Lab Software Upgrades

Beginning Winter 2002, all lab and classroom PCs were upgraded from the Windows NT platform to Windows 2000. This upgrade, coupled with a server upgrade provides a more stable computing environment and faster application delivery. Because of Windows 2000 more restrictive security model, and the complexity of Windows 2000 Logo certification, many applications that were written "for Windows" have difficulty running on the 2000 platform. As a result there are some things to keep in mind when evaluating software for use in the classroom:

1. Is the software 32 bit? If it will run on Windows 3.1, it’s likely 16-bit software, and we cannot install it. Unfortunately, most of the software bundled with educational textbooks cannot run on the Windows 2000 platform. Evaluate the software yourself. If the software is nothing more than videos, or documents, and if the copyright allows, try uploading them to My Gateway for online availability to your students.

2. Can the software be run from a Network server? If it cannot, we typically will not be able to make it run in our environment. The exception of course is browser plug-ins, which must be installed locally. But these too, must be tested and installed, so browser plug-ins must be submitted like any other software request.

3. Does the user have to be an Administrator? Software not designed to be run on a Network, typically requires administrative rights on the local machine to function properly. None of the machines in the computers in the labs and classrooms have Administrative rights. Your Vendor can tell you if this is a requirement.

4. After installation, does the software require you to reboot? Install the software on your own machine, if you are required to reboot, this typically means that the software must update certain registry keys that are loaded when the machine boots. As a result, your students will not be able to install and run this software on their own in the open computing labs. It must be installed on the server. Again look to make documents, PowerPoint presentations and videos available.

Virus Protection at UM-St. Louis

New computer viruses appear almost daily and their existence is often the subject of E-mail that is sent around campus. Since these viruses occur with such frequency, Information Technology Services does not, itself, make it a practice to alert the campus to their existence. The reason we have adopted this policy is that we have a strategy in place that has done a good job protecting the campus from these viruses. We do alert the campus when we feel that we do not have the situation under control.

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Teaching with Technology

Chances are good that if you are reading this column, you are using MyGateway, the computer-based course management system that UM-St. Louis has adopted to support instruction. During this winter 2002 semester, 560 instructors are using MyGateway in 827 classes. Faculty are learning the software’s features as they consult with a colleague or TA, experiment with control panel features, or attend one of the frequent workshops offered by Information Technology Services or the Center for Teaching Excellence. Using MyGateway, course information is uploaded so that students can print copies of misplaced syllabi, read lecture notes, review power point presentations, link to websites, take quizzes, participate in online discussions, and send e-mail messages to their professors. Now that you’ve increased students’ self-sufficiency, how can you use MyGateway to increase how effectively they learn?

That question captures the varied challenges of using a course management system. Students assume responsibility for obtaining course documents, but they could mistakenly conclude that attending class is not necessary because materials are available at the touch of a button. The challenge to faculty, then, is to use the features of MyGateway to provide learning experiences that are interesting, meaningful, and encourage students’ thinking and problem solving skills.

Consider these ideas. Putting a lecture outline on-line rather than uploading the entire lecture’s text requires that students pay more attention in class, think about the lecture content, and insert it into the outline. Students could be required to prepare for class by responding (using complete sentences and at least one current citation) to a discussion board question about the chapter assignment. Most classroom and on-line activities can be creatively adapted for MyGateway so that students actually spend more time outside of class meetings thinking about the course, applying content to relevant problems, and preparing for the next class meeting. Faculty are designing such strategies and refining them as they are implemented.

The monthly noon Conversations about Teaching and Learning are designed so that faculty can learn from one another’s experiences and accomplishments the dual goals of adapting the latest technologies as instructional tools and engaging students in meaningful learning. ITS/CTE Summer Institute 2002, Teaching with Technology, will offer faculty the opportunity to develop skills that will enhance traditional classroom interaction, as well as provide a foundation for developing strategies and techniques for active, online learning. Look for further details on Summer Institute 2002 in the coming weeks. Send suggestions for work-shop topics on MyGateway to Robert Keel rok@umsl.edu or Peggy Cohen Peggy_Cohen@umsl.edu.

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Great Ideas

Faculty who are integrating My Gateway into their face-to-face and online classes shared some of their great ideas at a recent Conversations about Teaching and Technology session. They mentioned benefits to their students, as well as course management short-cuts that they personally have found advantageous. Here is a brief listing (with thanks to these innovative colleagues):

Leighanne Heisel, Communication, has used email, file exchange, and discussion forums to shift time and place constraints of her students, who are mainly working adults with families, enrolled in Evening College. The flexibility she has built into her courses has permitted them to complete courses they might have otherwise dropped.

Tivoli Majors, English, incorporates the web resources’ searches done by her students in external links. She also uses the quiz feature for review and preparation in taking the face-to-face tests and exams. Her textbook publisher provides question banks.

Peter Asay, History, also reported using quizzes as study aids and has incorporated them as counting toward class participation. He posts lecture notes weekly.

Michael Grissom, Business Administration, has transitioned BA103 Computers and Information Systems to a self-paced online course for multiple sections. He has assembled “Frequently Asked Questions” in a file folder in Course Documents.

Mary Cooper, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, posts frequent announcements, saying, “It’s all about communication.” She announces deadlines, new materials, and thoughts of the week. “Allowing students to communicate in a Discussion Forum without jumping in immediately helps to create a classroom culture. It’s a version of staying in touch after you (the instructor) ask a question,” she added.

Margaret Scordias, Teaching and Learning, utilized the sequential nature of learning units in Course Documents to introduce students to key concepts, application and synthesizing learning activities. She has added i-move classroom videos as archived video streams as part of the learning units.

Sandra Lindquist, Nursing, has integrated a variety of online content provided by the textbook publisher. She cautioned that some resources are promised, but not available at the time they’re needed. Do reviews of the online resources in advance of selecting publishers.

Cynthia Mitchell, Nursing, described the online RN-to-BSN program which was launched Fall Semester, 2001. Each student cohort will proceed together through the two-year program of courses. Students sign agreements that they have the necessary computing equipment and experience per a Computing Requisites and Skills Inventory.

Please contact the faculty members directly for details about these (and additional) great ideas. You may contact the Faculty Resource Centers for help in preparing online learning materials, too. Email frc@umsl.edu or phone 314.516.6704.

Cheryl Bielma
Instructional Development Specialist

New Contract for Computer-Based Learning Products

The University system has a new contract for computer based learning products. The contract is with NetIQ and provides over 700 courses for computer based learning. The courses range from end-user based titles to technical titles that focus on product vendor certification. The courses are simulation-based and are accessible through Internet Explorer. University faculty, staff and students can access these courses. To login and access a course, use Internet Explorer, go to http://www.umsl.edu/technology/training and follow the instructions on that site. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Mary Brown X6016 or mary_brown@umsl.edu.

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Virus Protection at UM-St. Louis (Cont’d from page 1)

What follows is a review of UM-St. Louis’ virus protection strategy. We are currently in our third year of running an anti-virus software program called Antigen from Sybari on our Exchange email servers. This software works in two ways. First it scans all email messages and attaches them as they are sent through the system using both an anti-virus definition file and a custom file filter list. The anti-virus definitions are updated automatically every day. Sybari is very diligent in keeping up with any new virus threat and we typically see two or more new updates each week from them. The custom file filter is a list of files that we maintain which are filtered out of any email message. It will even look inside of zip files for viruses. This allows us to protect the campus from viruses during the period between when a virus is discovered and when a new definition is available. When an attachment is filtered out by Antigen, a file with the name “original_filename.txt” is sent in its place explaining that the original attachment was removed because it was infected with a virus. The second way Antigen can be used is for scanning Exchange mailboxes and folders housed on the server. This would only be used in a catastrophic event where a virus got into the system and infected many mailboxes before a definition or filter was in place.

Antigen has been extremely successful for us in stopping the spread of rampant viruses. On an average day, we stop anywhere from 15 to 30 virus infected emails from reaching their destination. This can go as high as several thousand when some of the new Outlook worms have hit. We do still need our users to practice responsible computing though. There will always be a lag time between when a virus is released onto the Internet and when it is discovered and can be stopped.

Kyle Collins
Principal Systems Administrator
and MOSE, MCP+I