Goal to enhance faculty-student communication

Amelia Giambino
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Personalizing the classroom experience is at the heart of Tech's new portal system. Picture this: Jennifer, a chemistry sophomore, wakes up on Monday and logs into her computer via her individualized campus account. She immediately gets the morning's headlines from CNN and her hometown newspaper, the weather forecast from the Weather Channel, a campus announcement that the library will be closed all day due to a power outage, an e-mail from her calculus professor saying that the Tuesday exam has been pushed back to Friday, a message from her study group announcing an extra study session because of the delayed exam schedule, an answer from her organic chemistry professor about a question she had in class on Friday, and a reminder from her sorority that the homecoming committee will meet that night at 8 o'clock. Good morning, Jennifer!

Planned for campus use during the summer 2003, the portal includes course management tools, targeted messaging, course chat groups, calendaring and e-mail functions. Opportunities for communications between faculty and students will be easier and more abundant. According to Provost Jean-Lou Chameau, "The campus portal project signifies an institutional commitment to a digital communication strategy. I am very pleased that the initial implementation will be predominantly focused on faculty-student communication. Ultimately, the project will benefit all campus constituents."

Organizing digital content

A portal system is a Web presence that organizes the digital content and applications that are available to Web users in a unified manner. Using fully customizable channels, users have the ability to import information relative to them in a single Web page, whether it be Web sites, chat groups or messages. It also provides a unified approach for access and delivery of content using secure technologies. For instance, when a student signs up for a course, the information is logged into the Banner database. With the portal, that information could be used to notify the professor, create a Web site for the course, and connect that student with other students taking the course through a dedicated chat group. It could also allow the student to coordinate social and academic calendars into one central calendar for improved time management. Other features include automated alerts, such as campus-wide notifications, and

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Professor: despite growth, city’s inequality lingers

Seán Bolman
Institute Communications
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Despite obvious gains from a twenty-year period of booming economies, Atlanta’s exceptional growth has exacerbated inequalities for women and especially among blacks, according to a professor in the College of Architecture. Speaking to a brown-bag luncheon with sponsored by the Office of Organizational Development, Professor Larry Keating discussed his recent book, "Atlanta: Race, Class and Urban Expansion," examining how Atlanta remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Despite record economic growth and efforts to improve the quality of life in the city, black women remain "out of sight, out of mind," Keating said.

In one instance, the book examines parity among jobs — and who holds them — within the region. Comparing data from the 1960 census and the 1970 census, Keating’s work focused on whether African-American women held the same percentage of jobs in certain fields as they did in proportion to the number of black women in the total workforce. The numbers show that many things remained the same. For instance: Black women did make modest gains in job parity. Yet in 1980, white men held 64.3 percent of executive jobs within the Atlanta region. By 1990 that number had dropped to 50.2 percent — still a sizable portion of the workforce.

Keating also noted the need for more income equality among races and genders. Economic development policies for Atlanta and the state, he said, should emphasize such issues. The CDCA is an example of how outreach efforts could improve inequalities within the region. The Center — external of Georgia Tech — has an 11-person board, with six seats held by representatives of low-income neighborhoods. The remaining five seats are allocated to representatives of Georgia Tech, the city of Atlanta, the local chapters of the Community Services Administration.

The CDCA recognizes that community-controlled institutions have helped improve community organization and development. Neighborhood planning and architectural design in neighborhoods throughout the city. It also provides residents assistance with cost estimation, grant writing, real estate finance and development. The CDCA is an example of how outreach efforts could improve inequalities within the region. The Center — external of Georgia Tech — has an 11-person board, with six seats held by representatives of low-income neighborhoods. The remaining five seats are allocated to representatives of Georgia Tech, the city of Atlanta, the local chapters of the Community Services Administration.

The next lecture will be an interactive session on Sept. 26, "Creating Effective Intercultural Interactions," in which attendees can learn how to better interact with international visitors to Georgia Tech. The course is free, but registration is required.

To suggest an interesting or timely topic for the series, call 894-7284 or e-mail shannon.scott@success.gatech.edu.

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individualized, secure access to aademic and financial information such as grades or scholarship funds.

For the faculty, the portal will provide the ability to manage e-mail, class calendars, targeted messaging, chat groups and course management tools external to WebCT.

Evaluation and implementation

Georgia Tech first began evaluating the portal approach to internal communications in 1999. By 2001 the technology had significantly improved and other campuses around the country were using it, said Provost John Keating. This past summer, the Institute signed a contract with Campus Pipeline.

"Phase-out" of expanded portal functionality.

The Portal Implementation Team is led by co-directors Greg Herndon, manager, Information Technology, and Marie Mons, director, Student Financial Planning and Services. Hushek says, "The team has been created with as much involvement from all parts of the Institute as possible. To realize the full potential of this technology, the team includes faculty, students, administrators, training, customer support, communications, quality assurance, project support, and a variety of technical personnel to build and operate the portal systems."

The implementation team will be very busy for the next eight months training, communicating with the campus and training. Stringent testing will be conducted to make sure that our portal is functional and secure," said Mons.

Provost Jean-Lou Chameau will appoint a steering committee to oversee the implementation team. Committee members will advise on policy issues as well as functional concerns. The committee will be named later this month.
Web design course ensures equal access for all

Tomika Jones  
Continuing Education

W ith last week’s reintroduction of Georgia Tech’s Web presence, the coming months expect to be filled with new standards of design, as campus communicators retrofit their sites to similar specifications. Some changes will be an issue of aesthetics; others will be to comply with the law.

To help navigate some of the legal and technological issues, the Westley Center for New Media created their latest course offering, "Creating Accessible Web Sites," as a hands-on, experiential certificate program, tailored to the needs of Web designers and managers. This program is scheduled for September 18-20, on Tech’s campus.

Robert Todd, a research scientist at the Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access and the course’s instructor, said, "This certificate program has been designed to meet a critical need for accurate, timely and usable instructions in accessible Web design." Citing the Chartbook on Disability in the United States, Todd estimated that between 15 percent and 30 percent of the population — approximately 80 million people — have functional limitations that can affect their ability to use the Web. This certificate program, he said, provides attendees with the knowledge to make informed plans regarding their own Web development and with the tools to make those plans reality.

Equal access under the law

When it was determined that the ADA also applied to the Web, the term "public accommodations" expanded into cyberspace. State and federal regulatory standards — among them Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act — mandate that business managers, human resource directors and Web masters understand the legal implications and liability of non-compliance. Building Web sites accessible to all is not just considered and socially conscious, it is the law.

"Oftentimes we only think in terms of the architectural barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter," said Denise Johnson, assistant dean of students and coordinator for disability services at Tech. "Now, as technology has come to the forefront in our everyday lives, the accessibility of information plays a major role."

Under Section 508, all vendors — public and private — must comply with designated Web accessibility standards to participate in the federal government market. This law applies to all federal departments and entities, and to all contracts and grants that they approve. States are following suit, passing similar legislation in increasing numbers. Major corporations such as Microsoft and IBM are leading the way in the business sector, promoting Web accessibility standards and education.

Certificate course

Upon completion of this three-part course, students will receive certification of course completion. Though there are no prerequisites for day one, it is recommended that students have a basic understanding of Web design with HTML for the second and third sessions, as well as a working knowledge of Macromedia Dreamweaver.

Located within the School of Literature, Communication and Culture, the Westley Center for New Media offers continuing education courses in electronic media theory and production, covering a range of visual and technical issues designed to improve its participants’ design capabilities.

For more information:

Westley Center for New Media

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Purdue hires Smith to head its ECE program

Mark Smith, a professor of electrical and computer engineering and former executive assistant to the president at Georgia Tech, has been named head of the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Purdue University, effective Jan. 1.

"I was struck by the enterprising vision and commitment of the new administration and by the strategic focus on cross-disciplinary collaboration," he said. "This, in concert with Purdue’s renowned faculty and outstanding student body, makes joining the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering extremely exciting for me."

Smith earned doctoral and master’s degrees in electrical engineering from Tech in 1984 and 1979, respectively.

Smith led the formation of a university coalition called EMERGE, or Empowering Minority Engineers and Scientists to Reach for Graduate Education. The program uses technology and outreach to encourage minority students to pursue graduate degrees in engineering and science.

A former Olympic athlete, Smith was a two-time national fencing champion, in 1981 and 1982. He also served as a member of the U.S. Olympic Team in 1980 and 1984.

Ethics specialist joins Tech

The Dean of Students office has a new face. Ericka Smith joined Tech last week as the Institute’s first Ethics Education Specialist. Smith comes to Tech from Emory’s Oxford College where she handled all ethical matters, to housing and facilities to teaching a class. Being a new position, many of her duties are being designed by the Dean’s office and Smith as she goes along. But part of her duties will include working with the Honor Advisory Council and training members of the various student judicial boards on the campus.

She’ll also be making presentations to students about ethics. “I’m the marketing person for ethical education on campus,” Smith explained.

A native of Riverdale, Ga., Smith moved to Clearwater, Fla., when she was 13. She received both her bachelor’s in organizational communication and her master’s in student personnel administration from the University of Central Florida.

Long distance tees

When Georgia Tech graduate student Sauraj Dutta received an e-mail asking him to come pick up a t-shirt he had won from Auxiliary Services, there were logistical problems that needed to be ironed out first.

“It will be a bit difficult for me to pick it up since I am a distance-learning student and live in England,” came the return e-mail. Thus, what started as a way to introduce students to Auxiliary Services’ revamped Web site has turned into a way of welcoming distance-learning students to the Georgia Tech community.

“Our students are the same whether on campus or in another country, and we try to promote camaraderie through our programs,” said Rosalind Meyers, associate vice president of Auxiliary Services. “While some distance-learning students are not concerned with all our issues like on-campus housing and dining, they are interested in what’s going on in our Tech community.”

A web-based contest, students win t-shirts when they visit the Auxiliary Services web page. Another distance-learning student who lives in Texas will be receiving a t-shirt by mail.

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