maintain over their lifetimes. The robust corporate models we purchase from Gateway and Dell are built to last to our standards and are a much better value to Western in the long run.

Both Dell and Gateway have set up web pages with special listings for the WWU standard computers mentioned above, as well as the full catalog of machines available under the educational contract. There is also a web site available for Apple computers. Please contact Debby Short, 650-3186, or Fred Robson, 650-7737, for the website details.

ATUS is currently working on a custom-made WWU desktop software image that will be preinstalled by both Gateway and Dell at the factory. A WWU custom software image means your standard computer can be up and running right out of the box, without a lot of time-consuming labor by technical staff. Campus computer technicians can still accommodate any special needs for further customization.

As always, I will be glad to assist you with any computer configuration questions. Please give me a call at 650-7737.

Technology Problems Get Quick Response

by Rick Nichols

When ATUS computer desktop support staff members are unable to answer their phones personally, calls are now answered by other computer consultants who can get started right away resolving your problem.

Our consultants and technicians are often out of the office on service calls, making it difficult to connect with them by phone. The person who answers the phone will be able to handle your problem right away, immediately refer your call for resolution, or allow you to leave a message. This procedure will specifically allow you to:

1) Get immediate access to another consultant who may be able to assist the person you called by providing you with the information needed to solve your problem right away;

2) Have a consultant immediately enter your call into the Help Desk tracking system, thereby assigning it to the person you called or to another staff member who can resolve the problem most quickly and effectively;

3) Have the support person you called contacted immediately for high priority or emergency issues;

4) Transfer to the voice mailbox of the computer desktop consultant or computer maintenance technician you called.

Each of these options will shorten the time necessary to resolve your issue. In addition to providing enhanced response times to your technology questions and problems, you can also be assured that your specific problem is being referred to the person you called by the time you've finished your initial phone call. No more waiting for return phone calls or playing "telephone tag." This call management approach also creates efficiencies for our computer support technicians, thereby freeing them up to provide better support to the hundreds of Western clients in their areas of responsibility.

Computer Labs Get Summer Facelift

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A few years ago, many were predicting that campus computer labs would become a thing of the past. However, the need for specialized software, the availability of high-speed network access, and continual growth in the use of computer labs for curricular work all combine to make this prediction a myth. ATUS will continue to both enhance current computer lab stations and find resources for new computer labs, until our supply of quality computer lab seats meet the needs of Western's faculty and students.

Wireless Computing

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Any student or faculty member with a laptop computer, a wireless network card, and a valid network login can access the wireless network. A survey of students last year indicated that as many 25% of our students own laptop computers, meaning that there are potentially thousands of students who can access the wireless network with their own computers. The ATUS Help Desk can assist with identifying network cards, pointing you toward discounted purchase options, and getting you up and running. See http://west.wwu.edu/atus/news/newsitem.asp?id=21 for detailed instructions.

The loan of laptop computers to students in the Library was so successful that thirty-six additional laptops for loan were purchased and distributed to the Viking Union Information Desk, the SMATE service desk, and the Library. Checkouts of these new laptops had just begun at the two new locations (SMATE and the VU) before this article was written. Students seem to love the ability to take a laptop and relax in a chair, study with a group gathered around, or just check email or tweak a paper between classes. Whatever the uses our students devise, wireless computing is definitely a growing proposition at Western.

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What Can I Load on my Computer?

by Linc Nesheim

ATUS staff members are often asked questions about what types of software can be loaded on computers. We prefer to answer this question in terms of what types of software should be loaded on your computer to ensure smooth operation and as few problems as possible.

Our general advice is to keep things as clean and simple as possible. Only add programs that truly enhance your day-to-day computer work. When ATUS troubleshoots computer problems that impact the way you work, the first things we often catch and eliminate are unusual software packages that may interfere with Western's standard software applications that are required by all of us to perform our daily work. Such standard applications include programs like Microsoft Office, Microsoft Outlook, Banner applications, Internet Explorer, Netscape, the network connection client (e.g., Novell), and anti-virus software. A more comprehensive list of standard applications can be found at http://west.wwu.edu/atus/ccm/supportedsoftware.asp.

Common 'non-standard' applications include programs like America Online (AOL), Yahoo Instant Messaging, WebShots, interactive screen savers, music/file sharing and searching applications, games, applications that claim to enhance some function of Windows or other more exotic applications. The most insidious types of non-standard programs are so-called 'spyware' programs designed to gather information from your workstation for "marketing" purposes – usually meaning you'll soon see an increase in email "spam."

With the internet, we all have easy access to a lot of software that may seem interesting and fun at first glance. Just try to remember that everything you install on your computer has the potential to negatively impact how well your computer and its standard software applications work. Here are a few simple guidelines to keep in mind as you evaluate non-standard software:

- Be careful of programs that have a hidden agenda, such as advertising, marketing, or capturing data from your computer. For example, a recent program available on the internet purported to provide many visual enhancements to Microsoft Office, but really was set up to advertise itself and capture private information.
- Don't add any programs without carefully seeking and reading reliable reviews of the purpose, effectiveness, and safety of the software. Good reviews are readily available on-line.
- Ask the ATUS Help Desk or ATUS support staff if they have had any negative experience with the software you're considering.
- If you decide to add new programs, add them one at a time. This allows you to evaluate the effects of a single new software package without confounding the evaluation with the effects of other software. If a new problem then shows up in your standard computer or existing standard software, you know it's likely that the new software package caused the problem.

Just remember. Keep it simple.

Getting the Best Fit in Multimedia Classroom Scheduling

by Nancy Grayum

ATUS and the Registrar have worked together to assure that faculty members who use both the Block Schedule system and the process for requesting multimedia classrooms in advance have an excellent chance of getting assigned to exactly the type of classroom they need.

Block Scheduling

Block Scheduling, developed by the Registrar's office during 2000 and implemented during the 2001-2002 academic year, defines how course contact hours shall be consistently scheduled, ensuring that there are very few un-used times in each classroom during the typical 8-3 M-F prime class periods. "It is working so well that the utilization of general university classrooms is much greater than it has ever been," said Registrar Joe St. Hilaire. "A corresponding advantage is that a much higher percentage of advance multimedia requests are met." A copy of the Block Schedule Plan can be obtained by contacting the Classroom Scheduling Office at 650-3758.

Use of the Block Schedule Plan is a critical factor in the success of matching faculty needs for multimedia. Just prior to the fall 2002 quarter, 32 faculty requests for placement in Level 4 or Level 3 classrooms were not able to be accommodated by the Registrar's classroom scheduling system. Ten of these 32 mismatches (30%) did not meet the Block Schedule guidelines. None of these ten mismatches were able to trade for the Level 3 or Level 4 classrooms requested due to conflicts between the unique schedule of the class and the Block Schedule. In contrast, nearly half of the mismatched media requests that fit the Block Schedule Plan were able to be moved by hand to meet their requests.

Media Requests

For fall quarter 2002, the Registrar's Classroom Scheduling office received 234 requests for Level 4 classrooms, a 47% increase over the 159 requests for the fall quarter of 2001. Level 3 requests increased by 26%, from 83 to 105. Ninety-one percent of faculty requests for Level 4 classrooms and 89.5% of Level 3 classroom requests were assigned the preferred type of classroom. In contrast, during fall quarter 2001 there was a success rate of only 74.8% for Level 4 requests and 77% for Level 3 requests. Despite the advances made in the scheduling of multimedia classrooms, we are still unable to meet the needs of nearly 10% of faculty requests for multimedia classrooms.

If you want to ensure that you get to use the type of multimedia classroom you need, just follow two simple rules:

1. Use the Block Schedule Plan for all of your classes.
2. Request the specific type of classroom you want from the Registrar in advance by noting which mediation level you need (Level 1, 2, 3 or 4).

Classroom Renovations

OM 330A and 330C were upgraded to Level 3 classrooms this fall, with CB 485 and MH 114 soon to follow. All will have instructor stations with computers and VCRs connected to ceiling-mounted projectors, as well as newly designed push-button media control systems. While we recognize that fall quarter is not an ideal time to complete renovations, the funding cycle confounded our ability to start projects, accept bids, and purchase materials in time to take advantage of the summer quarter and intersession to start the work.

Working closely with the Capital Budget Office, Facilities Management, the Registrar's Office and Space Administration, we are crafting a three-year plan for further classroom renovations with a timeline that will allow us to complete some classroom media installations early in the next biennium.

Please call Nancy Grayum at 650-3572 or Larry Gilbert at 650-2272 to provide ideas and input about how Western's general university classrooms are working for you and how they can be improved.