University of Minnesota

Office of Information Technology

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DMC Spotlight Issue

Using Technology to Support Consensus Building

Each month, Digital Media Center (DMC) consultants publish a "Spotlight Issues" article on our Web site about a current technology-enhanced learning (TEL) issue highlighted at sessions of the TEL Seminar Series, in our classes, or at our program or project meetings. This month's article is excerpted below.

Polls in classrooms

Having survived another presidential election, most people are probably tired of reading about polls. However, polls are making their way into classroom environments. Many instructors in large classes are using standalone student response systems that enable students to respond to quizzes and surveys during class and enable instructors to immediately count and share the results. Similar polling features are also built into other tools, such as Macromedia Breeze Live, a Web conferencing tool OIT makes available to all instructors at the University of Minnesota, and the University's myU portal. Usually, such tools are used to gauge student opinion on key issues or to determine class-wide comprehension of important information. These are useful to instructors of large and online classes.

Polls can also be used for consensus building by enabling students to discuss a topic until they reach a mutual agreement. Polling tools can thus be used to structure and drive as well as summarize or enhance a discussion. For example, the instructor of a large history class could pose a statement such as, "Abraham Lincoln was justified in using force to bring the seceded Southern states back to the union," and require the class to come to a decision using a jury system on whether this statement is true or false. Students who elected to share their opinions

Polling tools can be used to structure and drive as well as summarize or enhance a discussion.

would be compelled to support them and listen to opposing views. Students who did not participate in the discussion would serve as jurors and vote on the statement after all the arguments were heard.

Campus project

Kevin Smith, a professor of nursing, recently integrated use of a polling tool into a Web-based problem-based learning (PBL) environment to encourage consensus building. Students at various locations participated completely online in real time.

First, the instructor posted a typical scenario for nurses doing intake assessment, such as "a person has come in with an earache." This appeared in a static text area so students could review it throughout the process. The students brainstormed possible causes of the problem and discussed the merits of each suggestion using a chat tool. The instructor used the polling tool throughout the discussion to enable the class to either accept or reject each suggested cause, generating a short list of likely causes. After gaining experience with the process, students took turns leading their own sessions, posing their own scenarios (e.g. a patient experiencing trouble breathing), moderating the chat, creating polls as necessary, and building consensus.

When surveyed about their use of the tool, the students overwhelmingly responded that they learned more about the material and felt more connected to their classmates and the instructor, even though half had never participated in an online chat and two thirds had never participated in an educational online chat. This suggests that the combination of problem-based learning and consensus building helped students learn as well as create positive first impressions of online educational activities.

One key to the success of this project is that Smith did not present students with an "either/or" dichotomy. Students generated a list of possible diagnoses and reduced it by process of elimination. Some items were withdrawn by their originators if there was a lack of support. Others were originally met with skepticism but gained favor on the strength of argument. This is the process recommended by Sarla Stensaas in "Technology and Classroom Authority" (see the Bibliography section below).

Whether using a student response system or an online polling tool, consensus building activities compel students to consider their preconceptions carefully, argue persuasively, and engage in active listening — skills useful in almost any discipline.

Bibliography

Literature about the use of polling for educational purposes includes the following:

Stensaas, Sarla. "Technology and Classroom Authority." Radical Pedagogy 1: no. 1 (spring 1999). http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue1_1/stensaas.html.

For additional entries see the DMC site Consensus Building Spotlight Issues page at http://dmc.umn.edu/spotlight/consensus.shtml.

Campus resources

These resources may help instructors further explore the educational uses of polls.

- Meet with one of our consultants to get design help. See http://dmc.umn.edu/consultations/.
- Find out more about student response systems on the Office of Classroom Management site at http://www.classroom.umn.edu/notes/support_srs.html.
- Find out more about Breeze Live on the University's Breeze support site at http://breeze.umn.edu.
- Use the University's MyU portal to enable students to participate in polls at https://www.myu.umn.edu.

Kurtis Scaletta, Digital Media Center

News Briefs

Via VNS, Zambia to Minnesota

Video Network Services (VNS) provided a video conference connection for the U.S. Embassy in Lusaka, Zambia. The Embassy had asked a University of Minnesota student, Chizumba Shepanade, a Fulbright Grantee, to provide a Zambian perspective of U.S. elections to help the embassy fulfill their outreach objective of educating the Zambian community on "free and fair" elections.

VNS provided the video conference connection on Tuesday, November 2. Although the conference occurred at 7 p.m. CST, for the Zambian audience it was 3 a.m. In a follow up letter, Laura Gritz, Public Diplomacy Officer for the Embassy wrote that the conference was very informative and a great success, thanking both Chizumba and Video Network Services for the live video conference.

Lyn Weiler, Video Network Services, http://www.umn.edu/vns

For sale: refurbished computer equipment

University Computer Services (UCS) offers refurbished computer equipment (for example, Macs, PCs, monitors, laptops) for resale at very competitive prices. All equipment is tested by UCS hardware technicians and includes a 30-day warranty (unless otherwise stated on the computer equipment). For a detailed list of current computer equipment for sale, see http://www.umn.edu/ucs.

Sign up for e-mail updates about equipment for sale or exclusive UCS promotions at http://www.umn.edu/ucs/MailList.php.

Renee Rivers, University Computer Services

Helpdesk software license available

The Office of Information Technology offers and supports a wide range of services and processes. Tracking and analyzing inquiries about these services and processes is one tool that OIT help desks use to ensure that customers' needs are met, regardless of whether the inquiry is resolved immediately or is escalated to a specialist. The software that all OIT helpdesks use helps us streamline our workflow and improve customer service. This software, ServiceCenter, is available for other University departments that are interested in using a tracking system. For more information about how this software is used, read on. For information about licensing this software, contact simin@umn.edu.

Which help desk?

Since 1998 OIT 1-Help has used ServiceCenter. Since 2000 Financial Systems Support (FSS) has also used ServiceCenter. Both helpdesks use ServiceCenter to create "problem" tickets. Technically these systems could talk to each other; however, no effort had been committed to this task. Whenever OIT 1-Help had a problem to hand off to the Financial Helpline, 1-Help would close the problem ticket noting that the caller was transferred to the Financial Helpline. Then the Financial Helpline would open a ticket in their system to accommodate the caller.

With the advent of new PeopleSoft financial systems, the director of FSS, Linda Woock, knew that it would be important to tightly integrate the Financial Helpline with the OIT technology helpdesks.

The HRMS scenario was similar to that of the Financial Helpline and OIT 1-Help. Miriam Ward, the Human Resources Management System (HRMS) director, had also envisioned using problem management software that could "talk" with other helpdesks. In a few months OHR Employee Benefits was going to roll-out web-based benefits open enrollment, and

they needed to be able to quickly respond to callers' questions. The Benefits support center had a good manual system for tracking calls that came into their center; but to be prepared for self-service open enrollment, they needed to automate the tracking and follow up.

Standardizing on ServiceCenter

Late last spring OIT, FSS, and OHR agreed to pursue bringing FSS and OHR onto the ServiceCenter system OIT uses and supports. Timing was important. All three departments needed to find a good time for the implementation to fit into their processes. During early summer a project team of developers, business analysts, and functional end-users from the three departments gathered requirements; development occurred nearly simultaneously. The Financial Helpline implemented right before the start of fall semester, and OHR right after.

ServiceCenter and benefits enrollment

The Financial and HRMS call centers knew what it was like using a tracking system, since they had experience with using them in the past. Because the Benefits support center had never used an automated call tracking system, they wanted to be certain that it would work well so that they were well prepared to support self-service benefits enrollment. Kathy Pouliot, Benefits Services Manager, couldn't be more pleased with the implementation. The tracking software is quick and easy for them to use and fits into their business process perfectly**.** They successfully handled nearly 8,000 calls during open enrollment with about 360 of these calls requiring further investigation and follow up.

The ServiceCenter call/incident management system has provided an efficient and user-friendly system to document all Benefit ServiceCenter volume: telephone calls, e-mails, walk-in clients and appointments. In addition, it has streamlined the workflow for the entire department. Staff members are able to verify if another individual is working on an issue, triage to the appropriate person for resolution and follow-up with the employee. It has been a great tool during this busy Open Enrollment period. The staff really appreciates the value of having this system on a daily basis.

What's next?

Other information technology functional areas are also considering using ServiceCenter. A future addition will be the implementation of a ServiceCenter-integrated knowledgebase. Reporting from ServiceCenter will also be further enhanced. Self-service is in the works for the future; customers could open their own trouble tickets and follow up without ever having to call a helpline.

The possibilities for integrating the tool are endless. More information about ServiceCenter is online at: http://www.peregrine.com/products/servicecenter.asp.

Joann Conradson, OIT/Networking and Telecommunications Services, Jan Medill, Financial Systems Support, Kathryn Pouliot, Office of Human Resources

Protect private data

Did you know university data that is stored on or accessed by computers and other electronic devices must be secured against intentional or unintentional loss of confidentiality, integrity, or availability regardless of location. Examples of private/non-public data:

- Social security number, birth date, and gender
- Home phone number and address
- Veteran and disability status
- Health records and student grades (see below)
- Parking leases
- Location of assets
- Anonymous donors
- Ethnicity, citizenship, citizen visa code
- Trade secrets or intellectual property, such as research activities
- Linking a person with the subject about which the library user has requested information or materials

Non-directory student information may not be released except under certain prescribed conditions. Non-releasable information includes:

- Grades, courses taken, schedule, test scores
- Advising records, educational services received
- Disciplinary actions

More information here: http://www.umn.edu/oit/security/privatedata.html.

Tips from OIT's 1-HELP

Wilson Library's New Information Commons

Caroline Crouse, Wilson Library, http://www.lib.umn.edu

In the spring of 2003, the Libraries conducted surveys and focus groups with undergraduate students and faculty to find ways to enhance student learning.

When students are assigned a project involving research and writing, they have to visit several different places on campus to complete each project. They might start at one of 14 libraries to do their research, go to a computer lab to write the paper, and, finally, find the Center for Writing to get help with their writing skills.

At best, this wastes students' time; and at worst, it encourages students to skimp on the research or writing portion of the paper. So, instead of going to the library to look through scholarly databases for research information and taking advantage of excellent reference librarians, the student might just look to Internet sources (and not get the quality information they need). Instead of using cutting-edge multimedia programs to add impact to their presentations or papers, they may settle for just using Microsoft Word. Or, instead of getting proofreading help that will make them better writers, they may settle for mediocre writing.

The Libraries recognized that these kinds of services need to be collated to ensure that students make the most of what the University can offer.

The Libraries investigate…

In the spring of 2003, the Libraries conducted surveys and focus groups with undergraduate students and faculty to find ways to enhance student learning. We found that students, above all, need a place of their own that fosters a sense of community.

Some of the things we heard were:

> *"You need to do something to show that libraries are not obsolete in the face of the Internet."* — Undergraduate

> *"I don't know why you don't have a computer lab in Wilson. It makes you seem behind the times."* — Faculty

> *"[You need to be] making the library seem more central to what's going on in students' lives."* — Faculty

> *"We need to get students back in the library."* — Faculty

81% of the student respondents identified a need for "one place where students can research and write their papers with librarians, writing tutors, and computer assistants all there."

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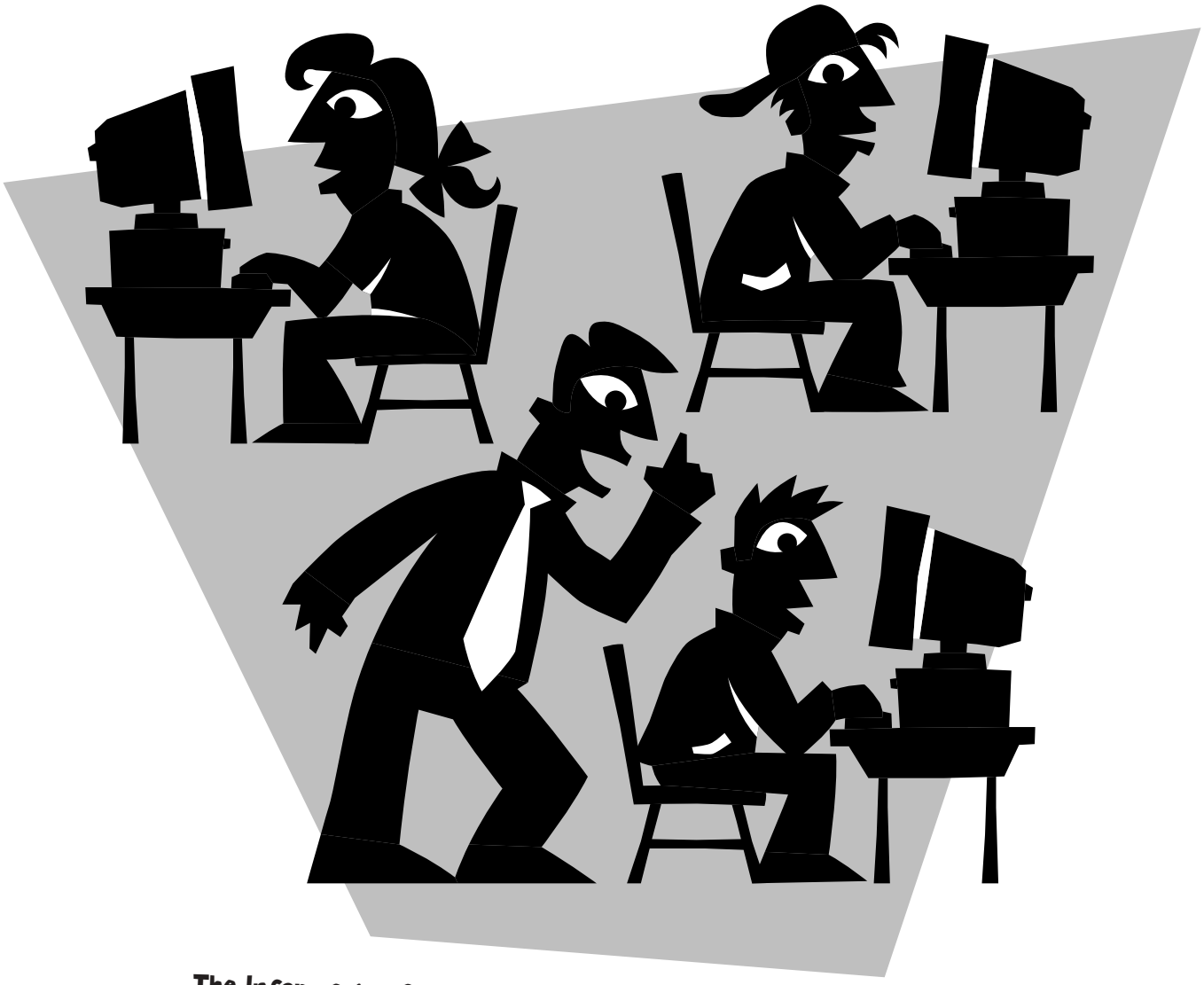

The Information Commons (IC) is a place for students to call their "home-base" for academic papers and projects. There, they will be able to work on projects from beginning to end with the resources and experts they need to succeed.

What did the library do in response?

In response to these findings, the Libraries requested funding in its 2003 Compact proposal to build a new integrated center in Wilson Library. Provost Christine Mazier was able to allocate $180,000 in one time monies and $69,000 in recurring money to support the project. Soon after receiving these funds, the Libraries began planning the Information Commons as a central place for students to perform research and produce academic projects.

A new place for students

On November 11, 2004 the University Libraries unveiled a new service: the Wilson Library Information Commons. The mission of the Information

Commons is to provide a place and supportive environment for students to:

- Expand their knowledge and expertise in research, writing, and technology
- Collaborate with their peers
- Develop skills to achieve their educational goals

The Information Commons (IC) is a place for students to call their "home-base" for academic papers and projects. There, they will be able to work on projects from beginning to end with the resources and experts they need to succeed.

The IC will have extended hours, a comfortable environment, and knowledgeable staff to teach students the research, writing, and computer skills they need to succeed at the U.

What equipment is available?

The Wilson Library Information Commons includes:

- 34 Macs and PCs loaded with Microsoft Office, Adobe GoLive, and Adobe Photoshop Elements
- 2 multimedia computers that are fully loaded with Adobe, Macromedia, and Microsoft Office programs
- 2 scanners
- 2 flash drive readers
- Color printer

But, best of all, the Information Commons will also have staff ready to assist students with:

- Research
- Computer applications
- Writing papers
- Creating multi-media projects

When did it open?

The grand opening for the Information Commons was November 11, 2004. During the Grand Opening celebrations, we offered tours of the Commons, refreshments, and raffled a free iPod for students!

Please stop in!

The Information Commons will be open:

- Monday–Thursday: 9 a.m. to midnight
- Friday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Saturday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Sunday: noon to midnight

During all IC hours staff will be available to assist students with research and computing questions.

A writing tutor will also be available in the Information Commons Monday-Wednesday from 2–5 p.m.

You can find out more information about the Information Commons at our website: http://www.lib.umn.edu/about/undergrad/infocommons.

Communications about this column can be addressed to Caroline Crouse, 180 Wilson Library, West Bank.

Information Commons in Wilson

Weekday	Opens	Closes
Mon.–Thursday	9 a.m.	midnight
Friday	9 a.m.	6 p.m.
Saturday	10 a.m.	6 p.m.
Sunday	noon	midnight

Writing tutor available

Mon.–Wednesday	2 p.m.	5 p.m.

http://www.lib.umn.edu/about/undergrad/infocommons

▼ Help

Computer Misuse or Abuse (also see Procedure 2.8.1.1)

- Emergency Network Help Line 612-625-0006
- Non-emergency, e.g., spamming ..... abuse@umn.edu

1–HELP 612-301-4357

Dial 1-HELP. Listen to the voice menu list of options. Press the number of your desired option.

- Technology Help..... www.umn.edu/adcs/help

▼ Modem pool for active UM accounts

Internet/PPP: up to 53kps if v.90..... 612-627-4250

▼ Quick Guide

- Internet/Email account options .... www.umn.edu/validate
- Office of Information Technology .....www.umn.edu/oit
- One Stop Services ..... onestop.umn.edu
- Techmart ..... www.techmart.umn.edu
- Computer Accommodation Program ..... cap.umn.edu
- University Computer Services ..... www.umn.edu/ucs
- MNCAT/LUMINA (Library).....www.lib.umn.edu
- UM News Server.....news.umn.edu

Associate Vice President and
Chief Information Officer, Steve Cawley 612-625-8855

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Twin Cities campus address label trivia: 1st # is record #; 2nd # is your Campus Mail delivery code, http://umn.edu/lookup

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