Microsoft Exchange

A project group comprised of IT staff from across campus formed in 2007 for the purpose of exploring growing interest in Microsoft Exchange. Microsoft Exchange Server is a email messaging and collaborative software product. The primary objective of the group is determining whether the implementation of Exchange would have the potential to become the primary email collaboration tool for faculty and staff. If so, Exchange would replace the current Sendmail and POP/IMAP environment. The scope of the project also included integrating a Blackberry Enterprise Server (BES) into the Exchange environment. A BES works with an Exchange server to seamlessly extend a client mailbox to a handheld device. Calendaring and email become real-time as changes on one are immediately reflected on the other.

The outline of work initially included an in-depth assessment of the current email infrastructure followed by several design options of the Exchange environment. This work was done in tandem by members of the project group with the help of consultants contracted from Dell. After the design was chosen, hardware and software were purchased, installed, and configured. The install was done in a classroom style setting with members of the project group to facilitate learning Exchange from the ground up.

At present, the environment is up and running with a small group of test users. The current phase of work includes testing various features, accessibility, storage requirements, backup and recovery, and functionality on various platforms. The next step is to include a pilot test group for further testing. After that, information collected will help determine whether campus-wide adoption will go ahead and with what time frame. Cost and other requirements would then have to be assessed as well as a rollout strategy.

Currently the group investigating Exchange has been asked to explore calendaring as a potential replacement for Bookit; it has been determined that calendaring is an important feature in the deployment of this product.

Brent Clerk has been instrumental in this project as our representative from AHS Computing.

Updates to Teaching Classrooms

Updates to teaching classrooms are an ongoing project. Over the summer, BMH 1005, 1035, and the Clarica Auditorium computers had hardware upgrades and were converted to Microsoft Vista. In addition, LHI 1703 is scheduled to be outfitted with new controls for the data projector, similar to the setup in LHI 2703 & BMH 3119. The controls are designed to simplify the process of connecting a laptop to a data projector or playing a DVD/VHS tape. In 3701, the 3M Display board has been replaced with a plasma monitor.

For further information about the technology that is available in the various teaching classrooms in BMH, please check out:
http://www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/ahsco/services/dataproj.html
New Email Service

An alternative email service is now available from IST. The new services features a larger quota (1 gigabyte), faster services, access from mywaterloo and Squirrel mail, and authentication to UWdir/Quest. Anyone (including faculty and staff) are welcome to try out the new system.

Instructions are available at: http://mailservices.uwaterloo.ca/imap/StudentEmail.php

Plans are underway to migrate all AHS students over to the new service before January 2009.

Virtualization—The Wave of the Future

Due to increasingly powerful computers, there has been a movement towards virtualization in computing. Virtualization is a way of running more than one operating system, like Windows, on a single machine. It can be done by installing a program, such as Virtual PC, on your computer. The program is capable of creating a virtual machine. The virtual machine will behave just like your computer did before Windows was installed. From this point, Windows (or another operating system such as Red Hat Linux or Unix) can be installed on the virtual machine. The virtualized computer will behave just like an ordinary computer, except it will be running in a window on your desktop.

There are a number of reasons virtualization is useful:

Consolidating machines

Several operating systems can be installed on the same machine. This is especially useful for servers, which are notorious for not fully utilizing their resources. Running several servers on the same machine can save a lot of money in terms of cost of machines and electricity that is saved.

Application Incompatibilities

After operating system upgrades, some programs may not work. The old operating system can be virtualized on the new system, and the legacy programs can be installed on the old operating system.

Currently, AHS Computing is investigating virtualization to run legacy software, consolidate server usage and provide a Terminal Service server for off-site access to certain software packages.

Web Advisory Committee

Over the summer, the UW Web Advisory Committee made some minor tweaks to the UW’s Website Common Look and Feel. Most of these changes were minor and do not affect AHS’s web pages.

In addition, VP Meg Beckel has formed a UW Identity Strategy Committee to look into the overall UW “brand.” Kelly Teahen presented an overview of the Committee’s work to the Web Advisory Committee in July. (She also presented to AHS members in August.)

The Identity Committee’s work is expected to extend into the Winter term and by the 2nd quarter of 2009, changes are expected to be released on a new Common look and feel for the web.

New Student Lab Computers

AHS Computing has outfitted the undergrad student labs in BMH 1038 & 2302 in addition to the RLS Grad lab, with brand new Dell Optiplex 755 pcs running Windows Vista (the HSG Grad lab was outfitted with new workstations last year and were converted to Vista during the same time as the other upgrades). These PIV Quad-Core PCs with 19” monitors are a significant upgrade over the tired workhorses that were in the labs. Our labs are the first on campus to be converted over to the Windows Vista Operating System. Over 30 computers were installed with Vista and physically put into place, including security measures, during the month of August. Earlier in the summer, a significant amount of development and testing went into getting the labs ready for the move. This included testing legacy software, preparing infrastructure and creating the necessary O/S settings needed for the deployment into the student environment. Lowell Williamson has been the lead on this project for AHS Computing. There are still some growing pains during the first term in production. However, AHS Computing is leading the way on campus in an effort to provide its students with the best computer experience possible.