Croft, Honors Applications Go Online

When Sidra Sarker's older sister, Shabram, applied to the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College (SMBHC) two years ago, she did so using paper and the U.S. Postal Service. As an SMBHC applicant this year, though, Sidra was able to skip the stamp and submit her application using a new online process created by the Office of Information Technology (IT).

The online process employs SAP Interactive Forms by Adobe, a cutting edge technology that integrates system-generated information and user input in a PDF that can be saved locally for offline access.

Sidra Sarker and John Samonds discuss her online application.

"It was really convenient that I could save the PDF to my computer and work on it in stages before I submitted it," Sarker comments. "I liked that when I opened the form, it already had my name and contact information on it. That saved me time and made me feel like the university already recognized and welcomed me."

The experience of prospective students such as Sarker motivated Doug Sullivan-Gonzalez, Dean of the SMBHC, and Kees Gispen, Executive Director of the Croft Institute, to approach IT about converting to an online application.

"We thought it would be good because we wanted to move into the 21st century," states Gispen. "I know all my kids applied online to the schools they went to, and that's just the way of the world. We didn't have that, and we thought we needed it to stay competitive."

According to John Samonds, SMBHC Associate Dean, there were numerous benefits in moving online.

"The idea was to provide prospects with a more convenient application and save them the trouble of gathering the various elements and mailing them as one package," he notes. "It also saves us time in copying applications for distribution to the admissions committee and saves a lot of paper in the process, since now committee members access the applications by logging into myOleMiss."

While most students are comfortable working online, the SMBHC and Croft staffs were not sure how recommenders would handle this transition. When applicants entered the contact information for their recommenders, e-mails were generated to these teachers and counselors with attached PDFs to be completed and submitted online in the same manner as the application.

"As a not very technologically savvy 'mature' person, I was prepared not to like the new online application," comments Mimi Bradley, Director of College Counseling at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Ridgeland, Mississippi. "I basically decided that I would have great difficulty using it and would probably end up sending paper copies. However, when I got the first automated message to do an online recommendation, I decided to give it a try. It turned out to be quick and easy, and I really liked it."

"I thought the online process was easy to use after a few initial kinks were worked out," says Jeanne Marie Peet, Director of College Counseling at Jackson Preparatory School. "It is faster and streamlines the process for everyone. Transcripts still have to go by mail, though, so I would like to see the possibility of sending electronic transcripts in the future."

As is often the case, moving a paper-based process online was not entirely smooth.

"I naively thought it would make things easier, but it actually created more work for us this year," explains Gispen. "There was a learning curve in designing and using it, and we didn't think about all the things that might be issues when it was up and running."

Gispen reports one issue which took him by surprise was not necessarily technical in nature.

"I don't know how we can deal with this," he says, "but when you tell students to write an essay and send it in through the mail, they take it more seriously than when you let them write it online. It may be that students just see anything online as being less formal, but I think we may have to develop very specific instructions to guard against that."

"The biggest challenge we had was applicants realizing that some things had not been submitted and sometimes being

Using Web 2.0 Tools for Teaching

By Daniela Munca in the Department of Modern Languages

I am an international graduate student in the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program. I am from the Republic of Moldova, a beautiful small country in Eastern Europe, and I came to Ole Miss as a fellow in the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program (see www.irex.org/programs/muskie/ for more information).

What is **Web 2.0**?

Don't panic and think you have to download some new version of the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 is a term used to describe the trend toward greater user engagement on the Web though such collaborative tools as social networks, wikis, blogs, and tagging. To learn more, visit **wikipedia.org**, often cited as a prime example of a Web 2.0 site.

Currently, I am also an instructor in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Ole Miss. I teach other international students from all over the world.

Last summer I was an intern with iEARN (International Education and Resource Network), which is a non-profit global network that enables teachers and students to use the Internet and other technologies to collaborate on projects that enhance learning.

I attended the 2007 NECC Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, as a member of the iEARN team, and there I was introduced to the concept of Web 2.0 applications and their popularity with educational organizations. By the time I returned to Mississippi, I was determined to take advantage of the great opportunities created by these technologies and incorporate them as an integral part of my daily instruction.

I am also writing my thesis on how Web 2.0 can enhance second and foreign language acquisition and how they can create interactive, motivating, and authentic learning environments for ESL/EFL students.

I have created an ESL class blog which I use to teach my American Culture class and a wiki to teach grammar to upper intermediate students. These function as working spaces where I post additional materials related to the content covered in class and the students exchange ideas, impressions, and suggestions and just have fun studying English.

My students are my co-authors. They are responsible for adding posts, attachments, videos, and PowerPoint presentations to the blog and wiki, and they read each others' posts and add comments and suggestions.

The greatest challenge has been getting my students accustomed to working online. Even though they use the Internet on a daily basis and are "digital natives," to borrow a phrase from author Marc Prensky, they were not used to posting and editing content online and collaborating with others while studying English.

I was amazed how quickly and enthusiastically the students got involved in working online. They created

Daniela's **Links**

My ESL class blog is at **http://dvmunca.blogspot.com/** and my ESL Funland wiki is at **http://dvmuncaesl.wetpaint.com/**.

I include links to these tools in my blog and wiki:
Grammar Girl podcasts—**http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/**

VoiceThread for online voice projects—**http://voicethread.com/**

A cartoon creator—**www.dvolver.com/live/mm.html**

Slideshare (where my students post and share PowerPoint presentations)—**www.slideshare.net/daniMD/slideshows**

TeacherTube—**www.teachertube.com/**

and posted numerous interesting PowerPoint presentations, essays, VoiceThreads, and videos. They are always eager to read each others' comments and become particularity motivated when they get feedback from other people around the globe. Because their work is being posted online and the blog and wiki offer them a larger audience than the teacher and their classmates, they are particularly careful with their grammar, spelling, and pronunciation, which helps improve their overall English skills.

I wanted my blog and wiki to function as tools, rather than simple resources of information delivery, allowing my students to become more responsible learners, capable of selecting appropriate content, adjusting it to their proficiency level, and using other online tools for error correction, linguistic input processing, and comprehensive output, all essential elements for successful language acquisition.

I strongly believe that Web 2.0 applications such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and videocasts offer language teachers, and educators in general, endless opportunities to enhance instruction, create authentic collaborative learning environments, and motivate students to link the classroom to the outside world while becoming more independent and creative individuals.
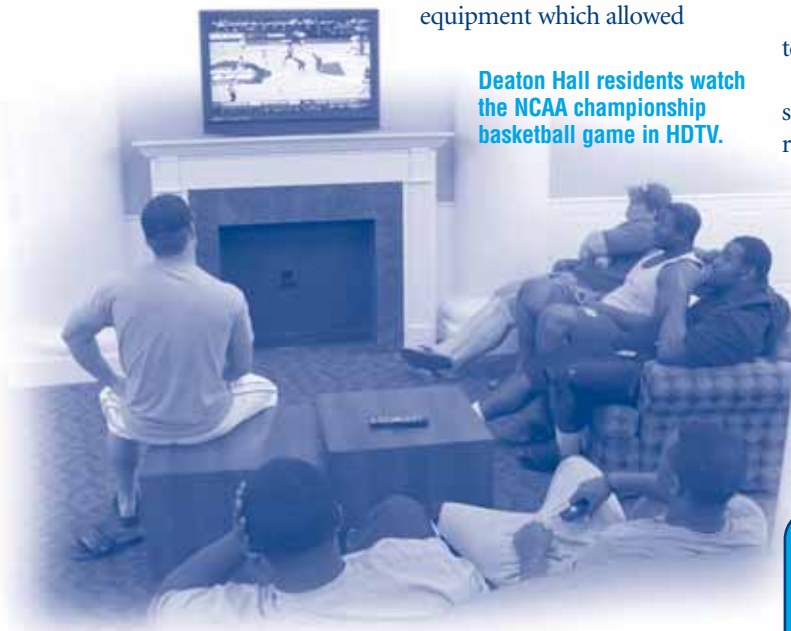
Daniela Munca

Telecom Puts the HD in Campus TV

An inquiry from the Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics got Stan Fortner in the Telecommunications Center thinking about high definition television (HDTV).

"The Overby Center called and asked if there were any plans to add HDTV service for the campus," Fortner recalls. "At the time, due to the cost, there were not, but I got interested in looking at HD services, and that was when the fun began, because I really had to hunt and scrape to find affordable equipment."

Fortner eventually acquired equipment which allowed

Deaton Hall residents watch the NCAA championship basketball game in HDTV.

Telecom to receive the digital signals for off-air channels from Memphis and add 20 new HD channels to their basic service lineup.

"The Federal Communications Commission prohibits charging for off-air channels," notes Fortner. "These stations are something we were able to give students to improve their basic lineup and make HD available on campus."

Telecom also invested in equipment to access three premium HD channels, ESPN, ESPN2, and NBC Universal, which RebelVision subscribers can pay a fee to get.

Many users get confused about the difference between digital television and HD. All HDTV is digital, but not all digital TV is HD.

"You must have a high definition television to receive HDTV," stresses Fortner, "but even on an HD set, not all programming you receive is broadcast in HD."

Deaton Hall's director, Kellen Lane, reports that residents are very happy about the addition of HDTV.

"Having HDTV has opened up more possibilities for hall programming," Kellen says. "With HDTV available in our lobby, there are more residents hanging out and watching events like the Super Bowl or Final Four. Anybody can watch the big games on regular television, but HDTV is special because it provides more detail and a clearer picture."

Visit www.olemiss.edu/depts/telecommunications for more information.

SPSS Upgrade Available

By Jason Hale in the Mississippi Center for Supercomputing Research

The statistical analysis software, SPSS 16 for Windows, is now available for installation on any university computer.

The Office of Information Technology manages a 110-concurrent user network license for SPSS Base, Advanced, and Regression modules.

SPSS 16 boasts a new Java-based user interface that is more flexible than in previous versions. Other features include expandability plug-ins for R, Python, and .NET, various data management enhancements, and a more powerful visualization engine.

The student lab in Weir Hall's Galtney Center for Academic Computing has been retrofitted with the new version of SPSS. In fall 2008, the Stats Camp offered by IT will include seminars on the new features in SPSS 16.

UM faculty and staff can learn more and download the software by clicking on the Software link under Tools & Resources in myOleMiss.

Contact the IT Helpdesk at 915-5222 or ftdc@olemiss.edu for installation support or, for usage assistance, e-mail the MCSR consultants at assist@olemiss.edu.

Debate Information on the Web

Some new offerings on the Web provide good ways to stay informed about the presidential debate scheduled for September 26 on the Ole Miss campus.

The university's official debate Web site is debate.olemiss.edu. Designed by the Cirlot Agency of Jackson, MS, the site includes information targeted at visitors, faculty and staff, students, and prospective students.

There is a "Latest News /Events" area on the home page, but you don't have to visit the site to know when something new has been posted. You can subscribe to the site's RSS feed by clicking the icon on the page. Links to any new stories will be displayed automatically wherever you view such feeds.

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
SEPTEMBER 26, 2008

A feed of another type is available to those who join the university's group on Facebook called The 2008 Presidential Debate at Ole Miss. Notifications of debate-related news and invitations to debate-related events will be sent out to members during the coming months. Anyone with a Facebook account can join this group.

According to UM Webmaster Robby Seitz, it's a natural fit to use RSS feeds and Facebook to disseminate information on the debate at Ole Miss.

"The trend these days is not just to pull users to your Web site, but to push new information out to them," says Seitz. "We're also providing downloads such as wallpapers, widgets, and screensavers that folks can use on their computers to show support for the university's role in this historic event."

For any questions related to the debate, contact debate@olemiss.edu.

How 'Bout Them Apples?

Sophomore Tommy Bell uses one of eight new 20" iMacs in the student lab in Weir Hall's Galtney Center for Academic Computing.

These high-end computers have 1 GB of RAM, 250 GB hard drives, and the ability to read, write, and re-write CDs and DVDs, including the new dual-layer DVDs. They have connection ports for USB 2, Firewire 400, and Firewire 800 devices, as well as built-in Bluetooth and AirPort Extreme (high-speed WiFi).

IT's Scott Davis installed the new machines and says they are a great addition to the lab. "They not only provide students with speedier performance but also loads of screen space for spreading out complex projects," he explains. "Users can attach the very latest external storage devices and even burn high density DVDs. Plus, they're very beautiful!"

A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed

For the University of Mississippi, John Hills of England's Newcastle University will be a good friend to have if an emergency takes down the university's information technology services.

"We've been collaborating with John and Newcastle University for several months to establish a geographically diverse presence on the Internet in the event of disaster," explains Robin Miller, UM Deputy CIO and Director of Technical Services. "The first step was to establish a backup Web server to answer Internet requests directed to olemiss.edu should our service become inoperable."

According to Kathy Gates, UM CIO, Newcastle University was a natural choice for this partnership.

John Hills of Newcastle University

"We have an excellent relationship with Newcastle," notes Gates. "Their location makes it unlikely the two universities would be hit by a disaster at the same time, and like Ole Miss, they run SAP software on Sun hardware."

Hills, who is Acting Director of Information Systems and Services at Newcastle, agrees.

"Our two universities have a long-established relationship as SAP Student Life Cycle Management development partners, sharing knowledge and working together to successfully lobby SAP for effective support for higher education," Hills says. "We were delighted to extend the SAP relationship into business continuity areas. Hosting a back-up Web server for Ole Miss may well be the first in a series of collaborative efforts, although I have to say we don't get many hurricanes in northeast England!"

In the tradition of naming UM servers after trees, the Newcastle server is called "rowan" after the tree in Great Britain traditionally thought to have magical, protective powers.

In addition to backing up the UM Web site, rowan will also function as a "life boat" if other UM servers are down, making it possible to retrieve data such as employee and student contact information that might be needed in an emergency situation.

Gates stresses that rowan does not replace other IT emergency procedures but rather is intended to provide options for maintaining business operations during times of trouble.

Croft, Honors Applications Go Online continued from front cover

unsure how to upload part of an application, like a resume," comments Samonds. "We've met with IT, and they're modifying the application in several ways to make it easier for both the applicant and the committee."

Sarker was one of the applicants who ended up submitting a paper resume, but she still thinks the Croft Institute and the SMBHC did the right thing in going online.

"Having an online application puts you ahead of the game," Sarker asserts. "If you're still doing paper, it shows that you may not be quite as advanced as other schools. Other students I talked to really liked that the application was on the Internet, and the recommenders felt it was more convenient. I think everyone was cool with the new system."

SAP Interactive Forms by Adobe were used in the transition to online faculty evaluations last year and will be employed again this spring as staff evaluations go online.

Oh, and by the way, Sidra Sarker was among a record number of applicants to the SMBHC this year. She was accepted and will be attending Ole Miss this fall as part of the SMBHC Class of 2012.

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