

August 31, 2009

Interim Activity Report to Senate Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning Committee – (selected topics tied to teaching and learning, since last meeting of March 3, 2009)

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Software evaluations

Web Collaboration Software

A software evaluation process to replace Marratech was undertaken this summer. Web collaboration software allows: Instructors to run presentations at a distance, involving guest lecturers from across the globe; to increase faculty-to-student and student-to-student interactions; to develop online group activities; to create study groups and meet virtually; to run meetings and share documents from across campus in “real time”.

The software that has been chosen (Adobe ConnectPro) will be deployed this year.

Screen sharing software

Multiple solutions (hardware and software) are under consideration for software that permits students to share their presentations via their own laptops on screens situated in classrooms across campus. Two pilot projects underway.

Drupal platform for www.mcgill.ca

We have launched a multi-year project to replace the custom-built database that drives www.mcgill.ca, with an industry-standard, open-source package called Drupal. This fall there will be the launch of two pilots based on the new technology: Alumnilife and the Schulich School of Music. Drupal may also form an important component for collaboration sites used in teaching and learning.

Recording lectures and presentations from laptops or desktops

Evaluation of software replacement (or continuation of) the Camtasia Studio application is underway.

What's next...

We have launched a use case study to assess the needs and expectations of our teaching and learning community, to determine how those needs fit the kinds of IT tools and resources we currently support and to identify gaps where needs are not well addressed. The second phase of the project will involve the development of strategies to address those gaps.

Pandemic preparedness

Significant time staff has gone into developing plans to manage a potential situation with high absenteeism on campus. This plan includes increasing priority for certain projects, increasing the server/storage capacity of myCourses and the portal myMcGill and stopping most other special projects, so that the delivery of basic services is protected. As well, user documentation is being created with an emphasis on tips on how to work effectively from home using currently available technology. At the request of the Deputy Provost and in close collaboration with Teaching and Learning Services a summary of technology-based tips for teaching was prepared, and can be viewed at <http://knowledgebase.mcgill.ca/it/teach-during-pandemic>

Automated notification system

In close collaboration with University Services, we have implemented a new system to allow broadcast transmission of text to cell messages, voice and e-mail messages. It will be heavily promoted by University Services during Safety Week in September. Staff and students are being encouraged to provide us with their cell phone numbers for this service.

An aspect of this project uses speakerphones in classrooms as an additional way of delivering emergency messages while classes are in session. (A test of the classroom speakerphones was run in March, with a second follow-up test at Macdonald campus over the summer).

Public display panels

A new technology has been deployed that provides central server/storage to drive local displays in buildings. This system is more reliable, "greener", and can also permit, in the case of an emergency, a way to distribute important safety messages. Our current installed base is 27 player/screens with 6 additional screens scheduled for installation in the near future.

[Blogs.mcgill.ca](http://blogs.mcgill.ca) and podcasts.mcgill.ca

These two sites are now live. The first provides a platform for McGill-purposed blogs; the second is a local "mirror" of a site that is also available stored and distributed through iTunesU (Apple site), and managed by Public Affairs.

Classroom support

The Director, ICS, in close cooperation with the Deputy CIO and with the Director of Content and Collaboration Solutions, is reviewing our classroom support model (by telephone and on-site intervention) this fall.

The current model comprises: first-tier support from ICS Service desk (3398) (open until 6:30 pm most days) and second-tier support through either NCS which has a team that circulates on campus for audiovisual and network technician support or CCS where the issues are related to education technologies that need to be replaced, or evaluated, or where user documentation need to be revised.

This model has been in place for 18 months and will be reviewed to ensure that we are in the best position to respond quickly and satisfactorily to incidents requiring IT intervention.

Software Licenses

We have now signed a Microsoft Campus Agreements which allows the use of Windows and Microsoft Office products on McGill-owned computers and on home computers used by McGill staff for McGill purposes.

In addition we have added to our list of software products, ChemDraw, which provides the potential for electronic laboratory journals.

The new, easier to use, website www.mcgill.ca/software is being promoted across campus so that we encourage the campus to use software licenses that are available.

Policies, Protocols, Guidelines (www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies/informationtechnology/)

Two sets of guidelines were issued: Guidelines for Blogs and Wikis at McGill (May); University Guidelines for Student-Owned Laptops (June) . A draft policy (Responsible Use of McGill Information

Technology Facilities) is being prepared to replace the Code of Conduct for the Use of McGill Computing Facilities. We hope to publish a consultation draft in October.

e-Calendar (<http://www.mcgill.ca/study/law/>)

In close collaboration with the Registrar, the pilot project for the Programs Calendar went live in late August (law faculty only) – a user-friendly web site that is structured with xml (reusable web content), and incorporates a multi-authored, complex document with approval paths, and version control. The coming year will see the incorporation of all undergraduate programs on campus, and with some aspects of the graduate program calendar.

Teaching and Learning Space Work Group

This summer IT staff worked hard with facilities staff to ensure the timely upgrade of classrooms, according to a priority schedule established by the Teaching and Learning Space Work group. IT Funds have been set aside again for allocation by this work group for next summer's renovations/upgrades.

myCourses

As part of the overall plan to improve the effectiveness and user-friendliness of *myCourses* (which is based on a Blackboard Vista product) a set of three course templates were prepared: Core template; Collaborative template; Full-featured template. These templates expedite starting a new course. Each design uses McGill colors, new icons, an editable header with links to key resources, a style sheet and a printable guide for getting started.

IT Security Awareness campaign (www.mcgill.ca/infosec)

Six electronic posters were released during the course of 2008-2009 to encourage students, faculty and staff to use McGill IT facilities in a secure manner. The topics included: social networking sites, recognizing internet scames, protecting personal information, securing laptops, using strong passwords, not sharing passwords.