From the CIO’s Office
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In the year that WordPress has been hosted at ODU faculty, staff and students have created more than 1500 sites: course sites, instructional material sites, faculty CV sites, research lab sites, community outreach sites, student organization sites and online portfolios.

“Faculty have been enthusiastic about moving into WordPress, and they are quickly building a wide spectrum of ODU sites,” said Spring Brennan, Instructional Technology Specialist with the Center for Learning and Teaching. CLT offers several courses for faculty who want to use WordPress for instructional purposes. “Starting Fall 2016, CLT is adding WordPress Open House workshops based on the sheer demand for advanced and individualized troubleshooting—faculty can bring their in-progress WordPress sites for workshopping.”

Before WordPress was introduced at ODU, the ITS e-Learning team did a thorough evaluation and analysis, holding forums across campus to talk to potential users and gather input from people who were already using WordPress outside of ODU.

“IT’s been using WordPress for over 6 years,” said Christina Steel, a lecturer with the Department of Biological Sciences. “It’s an extremely robust and flexible platform. I am very grateful that ITS consulted with faculty about how to implement this and what features we wanted and needed.”

Plugins add additional functionality to sites created with WordPress, allowing users to do anything from create tables and charts to filter spam comments. New plugins and themes are added to ODU’s production environment twice a semester. One recently added plugin allows users to assign their own domain names (which can be purchased through a third-party vendor) to their ODU-hosted WordPress site.

“Anything that’s open source (as WordPress is) runs the gamut,” said Dave Hamel, Assistant Director of Academic Support Technology. All requested plugins are reviewed for safety, security and stability, before they are eventually installed for use by everyone at ODU.

Members of Hamel’s team have written some plugins of their own. In addition to dashboard and login plugins that are necessary for using WordPress at ODU, they are working on a couple of plugins that will make it significantly easier for faculty to build faculty bio pages and course sites. Plugins that will import info from the Faculty Activity System and student enrollment data from Blackboard should be available by the fall semester.

Do you have an externally hosted WordPress site? Visit odu.edu/wordpress to find out how to migrate your sites to ODU servers. For more information about how you can use WordPress to enhance the learning environment, email the ITS e-learning staff at wordpress@odu.edu.
CLASSROOM CENTRAL: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The typical classroom on campus hosts well over 500 classes in a 16-week semester. The technology in these classrooms is used several times a day by faculty in various and innovative ways. The Classroom Central team works hard to ensure that this technology is operational and user-friendly.

“I would put our technology and support against any other,” said Dwayne Smith, assistant director of classroom and learning space technologies. “There is a large commitment to educational technology in the classroom at ODU.”

Classroom Central’s five classroom support specialists conduct monthly quality control checks in all 130 University classrooms, anticipating and solving technical problems before they arise. And when instructors do have issues, hotline phones in each room provide immediate support.

Besides troubleshooting and supporting existing technologies, classroom support specialists constantly listen for feedback and search for ways to improve the classroom technology experience.

“In our daily interaction with faculty, we see what works and what doesn’t,” said specialist Beth Bains.

“We try to do as much as we can in house because we control the quality of the finished product,” said Smith. “We’re successful because of the commitment and the ownership we take in what we do around campus.”

Despite fast-changing technology and constant upgrades, instructors will find similar features and functions no matter which room they are assigned.

“If you’ve ever taught in one of our classrooms and you walked into a new classroom, it should feel familiar,” said specialist Geoff Farley.

Each room has a desktop computer, a projector, a document camera, lecture capture capability and a control unit. In newer rooms (and as rooms are updated), classroom controls are located on a separate desktop box that allows instructors to project from their own laptops or media units without ever having to touch the classroom desktop. And going forward, each new or updated room will be outfitted with an adjustable desk and touchscreen monitors, mounted on swiveling arms, allowing instructors to present while seated or standing, either behind or in front of the desk.

The new desk was the product of several discussions about capabilities and user experience, with input from a variety of people.

“From a design standpoint, we try to understand what the user wants to do,” said Smith, “and we try to build from a concept, not a specific piece of technology.”

Lecture capture, the ability to record class sessions for later playback, is available in every classroom and has been proven to increase student performance. Smith and his team studied the use of lecture capture in several classes last year and found that students who watch lecture videos through Blackboard tend to perform better and have higher completion rates than those who don’t watch the videos.

“We get to see the success that takes place in the classroom as a direct result of something we did,” said specialist Clay Fogler. “That’s very rewarding.”

This fall, instructors who teach in large lecture halls might want to request a Catchbox – a foam-encased microphone that’s meant to be tossed around the room. Sure, it’s fun, but it also allows audience responses to be heard in classroom recordings, enhancing the lecture capture capabilities.

Other technology to watch for: the ability to connect to projectors wirelessly so instructors can move freely around the classroom while presenting and even encourage students to present from their seats. The new Education building will be the first to have this technology standard in every classroom.

“Our ultimate hope,” said Smith, “is that the instructor doesn’t have to focus on technology; the technology can focus on them.”

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and the Kate and John R. Broderick Dining Commons. Here are few numbers that highlight what it takes to equip the new buildings:

- **300,000** feet of copper cable to wire for network connectivity
- **1,084** wired network connections
- **107** wireless access points, supporting over **6,000** simultaneous device connections
- **51** technology-equipped classrooms, labs and conference rooms

Freeman Hrabowski, President of University of Maryland, Baltimore County, has said, “If I do nothing else, it is to get each of us thinking about the question, Why is what we do so important?” In ITS, the technology solutions that we design, develop, implement and support in partnership with academic and administrative units help to enable a world of possibilities in learning, research discoveries, service efficiencies and so much more.
PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN ITS:
DOING THE RIGHT PROJECTS RIGHT

That’s the motto of the ITS project management office, who have been keeping ITS projects on track and striving to improve the ways things are done since 2009.

“We are most successful when there’s a method,” said Barrie Sutton, assistant director of the ITS PMO.

To ensure the greatest chance of success, each requested project is evaluated by a review team to determine if it is compatible with our current IT systems and if the appropriate resources are available. Regular status meetings and reports ensure that all stakeholders know exactly where each project stands, and help project managers determine whether ITS should undertake any new projects at any given time. And when a project is completed, project managers perform a post-project review to discuss lessons learned and gather valuable feedback in order to continue improving.

The PMO works with departments across campus, planning infrastructure for new buildings and upgrading software.

“We do a lot of work with Student Engagement and Enrollment Services,” said Sutton, “helping them improve admission and graduation processes.” After helping SEES implement a product called Common Application, freshman applications for fall 2016 increased by 25 percent, according to Jane Dané, associate VP for enrollment management.

The PMO also works with the Information Security group to determine if requested software can operate within ODU’s existing infrastructure.

Are you doing the right projects right? If you would like someone from the ITS project management office to talk to your department or group about any aspect of project management, contact pmo@odu.edu.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Entrepreneurs at ODU

In support of ODU’s strategic goal to promote an entrepreneurial culture, the Entrepreneurship program highlighted the work of ITS employees Shailaja Rao and George McLeod in brief videos about their entrepreneurial work at ODU.

Shailaja Rao works with an NGO in India called Rainbow of Humanity, a support group for interfaith couples.

George McLeod trains the next generation of students to solve problems using geospatial technology.

ODU wins first Ellucian EllumiNation Award

ODU was recognized by Ellucian as the first Campus EllumiNation Award winner. This award honors institutions who inspire their peers to push the boundaries of technology.

According to Ellucian, “ODU clearly stood out as a leading institution that is using technology to enhance the student and campus experience, driving measurable growth in effectiveness.”

This award is the result of collaboration between Information Technology Services, Student Engagement & Enrollment Services and Human Resources in rolling out Banner XE.

Great Computer Challenge

The Great Computer Challenge – a joint project of WHRO, ODU and the Consortium for Interactive Instruction – was recognized with an award for Community Engagement Based on a Local Project from the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA). The Great Computer Challenge, now in its 30th year, is a competitive opportunity for students in kindergarten through 12th grade to demonstrate their knowledge of various computer applications and programming skills.

Mark Walsh
Exemplary Service Award

Mark received the 2016 Exemplary Service Award from the Tide-water Chapter of ARMA International, an association for records and information management professionals.