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**Information Technology  
Student Advisory Committee (ITSAC)  
Annual Report  
2006 - 2007**

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## I. Introduction

This year, ITSAC provided an important forum for students to discuss information technology as an important aspect of their academic and student life experience at the University of Guelph. As a result of important decisions made last year, ITSAC once again saw an increase in its membership to more directly reflect the University of Guelph community. Additional members included a representative from the Guelph-Humber campus, the Centre for Students with Disabilities, InterHall Council from Student Residences, and a member representing the new College of Management and Economics. This exemplifies the ongoing growth and development of the campus and the way in which technology is critical in all disciplines.

A number of new topics were tabled at the committee meetings this year. This variety was a direct result of ongoing changes at U of G in the area of technology. The discussions included concerns about accessibility, privacy and security as well as proposed changes to core technology infrastructure, including wireless and email and calendaring. This represents the importance of student input into new directions for technology as well as the ongoing maintenance and function of the essential technological tools that support students in their academic endeavours.

This final report highlights the ITSAC discussions for Fall 2006 and Winter 2007. Committee members consider these key areas as the highest priority issues for students.

## II. Membership

### Information Technology Student Advisory Committee – 2006/7 Members

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### **III. Wireless and Wireless Printing**

The ITSAC committee believes that wireless connectivity on campus is good, but there is always room for expansion. The committee believes that wireless should be available in large classrooms and common areas. The strength of wireless signals in some areas was discussed as a concern. Security was also a main concern as students want their personal computers to be protected while using the university's wireless internet.

The committee learned that by September 2007, approximately 1/3 of the campus will have wireless coverage. CCS will be posting signs where ever wireless service is available, but the ITSAC committee feels that more needs to be done to let students know about the new wireless areas that have been added.

As of January 2007, wireless printing was available on campus. The committee appreciates the change and the ability for students to use any wireless connection to print to any printer in the Library building and the OVC Learning Commons as well as other areas. ITSAC doesn't believe that students are aware of this additional printing capability and suggest that signs need to be installed by the printers to easily visualize where the printers are located and how it works. Additional ideas from the committee included informing Residence Life Staff about wireless and the ability to print from within residences to printers elsewhere on campus. The committee also wants to acknowledge that there are many students with Macintosh computers and they would also like to have WPA security.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ITSAC recommends that CCS continue with their enhancements to the wireless connectivity on campus, and as part of this they recommend increased efforts to ensure students are aware of the improvements. ITSAC feels that more needs to be done to improve signage for wireless areas and wireless printing in more visible areas. An ad in the Ontarion would be a good way for students to see what CCS has done to improve wireless over the past year.

## **IV. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**

Chris Graves, the new U of G Privacy Officer, attended an ITSAC meeting to discuss privacy issues and explain how the university will adhere to FIPPA privacy legislation. The committee brought forward a concern about the CSA and their ability to access student information for the student Health and Dental plans and the impact that FIPPA will have on students overall. Chris used the @uoguelph.ca directory as an example of how everyone, even outside the campus, can access personal information of students, staff and faculty. This has some privacy implications.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It is difficult for ITSAC to make strong recommendations around this issue because the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) is legislation and not simply an internal practice or policy of the University of Guelph. Recommendations from ITSAC should align with this legislation to ensure the university is meeting its legal requirement to the government around privacy issues on campus. The committee does see the value in Chris Graves' continued effort to meet with all groups on campus to provide information and to follow up with them. This is a challenge with typical one-year turnover in executive positions on college governments, the CSA, the GSA, and IHC. Despite the challenges, ITSAC recommends that Chris work specifically with the CSA and the GSA to ensure student information required to manage the student Health and Dental plans on campus is accessible. As well, from time to time, the CSA and student groups require specific information to run elections, distribute bus passes, etc. This information would include student name, student identification number, name of College they are registered in, home mailing address, registration status (full- or part-time) and eligibility status for health and dental plans.

The committee recognizes the importance of a signed confidentiality agreement between parties and that it will be respected. From the Confidentiality Agreement, student groups are required to ensure strict protection measures are taken in our offices and to ensure information is protected. The committee also recommends that Privacy Commissioner (Chris Graves), or someone else, be able to work with student groups to ensure measures are taken and appropriate safe guards are implemented

ITSAC understands the responsibility shared by all parties including university departments, colleges, and student government & groups for ensuring information is protected in accordance with the FIPPA. Student groups will be satisfied if the university fulfills its obligation to provide students with specific information they need to run and manage student services on campus.

## V. Email and Calendaring

### *Email*

From the perspective of the committee, the University of Guelph email system has not kept up with the demands of students. Student users have increased their expectations as a result of their use of free email services from Google (Gmail), MSN Hotmail, and Yahoo! Mail. Frustrations with the current email environment include the desire for increased email storage capacity, enhanced and more effective SPAM filtering tools, multiple modes of access through both webmail and thick clients. One concern with SMTP mail has been the various email server settings that students have to use depending on their location or role on campus.

In many cases, students have opted to forward their U of G e-mail to one of the more robust email service providers to benefit from the breadth of functionality, improved usability, disk space, aesthetics, and scalability. The users then benefit from many of the newest technologies released by these corporate such as integrated calendaring, document management, spreadsheet management, and instant messaging chat application integration. Both Gmail and Yahoo! mail have both integrated their chat applications into their e-mail services. As a result of the use of other mail providers, the benefit of Single Sign On that was a major selling point for the University's myPortico web portal application has not been embraced by the current U of G students.

Spam email continues to be a frustration from two perspectives. Some students experienced a block on @uguelph.ca email when sending to other institutions or corporations due to spam coming from our domain. At one point at least the commercial spam system SpamCop ([www.spamcop.net](http://www.spamcop.net)) listed one or more of the U of G SMTP mail servers as a source of spam on their SpamCop Blocking List (SCBL). This is frustrating for e-mail users. Students also receive vast amounts of spam in their inbox. Many students do not know about the Spam Assassin software available for them to use, or how to configure it. Even if using Spam Assassin, some users are still receiving spam mail, which is also frustrating. It would be helpful if more information could be sent to students to ensure they know this tool is available to them.

Many graduating students would like to keep their @uoguelph.ca e-mail address. Currently, alumni are able to pay \$10 a month for their @uoguelph.ca e-mail address and central login, web site storage. Many students believe that \$120 a year is over priced for an e-mail address.

ITSAC members welcomed the news about the initiative to replace the current email systems for students on campus.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ITSAC members believe that students will welcome a new and improved email system and look forward to seeing what this will be. If it includes the functionality students are experiencing in other email clients, it will be well received. Spam issues need to be dealt with aggressively, and

communications need to improve so that students can learn about the tools available to help combat spam in their inbox. It would be beneficial for students to have an email address that that can be maintained after they graduate and at no cost.

## ***Calendaring***

Students would greatly benefit from a calendaring system. Currently, students must copy out their class schedules to spreadsheets or their own calendaring applications or print hard copies. It would be much better if a calendaring system was available that would be automatically populated with course and exam information and that could be used to schedule personal and academic appointments outside of the classroom as well. Integration amongst calendars used by various systems on campus would prove most helpful to students. An integrated calendar was a requested feature for MyPortico, but the functionality is not yet in place. Importing and exporting calendars using a single file is available, but not a syndicated version.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The lack of a University of Guelph student integrated calendaring system is a problem. Students have been forced to use a variety of calendaring systems if they take a combination of distance and on campus courses, leaving users with the task of maintaining multiple calendars. The MyPortico calendar does very little to remedy the calendar problem at this time.

## **VI. Computer Pools and Lab Standards**

The committee discussed the appropriate use of available funds for replacing or upgrading computers in the Library. The committee recommends that a combination of laptops and desktops would be best, as there may be insufficient space for installing many more desktops, and insufficient power outlets to increase the laptop pool. The committee feels that an electrical upgrade is necessary in the library to enable the addition of more desktops/laptops, and also to provide power for those students who bring their own laptops to the library. With regards to power on campus, as laptop use increases, it has become clear that accessible and intuitively placed outlets will be key. The Committee realizes that this may require upgrades to the existing electrical infrastructure to handle the increased power demand. It was noted several times that library computers are being used for non-academic purposes, even during peak hours. The new “no parking” policy in the library has been very effective: “parking” is now frowned upon by the students using the library, however, the Committee feels that signage reminding students that they should only use computers for academic pursuits during peak times could help alleviate congestion during busy times. Another solution could be an increased presence and monitoring by library and CCS staff.

ITSAC discussed the potential of creating a program whereby students could ‘lease’ computers from the University of Guelph through their tuition. A benefit of this program could include a single software package that could be used for the duration of students’ programs. However, concern was raised about the effects of such a program on already high tuition rates and the



potential logistical issues inherent in such a program. ITSAC unanimously felt that this sort of program would not be feasible for the University of Guelph. ITSAC felt that our institution is too large and differences between various academic departments and student groups on campus makes this solution difficult.

In terms of campus lab standards, ITSAC felt that labs across campus are poorly standardized, and the same is true for classrooms (Rozanski versus MacKinnon). In computer labs, efforts should be made to upgrade and standardize all applications and hardware. In classrooms, efforts should be made to make the classrooms more laptop friendly, for example installing more power outlets, ensuring reliable wireless internet coverage and increasing desk space. ITSAC also stressed the importance of educating and providing support for faculty and staff on classroom technology so that they know how to successfully incorporate these technologies into their lectures.

In terms of software access, designing either a floating platform or centralized server that students can log into from any workstation on campus and receive their relevant applications would be beneficial. ITSAC felt that this type of floating software licensing model is absolutely critical for adaptive software, since students with disabilities can potentially be in any course, any classroom, any academic program and any computer lab across campus.

In terms of centralized printing, ITSAC felt that students did not know about the system. Finding a new way of informing students about printing, (i.e. rename the printing system “Print Anywhere” instead of ‘Distributed Printing System”, correspond with Student Life to inform First Year students) could ensure students are aware of this critical resource. It is crucial that the location of all printers within the printing system be posted at each of the printing stations.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ITSAC recommends adding more outlets to the public areas in the library and in classrooms to make these areas more laptop friendly. ITSAC feels that the library Distribute Printing System isn't clear to students and recommends the following:

- a. All printer locations should be listed at every print release station.
- b. The name of the Distributed Printing System should be changed to something more intuitive: like “print anywhere”
- c. Ensure clear signage and advertising of printing locations.
- d. Advertise the wireless printing and the fact that students can install it on their own laptops.
- e. Provide information to res life staff about this system so that new students are in the loop.
- f. Try to get wireless printing working on Macs.

ITSAC recommends that signs are needed on the computers to remind students to use computers for academic pursuits only during peak hours, but also feels that the no parking policy has already been a huge success. ITSAC recommends that computer labs across campus have up to date hardware and software. A base level of software should be available in all labs across campus, and ITSAC recommends the use of floating licensing/licensing servers where possible to keep software costs down.

## VII. WebAdvisor

Despite the usefulness of WebAdvisor, students have noted several problems when attempting to access the site for grades, course selection and other academic information. The majority of problems involve log-in and accessibility issues.

- During peak times, the WebAdvisor system tends to crash mid-session, sometimes resulting in difficulty logging back onto the system.
- A lack of system robustness tends to result in difficulty registering for courses at students' specified registration times.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

It appears that more system resources are required to improve WebAdvisor's performance, primarily during peak course registration times, in addition to improved co-ordination with the administrative bodies responsible for WebAdvisor and its divisions. ITSAC wonders whether technical improvements (e.g. more servers) would be necessary to enhance WebAdvisor performance during peak times, or if non-technical solutions such as time-sharing, pre-picking courses or further staggering course selection might help lessen the strain WebAdvisor during peak usage times. Understanding that some of these measures have already been implemented, more attention needs to be placed on these issues to improve the accessibility and efficiency of the WebAdvisor system.

ITSAC recommends having informative error messages when something goes wrong with WebAdvisor. Several of the current error messages are not informative and give users absolutely no indication as to what the problem was.

ITSAC would appreciate the chance to dialogue with someone from the WebAdvisor team to discuss issues surrounding WebAdvisor. WebAdvisor is one of the only online student services that has not sent a representative to speak to ITSAC in its 4 years.

## VIII. MyPortico

ITSAC welcomed the opportunity to speak directly to Gerrit Bos, MyPortico Project Manager. Some committee members have been involved in providing input on MyPortico design through a classroom project as well. Suggestions raised by the committee members included the following:

- The icons to maximize, minimize and focus a channel did not seem intuitive.
- A double login problem allows one person to log into the forum and at the same time someone else can use the same login and request a forum.
- Accessibility and adaptive software is a concern. For example, the back button is important for screen readers but breaks functionality in MyPortico.
- User feedback can be important. There should be a way to publicize feedback so users can see how they are impacting the project.
- Include The Cannon website from the CSA.
- CCS Software Distribution should be included on MyPortico.
- MyPortico requires a broadband connection and can't be used on dial up.
- The ability to "opt-out" or remove channels that are not wanted.
- The ability to search channels on MyPortico.
- Clubs would like to be integrated into the RSS news reader.
- The ability to download an entire folder from the Briefcase. Also, the ability to see quota in Briefcase if it exists.
- Email, WebAdvisor and WebCT should have their own tabs and have these open inline.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The committee sees many benefits to MyPortico but also sees the need for ongoing development and improvements to make the system more interesting to users. The content in the portal is great, but the user interface is what the committee thinks needs a lot of work in order to make the portal have better usage. As mentioned in the email section, there has to be improvements in other online services to help strengthen the interest in MyPortico and its content.

## IX. Hybrid Learning Initiative

ITSAC discussed the future of hybrid learning in university education as a result of an invitation from the Hybrid Learning committee. Some students prefer the online component of a class and others prefer the in-class component. Integrating technology into in-class courses, such as, podcasts, streaming video lectures, online discussion forums, text messaging, as examples, could help courses reach out to students with different learning styles. These initiatives should be supported in courses, but not forced upon students, or intended to replace the traditional in-class environment. We have heard about iTunes U, and think that offering podcasts of course lectures could be of great use to students. Offering lectures in several formats also provides huge benefits to students with disabilities.

Ensuring multiple modes of contact for professors (both online and in-class) ensures that students can reach professors by the method they are most comfortable with and have available to them. Examples would include email, course forums, instant messaging as well as face-to-face access, private or public chat opportunities. Online forums can act as an online repository of information for students, so if a subset of students has the same question, then they can all see the initial question and response. This ensures all students have the same information, and helps to eliminate unnecessary repetition. The committee believes online forums must be monitored by professors to deter any misuse or derailment of productive discussion. Courses in which the professors or TAs moderate the forums are ones in which the students feel connected to their teachers. Moderated forums discourage students from mistreating each other and their professors. The committee feels that support from both CCS and TSS would encourage professors to incorporate various technologies in their teaching approach. By providing educational opportunities to professors on these issues, CCS and TSS could also be instrumental in making professors aware of how important these technologies are to students.

Ensuring that students have adequate support and training/instruction and online training videos for these new technological offerings, is important. You cannot introduce new technologies into courses without ensuring all stakeholders know how to use them. If stakeholders are shown the benefits of the technologies then they are more likely to buy in. Web CT works very well for providing a way to get course materials to the students. Generally, students like the way Web CT is used. The committee perceives that there is some inconsistency with the level of expertise and use of WebCT from one course to another or one professor to another. There is an email component in WebCT that students do not use and they feel it is redundant due to the existing campus wide email infrastructure.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

ITSAC members had varying perspectives on the use of hybrid learning in the classroom. There are benefits for enhancing the learning experience with technology, but the experience varies depending on the delivery and the course content. The level of inconsistency between courses and disciplines is unfortunate. Increased use of technology could be especially beneficial to students with accessibility challenges. The university should examine how other institutions provide online instruction/hybrid courses and see what has or has not worked for them.

## **X. Future of Technology at U of G**

### ***IT Governance***

Mike Ridley, CIO, presented the new IT Governance to the committee. Students were pleased to see that ITSAC was mentioned as one of the important stakeholder groups and would have an opportunity to provide input on current and future technology and iCampus related initiatives. The committee is interested in ensuring that information is widely disseminated to the student body in a way that will not only inform them about issues that are taking place, but how it impacts on them. ITSAC sees itself as the voice of student technology concerns, and in that role they want to ensure there are channels in place that will allow information to flow between ITSAC and the student body and in turn, back through ITSAC to the appropriate IT Governance committee(s) and high level decision makers. It is important to ensure information is cyclical. The committee also would like to see a method for students to provide feedback on specific decisions that are made via the IT Governance model. There is also a desire for transparency in the decision making process.

### ***Library Tech Survey***

The committee was very pleased to know that there was a survey that would assess expectations for technology on campus and the current way in which students integrate technology into their academic and student life. The committee provided feedback on the creation and content of the survey before it was released to the student body. The students also participated in the survey itself. The committee is looking forward to reviewing the survey results in the next school year and appreciates the extra effort put into this by the survey committee members from the Library.

## **XI. Conclusion**

Technology is a growing component in the academic and student life experience at U of G. The use of technology is increasingly common in the classroom and in all activities on campus. The committee is increasingly aware of the importance of sharing content from ITSAC with their peers. The IT Governance initiative and the Library Tech Survey are examples of new ways in which IT service providers are able to learn more about students' experiences and opinions about technology, but there is still a gap when it comes to sharing technology information directly with students. ITSAC members are interested in finding ways that they can share committee information with the larger student body, and discussed ideas like a column in *The Ontarion* and with email mailings to students. One of the challenges is that the committee lacks administrative resources and this has had an impact on carrying forward the committee's business from meeting to meeting to free up other resources for moving ideas towards action.

There are many exciting technology initiatives taking place at U of G. ITSAC is pleased with the information it has been privy to this year, including the IT Governance initiative and the new Email and Calendaring project. Committee members are encouraged by their ability to speak directly to the individuals who are making important decisions about the direction of IT on campus and they look forward to the ongoing role the committee can play in ensuring the perspective of students is shared. ITSAC members have benefited from the discussions that take place at committee meetings, and are committed to providing input and working with the IT service providers on campus to see ongoing improvements in the student experience with technology.