Information Technology Services

CONNECT

From the CIO’s Office
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We’ve had an extremely busy summer, averaging over 100 active projects. The ITS Project Management Office (PMO) has helped us make major strides by overseeing the review and intake of new projects and managing all the complexities of a large project portfolio. Take a look at the updated IT Project Management web page at www.odu.edu/pmo, where you can request a project, learn about the project life cycle, and view an entire list of our active projects.

In 29 years at ODU, I’ve realized that in order to deliver successful IT solutions and services, our two most important assets are our partnerships and our people. Strong partnerships and collaboration are key to developing, implementing, and supporting IT solutions that touch every aspect of the University. And every day, I am amazed by the talented and hardworking people in ITS. I have come across many IT organizations that have more resources and staff, but none can match the capability, creativity and dedication of ODU’s ITS staff.

We introduce this newsletter to tell our recent partnerships.

Research Computing at ODU

High Performance Computing

By fall, ODU researchers will have access to over 4,300 computational cores in the Turing Cluster and a 100Gb network connection to national research networks and facilities. These investments improve the capacity for large data transfers and represent an increase in compute capacity by 800 percent over the past 2 ½ years. With the increasing importance of research computing across many disciplines, significant investments are required to sustain High Performance Computing (HPC) at ODU. The input of our HPC Advisory Committee is vital to making the right investments. Advisory committee members often stress that standing still means we are losing ground. To continue moving forward, we hope to hire a new HPC computational scientist this summer to support researchers in the use of computational resources, and will continue to find opportunities to invest in research computing.

100Gb Research Network

ODU has partnered with Mid-Atlantic Broadband to develop a 100Gb fiber optic broadband network that will allow ODU researchers to connect to research networks and facilities across the world at speeds that are up to ten times faster than before. This upgrade in infrastructure places us among the best-connected institutions globally.

The 100Gb fibers connect ODU to the Mid-Atlantic Research Infrastructure Alliance (MARIA), which then provides connectivity to the national and international research and education networks. Previous connection speeds maxed out at 10 gigabits per second.

“This enables us to research and collaborate at the highest level,” said Wayne Jones, Director of Information Technology Infrastructure. “ODU has taken a leadership role in building a statewide research and education network. Together with Virginia Tech, we will be the first MARIA members to implement 100Gb channels over the research allocation.”

Old Dominion University’s 100Gb connection benefits other participants in the E-LITE metropolitan network operated by Old Dominion in the Hampton Roads region. E-LITE (Eastern Lightwave Internetworking Technology Enterprise) is a regional network collaboration comprised of ODU, William and Mary, Jefferson Lab and ODU’s Virginia Modeling and Simulation Center (VMASC). E-LITE members share cyberinfrastructure resources and network connections to MARIA.

The new network, which has been in development for over two years, became operational in mid-July and represents a significant 10-year cost savings over the previous research and education network plan.

George McLeod
Distinguished Geospatial Educator Nominee

George McLeod, assistant director of geospatial and visual systems, was recently nominated for the Distinguished Geospatial Educator award presented by the National Geospatial Technology Center of Excellence (GeoTech) to honor those who prepare students for careers in geographic information systems (GIS).

It’s not hard to imagine why George would receive such a nomination. He works tirelessly to promote geospatial education and technologies from the community college level up through the University. Few people have more passion for preparing students for a future in GIS than he does.

“My most important role is that of getting students to the point where they can go out and do other great things,” George said. “I think that’s the best part of my job.”

Several of the students who have worked with George in ITS and taken GIS courses offered by the Department of Political Science & Geography, have gone on to careers with major corporations like Apple, NASA and ocean engineering firms thanks to the foundation they received here. They get real-world experience thanks to partnerships built with researchers and staff across campus.

“They give us the opportunity to work on some really cool projects,” he said, “and my students get to graduate with three or four projects in their portfolios. It gives them a huge advantage.”
ITS values our partnerships with departments across campus. Strong partnerships and collaboration allow us to develop, implement and support solutions in an environment where IT touches every aspect of the University. Here are just a couple of recent examples:

Registrar: Banner XE Registration

When Ellucian, makers of Banner, announced an upgrade that would provide an improved experience for University users, ODU’s registrar, Mary Swartz, knew our students would benefit from the Banner XE registration component. When Swartz brought her request to ITS, we spent months working together to prepare our systems for the new Banner XE platform. And when Banner XE Registration went live in June, ODU became the first university in Virginia to launch the product.

“Mary is really a pioneer,” said David Kozoyed, director of information technology solutions. “She pushed for this to happen and set the bar. Then our ITS teams jumped over that bar.”

“The Registrar’s office has always enjoyed a very strong partnership with ITS,” said Swartz. “The implementation of Banner XE Registration is an excellent example of that.

Banner XE is an entirely new “extensible ecosystem,” built with modern standards-based, open source technologies. Because of its flexibility, Banner applications are easier to customize and extend in the future. It provides a better end-user experience designed for today’s web and mobile environments.

But upgrading required months of preparation. ODU uses Banner for everything from payroll to student enrollment and financial aid. Without proper planning and careful execution, an upgrade of this size had the potential to affect the financial stability of the University.

ITS spent months assessing readiness, extending the data-base behind Banner and training application developers on the new system. It was a giant investment of time and resources, but it paid off in the end.

“ITS leadership developed a comprehensive development and testing plan in consultation with the Registrar’s office,” said Swartz, “and we were able to release the new, enhanced registration package on time and with few problems. We could not ask for a better group to help us with ongoing development!”

Banner Registration was only the beginning. Over the next couple of years, ITS will work with other departments to upgrade and implement more Banner products like employee web time entry and faculty grade entry.

“We’re looking at the big picture,” said Kozoyed, “planning for the day when all Banner systems will be on the XE platform.”

Institutional Research: Enrollment Tracking

ITS is working with the office of Institutional Research to improve the timing, automation and design of a report they use to track and compare week-to-week enrollment data. The weekly report used to take days to generate, as data had to be scrubbed before analysis. ITS is working to automate the process so that the report is ready within an hour after each week ends.

The report shows enrollment numbers by campus, by College and by program, helping to guide decisions at every level. Trends and comparisons are easier to see, human error is reduced, and data standards remain consistent.

Jimmy Patel
Customer Service Employee of the Year

The 2014 Customer Service Award was presented to Jimmy Patel, assistant director of business intelligence architecture, for his tireless collaborative efforts across the University. His friendly demeanor, can-do attitude and extensive experience have made him an invaluable member of ITS and ODU. His work not only keeps the University running smoothly, but has also put ODU on the national radar as a leader in statistical analytics and modeling. The enrollment tracking project was a large credit to Jimmy.

Dwayne Smith
Presenter, InfoComm Conference

Dwayne Smith, assistant director of classroom and learning space technologies, along with Dr. Terri Mathews, associate dean and director of the Math and Science Resource Center, presented at the InfoComm International Audiovisual conference in Orlando last month. They spoke about lecture capture and its ability to improve student performance. In their work at ODU, they found that students who watch the lecture videos offered through Blackboard tend to perform better and have higher completion rates than those who don’t watch the videos. This shows how ITS and ODU are innovating and using technology in ways that improve student success.