SmartSite arrives. Ready?

The pilot stage is done. From here on out, SmartSite is the main online course-management and collaboration system for UC Davis.

That means its new set of tools is now fully operational. The story of what went wrong is complex. Early this year, the system had to be rolled in on a cart. Early last year, the department's principal TV technician in IET-Academic Technology, Cyrus, that improved email performance. It has monitors and responds to events involving email.

Email problems will get an outside look

Pete Siegel, chief information officer for UC Davis, has formed an independent group to review what caused the severe service disruptions that affected thousands of the campus’s 52,000 email accounts in mid-September. Led by Dean Enrique Lavernia of the College of Engineering, the group will include faculty and campus technical staff. They will work with Information and Educational Technology to understand what happened, and to recommend adjustments, as needed, to the way IET monitors and responds to events involving email.

For updates or to read more, visit TechNews—IET’s campus technology information service—at technews.ucdavis.edu. To report problems or get assistance with email, contact the IT Express help desk at (530) 754-HELP (4357).

Email was lost, and the service was stable the following week. Administrators continue to work on solving the underlying problem, and are closely monitoring the system. One long-term solution might be to consider the side effect of download- ing duplicate content, as existing emails for some clients. IET will notify them in advance.

The review group will report its conclusions directly to Siegel, who is also the vice provost for IET. The group’s assignment and findings will be posted at.

Photo: Sam Woo

Joe Kelley, a principal TV technician in Information and Educational Technology, demonstrates the new system in 126 Voorhies. (That’s “The patriot” up on the screen.)
If you routinely receive emails clogged with more than you want to see, you're far from alone on campus. It's not just a UC Davis problem, of course. A recent study on email by stress researchers at California at Berkeley and Panayotis university in the United Kingdom found that some British office employees check their inbox up to 40 times an hour. (The researchers had somewhat extreme, optimistic.)

One third of the participants said they felt stressed by the amount of email, and felt pressured to respond quickly. But checking frequently, or responding to urgent items, triggers a person's hair. That task any that requires sustained, focused attention.

Maybe that's a reason to sometimes try at your desk, to log email sessions, and prioritize tasks just as you would a meeting. That message with an RSVP for the meeting.

It doesn't need to be an email

To decide when to read your email, click your inbox impulsively. Decide, then stick to it. Consciously turn off the automatic response that you're文字 start with the subject line.

When you do write an email, make sure that your email is clear and your message is concise and to the point.

To manage your inbox, one idea is to file messages in folders, or create rules so that messages are automatically delivered to specific folders. For example, send all email newsmakers to a folder called "news." Phone calls and email don't always go together.

When you're busy, the last thing you need is an inbox that starts filling up with messages, from work and personal accounts alike. So, instead of dealing with all the messages that come in, try sorting them:

1. Use folders to organize email messages into categories, such as work, personal, or for follow-up.
2. Preview messages before opening them, to see if they contain attachments or links that require immediate attention.
3. Use the "flag" function to mark important messages for后续, and mark messages that can be handled later.
4. Use filters or rules to automatically sort messages into predefined folders.
5. Use the "unsubscribe" links in spam messages to avoid future messages from the same sender.

Tips for managing an email inbox:

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Podcasting lectures, one year later: A quiet, generally favorable start

The numbers don’t really show it yet, but podcasting is starting to take hold on campus.

Fall 2007 marks the start of the second full year of the campus podcasting program, and so far, less than 100 instructors are using it to record their lectures. At the end of spring quarter, 49 main-campus classes were registered to podcast through the Information and Educational Technology service, although only 38 posted material. The demand forecast for this fall is about the same.

Rodd Kleinschmidt and Charlie Turner of IET-Academic Technology Services (ATS) both work with the podcast service. They ascribe the numbers so far to faculty concerns that podcasts depress class attendance, and to limited access to podcasting in classrooms—just 10 had installed podcast hardware last year, although 18 have the hardware now. Plus, some faculty don’t want their lectures recorded.

But instructors who have used podcasts generally like the experience. And students appreciate the service—sometimes for unexpected reasons. So odds are, the use of podcasts to record and distribute lectures will keep growing.

Helpful for ESL students, post-lunch sleepiness

Liz Applegate, a senior lecturer in the Nutrition Department, is a campus podcast veteran, who joined the campus podcast project two years ago. She podcasts her lectures and review notes, then posts them through iTunes for easy downloading for her Nutrition 10 course.

Nutrition 10 is a lively class with up to 600 students. Applegate said the podcasts, combined with the reviews and posted lectures, offer students a fail-safe way to get course material. If students miss class, she directs them to the podcast. That saves her time and makes it easier for students to get the information.

Applegate would like her students to use the podcasts in the right way—to reinforce the information, not as a substitute for coming to class. “If you have a choice between the Nutrition 10 podcast and the Green Day,” she often tells students, “pick the podcast.”

Victoria Cross, another veteran of the podcast pilot and a lecturer in psychology, uses her podcasts to evaluate the information, organization and flow of her lectures, as well as to make them available. She was surprised at the variety of reasons why students find the podcasts useful.

“I have heard from ESL students that if I use a word or phrase that is unfamiliar, they put a mark in their notes and come back to it later on in the podcast with a dictionary to help identify what was said.” —Victoria Cross

Students like it

Students seem to like podcasting. In 2006-07, student use of the service rose 154 percent over the prior year. Applegate recently surveyed her Nutrition 10 class, asking students if the podcasts helped. Eighty-five percent of the students who answered strongly agreed, and 13 percent agreed.

The UC Davis School of Medicine operates its own podcasting service separate from IET. Unlike the main campus, all of the medical school’s lecture halls, classrooms and labs are equipped to record audio and video. The school records lectures only if the instructor or speaker consents, said George Santos of ATS.

Students are glad to have the recorders to help them review material, he said. About 80 percent of the core classes in the School of Veterinary Medicine will offer podcasting this fall, estimated Instructional Media Development Specialist Chris Brandt. The school started podcasting a few classes in fall 2006, most core classes were using the service by spring. The recordings are posted on CERE, the school’s version of SmartSite. (That approach also lets the school control access to the recordings.)

There’s been no sign of depressed attendance, he said. Students have appreciated having the chance to review a lecture. “Everything I’ve heard about podcasts is positive,” Brandt said. “There’s no harm in having it, and for those who use it, it’s exceptionally valuable.”

Advice from TAs

For one of its sessions on July 19, the Summer Institute on Teaching and Technology asked a few graduate student TAs to describe what they consider to be good teaching at UC Davis. They were happy to assist: They like instructors to have a clear syllabus, communicate clearly, be predictable—and they offered ideas on how best to use classroom tech and work with TAs.

Read more about SIT—and get campus tech news as it happens—at TechNews, a free service run by Information and Educational Technology. Search, read or subscribe at technews.ucdavis.edu.

Email (from page 3)

• Meeting in person—lets each person deal with whatever questions or issues come up.

• And an old favorite: Spam-swatting

One final, familiar idea: block as much spam as you can. On a typical day, the campus spam system will process about 2.7 million email messages, of which 1.2 million will be rejected as spam; another half-million is likely spam.

If your email account resides on one of the campus email servers, you can use the campus spam filter to detect much of the junk.

Each piece of email that goes through the campus system is ranked for its potential spamminess and given a score from 0 to 14.

From 0 to 4, the message is most likely legitimate email. From 5 through 9, it’s probably spam, and from 10 through 14, it’s almost assuredly spam. Anything above a 13 gets the boot.

You can choose your own screen threshold, learn more at email.ucdavis.edu/security/spamfilter.php.

READ MORE:
For more information, including how UC Davis classes are recorded and how the technology works, go to podcast.ucdavis.edu.

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A TechNews highlight

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