

What's Your Favorite Website?

"Mine is www.imdb.com," says Jack Barbera in the English Department. "It's a good place to get basic info and trivia on any film. I find myself using it almost every day."

"My absolute favorite website is www.foodtv.com," says Heather Crockett at the Counseling Center. "I like to download recipes from there."

Amy Howell at Printing Services recommends www.usnpi.com, which has links to newspapers and other resources across the U.S. She notes you can even get to small Mississippi newspapers from there.

Michael Newton in the Office of Media Production and Distributed Learning likes www.jibjab.com, an off the wall animation site that hit the big time last year with their humorous election season offerings.

In the Office of Information Technology, Buster Hale's favorite is www.oglobo.com.br, but you'll need to read a little Portuguese since it's the website of the leading newspaper in Rio, Brazil.

"One of my favorites is www.tucows.com," says John Schuster, also in IT. "Tucows stands for 'The Ultimate

Collection of Windows Software.' It's a rating and collection site for free-ware and shareware."

Angelina Altobellis in the Office of University Advancement checks Arts and Letters Daily at www.aldaily.com for "current articles on the humanities and much else that I lack the time and dedication to discover elsewhere."

Penny Rice at the Faculty Technology Development Center gives www.theforce.net her thumbs up. "It's a Star Wars website," she explains, "and it may not be helpful or good, but it's sure a lot of fun!"

Got a favorite website you want to share? E-mail us at technews@olemiss.edu!



New UM Website *continued from front cover*

Mims relates that this merging of form and function can make for interesting committee meetings.

"It was tough sometimes, because everyone had their own area of expertise," he recalls. "Some of us understood the technology and what's involved in making it work, and others in the room had an eye for what really looks good and wanted to see that happen. Somehow you have to bring it all together, and in the end, I think this was a good example of how a committee's supposed to work."

Mims notes the website is a work in progress, with some elements still to be added this year. But he feels his time and effort, and that of everyone else on the committee, have already paid off.

"I'm really impressed," he says. "I think, for students and faculty, it's very useful and modern. As a group, I feel like

we came up with something that is quite good over all. And I can't believe we got it done by Christmas!"

Other committee members include Jeff Alford (co-chair), Dr. Eric Aitala, Adrian Aumen, Sabrina Brown, Wendy Carmean, Sandra Crowe, Kevin Herrera, Carra Hewitt, Dewey Knight, Penny Rice, Brenda Robertson, and Dr. Sean Wilson.

Got an Opinion?

If it's on the new UM website, please send it to web@olemiss.edu

www.olemiss.edu/technews



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Got a technology question or issue you'd like us to cover? E-mail your suggestions to technews@olemiss.edu!

Form Meets Function in New UM Website

At the first meeting of The University of Mississippi's Web Planning Committee last summer, Dr. Clif Mims knew immediately he had something to contribute.

"My Ph.D. is in instructional technology, and I've spent a great deal of time working with experts in this area," explains Mims, an Assistant Professor in the School of Education. "So as we started talking about how users access websites and how quickly they want information, it was kind of cool because I already had a lot of these answers."

According to co-chair Dr. Kathy Gates, getting people like Mims on the committee is a key component in producing a successful end product.

"We need members who can think about the broad range of people utilizing the website," she notes. "Our user groups include everyone from prospective and current students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, the media, to just the general public. We call the homepage the 'front door,' because that's what it is, a very important access point for a wide audience with differing needs and expectations."

When the committee was considering content, Mims went straight to his students for input.

"Those were really fun conversations," he reports. "They

could see themselves as both students and teachers, and their ideas reflected this. We wanted to have items on the front door that would bring people back to it again and again, so they suggested things like a download of the day or picture of the day."

"It was exciting to hear the many ideas for making the website effective for all users," comments committee member Janea McDonald, Manager of Employment for Human

Resources. "It fell to Eric Aitala [University Webmaster] and Carra Hewitt [Senior Graphic Designer] to interpret the committee's suggestions, and I think they did a great job bringing them to life."

According to Aitala, going from idea to reality isn't always easy when web page coding is involved.

"The wide use of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) makes the creation of more attractive, user friendly web pages easier, but it also creates difficulties," he explains. "It's not

always clear if certain design elements will work until you actually build the HTML and CSS codes, so there is a lot of trial and error involved. Things that seem quite easy to the user can be difficult to implement, especially keeping accessibility in mind." (See related articles on page 2.)



A Work in Progress: Janea McDonald (right) looks on as Eric Aitala and Carra Hewitt work with the design and coding of the new UM website.

continued on back cover

A Message from the Webmaster

Dr. Eric Aitala reminds everyone there is a NEW policy for official UM web pages that can be found at www.olemiss.edu/depts/it/webproject/offpol.html. Also there is a new UM Website Index, and links can be updated or added via the UM Web Registry link found on every page

of the index. The Web Registry is also how information is updated or added to the Department Directory. If you are working on an official UM website or page for the first time, be sure to visit www.olemiss.edu/depts/it/webproject before you begin.

This is the size type you to be able to read if you were Joe McKinney.

McKinney, a graduate student at The University of Mississippi, was born with only 20% of normal vision.

"I can see everything everyone else can, but not in the same great detail," he explains. "The rods and cones in my eyes didn't develop properly, so I have a color deficiency. I can't tell blues from greens or yellows from purples, and I can't see shades of gray. I also have a problem with depth perception."

Despite these limitations, McKinney is just three classes away from finishing a master's degree in professional counseling. He is already licensed to be a K-12 special education teacher and has plans to pursue both an LPC and a Ph.D.

"Eventually I want to be a tenured professor somewhere and have my own counseling practice," he asserts.

In order to achieve these goals, McKinney must access information on both the printed page and the Internet. He's gotten help doing so from the Office of Student Disability Services, located in Martindale 234.

Student Disability Services has five computer stations loaded with specialized software programs, including Kurzweil, Zoomtext, JAWS, and Dragon Dictate. Three of these stations have extra large monitors to assist students with low vision or reading disorders, and two have electronically-controlled adjustable tables for wheelchair users.

Must Visit Sites for Web Developers!

The University of Washington is a leader in disseminating information on accessibility. A great place to visit is AccessIT, the website for the National Center on Accessible Information Technology in Education, at www.washington.edu/accessit/.

UW's international program, DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology), is at www.washington.edu/doit/. Click on "accessible web design" under the hot topics there and you'll reach an extensive list of helpful links and resources, including DO-IT's own publication, "World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design."

There are also two V-Tek machines, which are stand-alone devices that magnify reading materials.

"Computers play a vital role in today's learning environment," says Stacey Reycraft, Assistant Director and Disability Specialist. "More and more instructors are using online teaching tools and universities across the nation are putting administrative functions on the web. Admission, financial aid, registration, lessons, notes, grades, these things are all online now, and if they're not accessible to all students, you've got a real problem."

For reading the long articles required in his coursework, McKinney depends on Kurzweil, a program which uses OCR, or optical character recognition, to vocally read text to the user. The program has many features, including different voice tones and speeds. McKinney is proficient enough to use a setting of 180 words a minute, making him a "speed listener."

When McKinney types or goes online, he also employs Zoomtext, a program which greatly enlarges what's on the computer screen. But none of these tools help McKinney use a website if it wasn't developed with users like him in mind.

"Graphics are one of the main accessibility problems in website design," explains Clint Jordan, a graduate assistant in Disability Services. "So many people forget that not everyone can see graphics. Even if you can see but have a slow Internet connection or an old computer, large graphics can still be a problem. Many websites once had a 'text only' option, but that's disappeared with the advent of higher bandwidths. It's too bad because many people still need that accessibility."

For McKinney, other design elements can affect his use of a website.

"Poor contrast between text and background is very difficult for me to read," he notes, "and red text just drives me up the wall!"

Jordan says that making a site accessible is usually just a matter of following the accepted standards for web design (see "Top 12" list at far right).

"The main idea behind the Internet was to convey information quickly and easily," he reflects. "A lot of the better websites that have been up and running from the beginning have very basic but very good designs. If you use a design program, like DreamWeaver or GoLive, they usually have plug-ins that can check your web code for accessibility."



would need

Reycraft notes there are legal reasons to provide access, particularly when it comes to universities and other public institutions.

“When your administrative functions are online, then accessibility is not just a matter of convenience,” she says. “If a student like Joe has to have someone sit next to him and work through the program for him, that’s a violation of his privacy and an infringement on his independence.”

Reycraft points out that web accessibility doesn’t just affect users with disabilities. A growing number of people are utilizing cellphones, PDAs, and other handheld devices to go online, and the things that make a website accessible help them, too. Reycraft muses it’s not the first time the benefits of accessibility have been far-reaching.

“Think about the automatic door opener,” she says. “It’s specifically for people in wheelchairs, but if you’re carrying groceries and have a child in tow, then it helps you, too. People on bicycles or pushing strollers use ramps and curb cuts all the time. Again and again we’ve seen that accessibility for people with disabilities ends up helping everyone in the community.”

For more information, contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 915-7128 or sds@olemiss.edu.



Joe McKinney

TOP 12

Tips for Making Your Website Accessible

- 12. If you can't see it, a picture isn't worth a thousand words.**
Don't rely solely on graphics to tell the story and don't use images for links.
- 11. Turn off the speakers and see what's missing.**
If you have audio or video, provide text or captions for users with slow computers or internet connections and those who can't hear well.
- 10. And YOU thought pop-up windows were annoying.**
If you can't see it pop up, you don't know it's there and can't access the information in it.
- 9. Size does matter.**
Don't use such variable fonts that you have very large text in one part of the page and very small text in another.
- 8. Use tagged PDFs or provide alternative formats.**
Since PDFs are really just pictures of pages, some screen reading programs can't access the text on them.
- 7. Does your page blow up?**
If you use fixed-width fonts or interlocking text and images, it may fall apart when enlarged.
- 6. Stick with standard HTML.**
This ensures your site can be accessed by all browsers. Avoid using things like Flash and JavaScript for content or navigation.
- 5. No frames, no frames, no frames!**
- 4. Contrast makes the difference.**
To be readable, text needs to stand out from the background.
- 3. Keep it simple.**
Avoid flashing or scrolling text.
- 2. Bigger is better.**
Users with limited mobility have a hard time clicking on small links. Consider using larger text or buttons to assist in navigation.
- 1. Test your site!**
Turn off image loading in your browser and look at the site or run it through such online services as www.hermish.com or bobby.watchfire.com which test for minimum accessibility.

Reece Oversees DL Expansion in

Lynn Reece, Distance Learning Technician at The University of Mississippi's DeSoto Center in Southaven, has always had a knack for technology.

"My dad worked at Sears and repaired equipment and things like that," she remembers. "He was just a hands-on person, and I see myself being a lot like him. I'm not a person who likes to sit and read. I'm a do person. I like to be active and work with my hands."

Reece didn't immediately follow in her father's footsteps after graduating from high school and getting married.

"Back then, choices were limited for women," she explains. "It was either be a teacher or secretary. I took office management skills, typing, accounting, that sort of stuff, and I did secretarial work for years."

Born and raised in Memphis, Reece and her husband, Jerry, moved to Southaven in 1970.

"We've seen it grow by leaps and bounds out here," she notes. "What used to be pasturelands is now subdivisions, office buildings, and stores."

Reece eventually started working for the school her two sons attended so she could be off when they were.

"I helped automate their library," she says. "I set up the whole computer system and maintained the program. I was there 12 years, and during the last two, I switched over and worked on the school's computers as assistant to the network administrator. It was a great learning experience for me."

When Reece's youngest son went to college, she decided it

was time for her to do the same.

"I used the DeSoto Center's 2+2 program, where I attended Northwest Community College the first two years and then Ole Miss the last two," she notes. "I never would have gone to college if the Center hadn't been right here in my backyard."

Reece graduated in May 2001 with a bachelor's in business administration and was hired by the DeSoto Center in August that year. Both the Center and its distance learning (DL) program have expanded greatly in recent years (see "By Leaps and Bounds").

"DL creates the opportunity to offer classes we couldn't otherwise," she explains. "I really appreciate that, because when I started as a student some courses weren't available here, and I had to commute to Oxford, which was over an hour each way for me."

Reece has a staff of six student workers and a full-time assistant, since DL classes take place every weekday from 8:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night.

"We have to be flexible with our class times," she notes, "because the majority of our students are non-traditional, and they hold down fulltime jobs."

At the start of the year, the DeSoto Center opened a new "DL Quad," and Lynn Reece is thrilled.

"The Quad gives us four large classrooms and an additional small conference room," she explains. "Our control room and office are centrally located among the classrooms, and we have plans for a sixth room eventually. We're really

By Leaps and Bounds

The DeSoto Center has experienced tremendous growth since it opened in 1995 with 80 students attending 15 on-site courses.

Last fall, the Center had an enrollment of 689 students and offered 140 courses. One hundred fifty-six courses are scheduled for the Spring 2005 semester.

The Center, originally built with donated property and DeSoto County local funds, is a collaborative effort between The University of Mississippi and Northwest Mississippi Community College.

"The DeSoto Center is a win-win for the community and our institutions," says Director Dr. Bonnie Buntin. "Both Ole Miss and Northwest are committed to the success of their students. Having the unique 2+2 partnership facilitates convenient transfers and degree completion. And the combined administration, joint marketing, and shared facilities make for good stewardship of state funds."

Overseen by UM's Division of Outreach and Continuing Education, the Center's distance learning (DL) program has played a key role in its development. DL courses via compressed video were first offered in Spring 1996 with five inaugural classes. Forty-four of the 156 courses in the spring will be through distance learning, allowing students at the Center to access classes taught in Oxford, Tupelo, and Jackson.

The statistics tell a story. Last fall, 75% of the Center's students were female and 25% male. Thirty-seven percent were between the ages of 19 and 24, another 37% between 25 and 34, 10% were 35 to 44 years old, and 16% were 45 or older.

Four hundred forty-three students, or 64%, were from DeSoto County itself. The rest hailed from Shelby County in Tennessee and Tate, Tunica, Marshall, Panola, and Lafayette counties in Mississippi. Four students were from Arkansas and 76 more from outside the immediate tri-state area.

The DL Quad mentioned in Lynn Reece's story is just part of a \$7.5 million expansion taking place at the Center these days. The facility is slated to open a new west wing in the late spring of this year.

For more information, visit www.olemiss.edu/southaven/.



One of four new distance learning classrooms at the DeSoto Center

Southaven

excited, because this will increase the number of classes we offer and students we serve.”

Reece’s job isn’t just limited to distance learning.

“Dr. Buntin [DeSoto Center Director] says everyone comes to me with anything that’s got a cord attached,” she laughs. “I help students in the computer lab and faculty with any technical equipment they use.”

For Reece, using technology is fun and intuitive, but it also pays off in her line of work.

“Switching to Campus Management and putting everything online has been a wonderful thing for us,” she says. “At first we had to wean faculty and students off doing everything on paper, but now they see the benefits. It helps tremendously in my job, because we’re able to pull data and do statistics so we can see where our enrollment is going and what classes students need.”

Reece does have firsthand knowledge that not everyone shares her same comfort level with technology.

“I’m definitely the technology person at home,” she muses. “My husband is an insurance claims adjuster, and they’ve put him on a computer. I’ve tried to help him, but if he had his way, he’d go back to pencil and paper!”



As Reece has learned, though, it’s never too late for learning new things.

“If you don’t have computer skills, you’re kind of up a creek these days because this is where everything is going,” she asserts. “Students come to me with little things, like they can’t print out a file or get something off a disk. I like that I can help them. I can see that what I do assists them in getting their degrees, and that’s very satisfying to me.”

SSL Tightens E-mail Security

From David Drewery
Campus Security Coordinator

Last year, when e-mail authentication switched to LDAP, more commonly known as your webID, it eliminated the need for multiple user IDs and passwords to access e-mail and other campus web applications. While that was a good thing, it also necessitated the implementation of Secure Sockets Layer (SSL). SSL is a method of encrypting passwords between pop e-mail clients, including Eudora, Outlook, and Outlook Express, and campus host servers such as sunset.

Most e-mail users on campus employ these pop clients. They transmit messages between your computer and the server in what is called “clear text” format. This means that both your password and messages can be intercepted and read by someone else. Since this person would now have your webID and password, they could also access your university records and online services.

SSL encrypts your password and thereby protects your webID. You should be aware, though, that the messages themselves are still being sent in clear text between your computer and the host server when using a pop client.

The University’s WebMail site is a secure alternative to pop clients because it is encrypted and messages on it are not transmitted in clear text (see Tech Tip on page 7).

A note about the author:

When you get an e-mail message from italert@olemiss.edu, that’s David Drewery warning you about a security concern. Assistant Director at the Telecommunications Center, he also became Campus Security Coordinator in June 2004. TechNews plans to run future articles from David about keeping your computer and information safe. If you have any questions, contact him at davidd@olemiss.edu.

Student Housing Application Goes Online

For prospective students planning to attend Ole Miss this fall, completing a housing application requires just a few short minutes in front of the computer.

So far, over 600 students have utilized the new online application implemented last fall by the Office of Student Housing and Residence Life in partnership with the Office of Information Technology.

"This is a great example of different departments and staff members coming together to make something really work," says Casey Blankenship, Housing's Associate Director for Administration. "We envisioned this as one-stop shopping for the student, but since there are two different systems involved, we needed IT's cooperation to make that happen."

JP Chilumula in Student Housing collaborated with IT's Anil Vinjamur to create a seamless interface between Housing's RMS system and SAP's Campus Management (CM) system.

When a student visits the application website and clicks to apply, he starts a process in CM that authenticates webID and password, verifies enrollment, and retrieves pertinent information like address and phone number. That data is sent via secure channel to Housing's system, which verifies the information is complete and accurate before allowing the student to proceed.

The student then completes just a few fields, since most of the information on the application has been supplied automatically by CM, and agrees to the terms and conditions. This brings up a receipt which the student prints out and mails with a prepayment to the Bursar's Office.

"There are many benefits to the new process," comments Chilumula, "It's much easier for the student, and the integrity of the data is maintained between CM and Housing. Because everything is automated, you avoid the human errors that come with illegible handwriting and data entry. It reduces mailing costs and saves endless work hours for our office."

The next step is to add the housing agreement and preferences forms to this process.

"This is where students list attributes which help us assign roommates," explains Blankenship. "In the past, we used scantron sheets with just a few questions, but now we'll be able to expand and customize the form as we go along and gather more data, not just on roommate preferences, but on ideas for programs and community lifestyle options we might provide."

Blankenship notes that Housing provides alternatives to anyone who can't access the online application.

"There's a troubleshooting guide on the website," he says, "or we can e-mail a PDF or send a hard copy of the application through the mail. The bottom line is, we'll do whatever is needed to help students and their parents complete this process."

Visit www.housing.olemiss.edu/studentservices/index2.html to see a slideshow of the online application process.

Web Updates Made Easy with Macromedia's Contribute

By Amelia Rodgers
In the Faculty Technology Development Center



Is updating the departmental website on your to do list? If so, you might be interested in the software program, Contribute, from Macromedia.

Macromedia has scaled down DreamWeaver, their high-end web design program, to Contribute, which is more basic and probably a better choice for departments that need to update web pages but don't have their own "techies" on staff.

This program is great for administrators who manage a website and want to allow others to contribute content. An administrator can set various permissions regarding access, images sizes, and more. There is even a "send for approval" option, so submissions can be reviewed and approved before being published.

Anyone who knows how to use Microsoft Office and a browser can update website content with this program. Basically, all you have to do is browse to your site in the program and click "edit" to make changes in an editing mode similar to Office. When you're done, simply click "publish" to send the site to the web.

This software has a wonderful ease-of-use functionality for new or basic web developers. It also has great support structure for web administrators and more skilled developers. Best of all, it is available at a relatively low cost!

Please feel free to stop by FTDC and check out this software. Or, for more information and a trial version of the program, visit www.macromedia.com/software/contribute/.

Another Successful Year for TACIT

The TACIT program marked its fifth anniversary in November 2004 with the distribution of 102 new computers to faculty. Recipients attended a general training session (below) and two additional workshops on topics ranging from multimedia classrooms to the academic web.

TACIT (Technology Acquisition for Curricular and Instructional Technologies) is funded by the Provost's Office and facilitated by the Office of Information Technology.

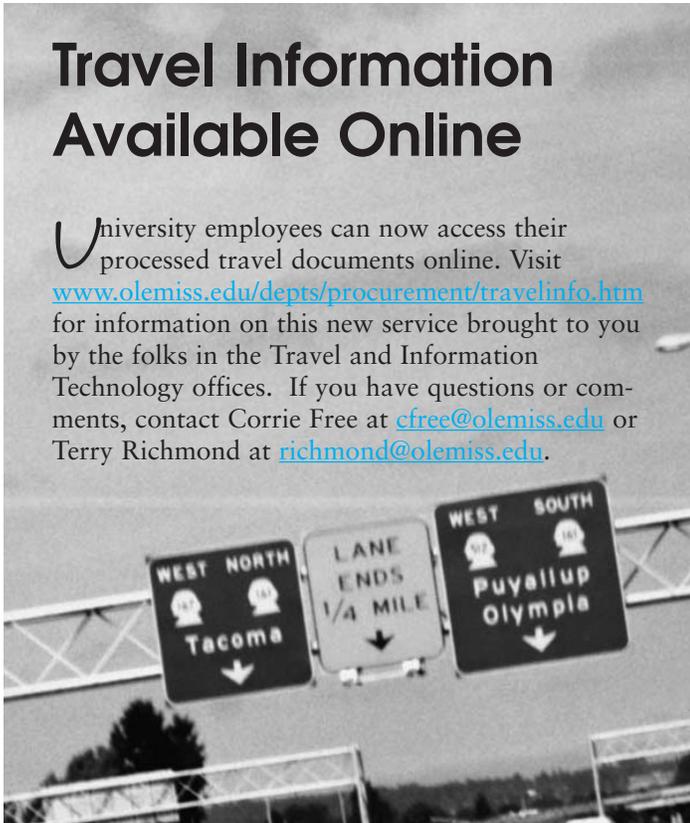
Associate Provost Maurice Effink (right) was one of the session speakers and had this to say about the program:

"We think TACIT is a hit with faculty and provides a good way to gradually maintain adequate office computers. We expect faculty to do so much online these days that having an up-to-speed computer is extremely important. They must be able to communicate with students and administrative offices, download class rolls, use online advising tools, and submit grades, among other functions. A good computer can also be an excellent research tool."



Travel Information Available Online

University employees can now access their processed travel documents online. Visit www.olemiss.edu/depts/procurement/travelinfo.htm for information on this new service brought to you by the folks in the Travel and Information Technology offices. If you have questions or comments, contact Corrie Free at cfree@olemiss.edu or Terry Richmond at richmond@olemiss.edu.



Tech Tip from Ted Smith

in University Advancement

Are You Using webMail Yet?

If not, you should be! WebMail can be used to check and compose messages on your Ole Miss e-mail account from any computer in the world that has Internet access.

Basically, instead of using a program like Outlook or Eudora to access your e-mail, you use an online browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape to visit <https://webmail.olemiss.edu>. There you can sign into your account with your Ole Miss webID and password.

The service is free, and there is no need to sign up as long as you already have an active e-mail account with the University. If you have forgotten your password or have any other problems using WebMail, call the Information Technology Helpdesk at 915-5222.

I use WebMail when I'm not at my regular computer or if I'm on the road. I miss some of Outlook's features, like remembering addresses as I type them, but I love the accessibility and ease of use provided by WebMail.