IET COMMENTS RE: GSA AND ASUCD REPORTS TO CCFIT
MAY 2007

In this document, we provide brief comments and updates about some of the key technology-related topics and questions raised by students who participated in the surveys conducted by the representatives from the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and the Associated Students of UC Davis (ASUCD). When appropriate and useful, Web sites are referenced for additional information.

As well, IET welcomes student feedback at any time. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be shared directly with the Vice Provost-IET Office at vpiet-info@ucdavis.edu. Technical assistance continues to be provided through the IT Express Computing Help Desk (itexpress@ucdavis.edu, 530-754-HELP).

Many thanks to Esther Pun, Julia Silvis, and Ravi Deepak for bringing these questions and comments to our attention. The GSA and the ASUCD reports are available on the CCFIT Web site.

ONLINE COURSE MANAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Summary of comments from graduate students:

- Received mainly positive feedback from those who have used SmartSite.
- Requests for instant messaging capability; SmartSite workshops for people with different levels of computer skills; instructor's ability to disable access (temporarily) to the Wiki & Message Center; improvements on the chat functions, discussion boards, and any other online function to spur collaboration.
- Gradebook in MyUCDavis works, but lacks flexibility, room for creativity. MyUCDavis: not scalable as an enterprise-level system.
- Sample Praise: "I took a class on using Smartsite and used it last quarter to coordinate a study group. It was great, since we were able to share responses to questions and post ideas to share with the whole group."

IET comments:

We're very pleased to see that students who have used SmartSite have had positive experiences with the new system. The pilot has proven very successful, to the point that we are preparing to officially launch SmartSite this fall as UC Davis' new online collaboration and course management system (see http://smartsite.ucdavis.edu).

Transitioning to SmartSite

The decision to replace the course management tools in MyUCDavis dates back to June 2005 when the CCFIT Working Group on Course Management released a report recommending that UC Davis implement the Sakai community source platform as the campus' primary learning information system. In January 2006, Information and Educational Technology (IET) launched the SmartSite pilot with interested faculty, staff and students. In Fall 2006, the School of Veterinary Medicine launched its version of SmartSite, called CERE ("Collaborative Educational Research Environment"), for all its courses. Throughout the 2006-07 pilot phase, we performed technical and functional evaluations. New trainers were hired, and a comprehensive training, support, and communication program was developed in preparation for the Fall 2007 roll-out.

The use of SmartSite has grown fairly steadily since it was introduced as a pilot. Last Fall, SmartSite attracted more than 2,000 new users. As of April 2007, there were 210 project sites, and 262 course sites. The number of faculty users continues to grow (234 in April). In addition, a number of graduate students have experimented with SmartSite this past year, which has been very helpful to the team and has yielded valuable feedback (including numerous reports of SmartSite use outside of the teaching arena, such as in organizing one's dissertation).

Tools & features

SmartSite offers an extendable set of tools based on Sakai open-source software shared and developed by more than 100 universities and colleges. UC Davis faculty, researchers, students, and staff are using the tools to do anything from posting a reading list to collaborate on an assignment or, in a music appreciation class, tracking the sound of a flute in a recorded symphony concert. The system can archive chat-room discussions and make various types of material securely available online to as many people as the user wants. Last fall, we added new features, like tools for podcasts, blogging, handling email, interfacing with iTunes, a discussion forum and SiteStats (a tool to collect data in real time by user, event or resource). As mentioned, there is a chat tool, and the team will investigate having an irc or similar function available.

(Others have said they prefer the chat tool because it does not require any other client in order to function.) The Gradebook and Quiz & Test tools continue to improve, making them more suitable for large classes.

At present, SmartSite users can remove any tool from their sites. Once those tools are added back again, they are reconnected to all the existing data, which has the effect of "temporarily disabling the tool." This is a situation that the project team will keep in mind for the future to ensure that it continues to work this way if so needed--or to find a new way to do this.

This upcoming fall, the team expects to be able to offer an online collaboration and communications tool. Stay tuned for more on what has been tentatively codenamed "SmartMeeting."

Training & support

To help students and instructors learn and take full advantage of SmartSite's many features, the Teaching Resources Center and Mediaworks have developed a series of workshops. One-on-one help is provided by a faculty technology trainer on pedagogical as well as technical aspects of SmartSite's use. Participants can learn the basics of SmartSite, or they can explore how to customize their SmartSites through open workshops. In addition, sessions are held on ways of increasing student collaboration and engagement through blogging, podcasting, the chat room, etc. For the full schedule of sessions aimed at the novice and more advanced users, see http://trc.ucdavis.edu/trc/events/smartsite.

We invite you to continue to use SmartSite, to encourage your friends and classmates to join the UC Davis SmartSite community, and to continue to share your experiences with us. The more we learn from the student community, the more we can realize SmartSite's incredibly rich potential.

ONLINE EVALUATIONS

Summary of student comments:

- The undergraduate report from last year the possibility of online course evaluations. Since then, websites such as ratemyprofessor.com have greatly expanded in student base. An online course evaluation would bring some transparency to the courses, and it would hold professors and TAs accountable for their performance.
- Currently, students tend to believe that their course evaluations don't matter or matter very little. However, if the results were posted and available to the students this wouldn't be the case.

IET comments:

IET is participating in the CCFIT Online Teaching Evaluations Task Group headed by Professor Roger McDonald. The working group has been charged with making recommendations on how best to introduce and implement an online teaching evaluation system at UC Davis. While technically it would be relatively simple to implement a system to allow students to fill out teaching and/or course evaluations online, some issues and questions remain to be addressed (e.g., reaching agreement on key functional requirements, identifying 'official owners' of the campus evaluation process, etc.). IET will continue to work with CCFIT and campus to address these issues and to identify an academic unit or group that will oversee and manage the online teaching evaluation process. The CCFIT workgroup has proposed to develop a plan for how outstanding issues should be addressed, and how the campus might implement online teaching evaluations. IET will continue to be fully engaged in these discussions (see the charge to the workgroup at http://ccfit.ucdavis.edu/comm_wkgrp/2004-05/courseeval_tskgrp.cfm).

MUSIC DOWNLOADS: CTRAX

Comments from graduate students:

- 2/3 of graduate students surveyed were not aware of the service or haven't used it. While some were enthusiastic to try it out, others were not interested because it's not iTunes/not iPod compatible, and it isn't possible to burn or upload music to an mp3 player (for free).
- Limited music selection; program is slow. Even for 'free' music it wasn't worth the hassle."

IET comments:

In Fall 2006, every UC Davis student was provided a free one-year subscription to Ctrax, part of the Cdigix media suite. Staff and instructors were also given access to the service (for $5.99 per month). The program was a coordinated effort of Student Affairs and Information and Educational Technology, and was designed to encourage students to buy and obtain copyrighted music legally, not through illegal file-sharing. The Ctrax

subscription included unlimited downloads and streaming audio from a library with more than 2 million songs.

Notices of illegal file-sharing sent to the campus rose 400 percent in November over a year ago. Violators of copyright laws can get sued and, at UC Davis, be placed on academic probation and denied access to computer network resources.

In February 2007, the company that owns Ctrax issued a statement essentially ending the service effective April 30 because of "moderate interest" from students and changing company priorities. About 1,300 students have used Ctrax at UC Davis. Those who bought permanent downloads can keep using them after April. Student access to songs that were downloaded as part of the subscription service will expire 30 days after the download date.

UC Davis continues to promote legal file-sharing and respect for the creative property of media artists. We appreciate any assistance GSA and ASUCD can lend in ensuring broad awareness among UC Davis students of these issues, of the legal options available, and of the implications that illegal file-sharing can have on UC Davis and its community members. More information is available at http://getlegal.ucdavis.edu.

PRINTING & SCANNERS

Summary of comments from graduate and undergraduate students:

- Students still seem to have trouble getting computer time to print papers and work on projects. Are there plans to expand the computer labs or building more? Are there computer printing stations?
- There should be a limit on how long people can use terminals in common labs.
- Request for centrally-located scanners (scanner sheets could be counted towards quota).

IET comments:

There currently are 111 open access computers on campus, 51 of which are quick access stand-up stations (see http://clm.ucdavis.edu/rooms/rooms.html#openaccess). We have taken a multi-faceted approach to address the continuing demand for on-campus access to computers and printers. We look for ways to add space or to remodel existing space. For example, over the past year we have added a 37-seat computer classroom in 2060 SLB and added 11 more quick access stations by remodeling 15 Olson and 163 Shields. We will continue to look for new space to add computers and access to printing.

We have also implemented a 10-minute limit on the quick access stations to allow for a fast turnover for student printing. In addition, we added a 10-minute timer to those stations last summer to allow students to better track their time. And, as mentioned above, 11 quick access stations were added last summer.

Last October, IET started offering wireless printing in five different locations: 177 MU, 1101 Hart, 75 Hutchison, 15 Olson, and 1154 Meyer. The wireless printing service lets people use the campus wireless network to send documents to computer rooms for printing. Just recently, 163 Shields was added to the list of computer rooms set up for wireless printing. Students are using the service in increasing numbers. In winter 2007, there were 2,093 wireless printing jobs, roughly triple the volume of fall quarter. This service is expected to help reduce the wait lines and to give students easier and quicker access to printing. (see http://wirelessprinting.ucdavis.edu)

As for scanners, several are available in 1102 Hart, 1131 Meyer, and 1154 Meyer. New scanners were installed in 93 Hutchison before Spring quarter. The addition of scanners in other locations will be evaluated during spring and summer. Since scans produce a file on a computer, they can be printed from the lab as any other document, and would be counted toward the printing quota, in the same way printing other pages is.

EMAIL

Summary of comments from graduate and undergraduate students:

- 2/3 of the graduate students surveyed are in favor of outsourcing while 1/3 were not in favor.
- Requests for more storage space, search capability, draft saving function, spell check, etc. (all of which Geckomail lacks); lifetime email address; flagging/folder functions; conversations threads (by Google); ability for e-mail to be sorted into folders as it is received; command line

- Concerns: academic freedom/security; corporate involvement; privatization of university activities; need for sufficient guarantees of intellectual property rights and individual privacy.
- Many students requested Google by name.
- Request for training/help with common email clients (Mac Mail, Eudora, Outlook, Thunderbird)
- Concerns about "Geckomail" (lack of search capabilities, slowness, inability to save drafts, insufficient storage space, difficulty viewing and sharing large graphic files/theses,
- Majority of respondents forward their email to a non .edu address. Want to retain .edu account.

IET comments:
Two projects are under way in the area of email improvements. These projects are expected to address a number of the comments and concerns expressed by both GSA and ASUCD survey respondents.

The first project aims to introduce the next generation of Web-based email services for UC Davis students. Many students come to UC Davis with their own email accounts through providers such as Microsoft, Google or Yahoo. As mentioned in both the GSA and ASUCD reports, an increasing percentage of students forward their university email to these off-campus accounts. The project team is investigating the extent to which replacing Geckomail with Google's GMail or Microsoft's LiveMail is the most efficient way to provide the rich email and communication features students have come to expect, and whether it will be a more economical way for the campus to address increasing costs associated with higher email storage volumes, virus protection, spam filtering, etc. (see http://vpiet.ucdavis.edu/student.email.cfm).

The project team has been evaluating and comparing major Web-based email providers. They have also started a comprehensive informal consultation process with key campus groups, colleagues from both the UC system and other peer universities, and major Web-based email providers. We are particularly grateful to the representatives of the graduate and undergraduate student representatives on the CCFIT for helping us organize a student forum with Google and Microsoft in early April. The feedback we have collected from the forum and from student surveys is being used to establish a set of email features and functionality that are of particular interest and value to our student community. This feedback was also used to inform the recommendation to launch a pilot this fall with Google. The project team will be discussing this proposal with campus groups, including ASUCD and GSA, in the coming weeks.

The second project involves making significant improvements to the back-end (infrastructure) supporting the campus email service. Like the project to introduce new email services to students, the conversion to "Cyrus" has been discussed on a couple of occasions with CCFIT. This conversion will help address many of the concerns expressed by students. Essentially, Cyrus will improve email performance and user response time, it will allow faster access to mailboxes by Web-based email programs, and it will improve the system's storage of messages. Once implemented, Cyrus will also make larger email quotas feasible. This issue will be discussed in more detail with the campus community. If you'd like more detail about this project, see http://vpiet.ucdavis.edu/email.storage.cfm.

SPAM

Summary of comments from graduate students:

- More than 2/3 of graduate students surveyed are (reasonably) happy with the new spam filtering measures. It was unclear if those who were complaining of terrible spam knew that they could adjust their filtering settings.
- Lack of awareness of the Allow/Deny lists; loss of non-spam emails.

IET comments:
We are very pleased to see that the new spam filtering measures that went into effect on November 29, 2006, are having their intended effect. Those changes were designed to reject hundreds of thousands of spam messages each day before users would ever see them. Messages that score extremely high are now no longer delivered. Unless an email user changes his or her own settings, messages that are given a moderate score are sent to temporary holding folders (UCD-spam folders), where the recipient may read or retrieve them. After two weeks, messages left in the folders are discarded too. Email messages that score low on the spam scale reach the user as usual. As a reminder, those who want to customize their spam threshold can adjust their own settings (http://email.ucdavis.edu/secure/spamfilter.php).

Before the new measures were put in place in November 2006, the campus email system was processing more than 2 million email messages daily. About 25 percent of those messages were considered spam; another 50 percent was considered probable spam. In March 2007, the campus email system processed over

2.5 million email messages. With all the anti-spam measures in place, the number of messages considered spam had risen to 58%; another 15% was considered probable spam.

Specific advice and where to find help if needed was provided to UC Davis email users through various communications. Additional communications, including a reminder of the allow/deny lists and how/where to adjust spam filterings, are planned for spring, summer and fall quarters. An awareness program has been developed and additional communications will be shared with all students this fall. Here again, we will continue to work with ASUCD and GSA to try and reach as many students as possible.

WIRELESS & REMOTE ACCESS NETWORKING

Summary of comments from graduate students:

- Questions re" plans for upgrades to the wireless network? Wireless is not always available in Shields Library; would be good if on-campus housing had wireless.
- Many people said they used remote access, and having a higher-speed connection would help them.
- Buy more IP addresses. This is a university—there shouldn't be IP conflicts all the time!"

IET comments:

The CCFIT Wireless Working Group established earlier this year is expected to provide ongoing guidance to IET in the prioritization of wireless deployments. The working group will make recommendations in two general areas: where to install additional wireless access points, and how to provide and manage wireless access to all classrooms, public spaces, and administrative buildings (see charge letter at http://ccfit.ucdavis.edu/wireless.cfm).

In addition to the CCFIT working group, there are several technical testing and development efforts under way in IET to enhance the performance of the existing campus wireless network and to expand campus wireless services. (For an overview of projects under way, see http://vpiet.ucdavis.edu/init_central.cfm. To access the current wireless coverage map, see http://wireless/maps.cfm.)