CIO and ITS Monthly Report for
April 2003

Major Information Technology Initiatives

Learning Management System (LMS)

UWF continues to focus on the Desire2Learn system (www.desire2learn.com) as the replacement for Prometheus. The University is completing its due diligence investigations on the product and the company, and is now preparing to move to contract negotiations. The current plan is to have Desire2Learn operational for Fall Term 2003; Prometheus will cease operation on July 31, when our Prometheus license expires.

President Cavanaugh will meet with the LMS Selection Committee, chaired by Dr. Gary Howard, on May 7 to discuss the due diligence findings and finalize the decision regarding Desire2Learn.

Information will be forthcoming soon from the Center for University Teaching and Learning regarding the plan and schedule for migrating courses to Desire2Learn, and for faculty training in the new system.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System

In April the UWF Banner system project held its internal project kickoff meeting for the entire 50-person project team. The Finance System implementation began with information gathering sessions conducted by two consultants from SCT, the maker of Banner. The Human Resources System project continued with additional information gathering sessions. Additional system servers became operational at UWF, improving performance for the development and test system. The support contract with the Central Florida Regional Data Center, which houses UWF's database servers for Banner, neared completion.

National LambdaRail and Florida LambdaRail

In May, UWF will officially become a charter member of the Florida LambdaRail consortium. Florida LambdaRail is a subset of the National LambdaRail organization, which is building a new nationwide high-speed research and education network to complement Internet2 and regional research networks. Seven of Florida's public universities, as well as the Florida Institute of Technology and the University of Miami, are partnering to bring the National LambdaRail network to Florida and build a statewide high-speed research and education network.

LambdaRail will provide network bandwidth 400 times greater than UWF's current Internet connection, at a cost roughly 25% that of commercial network providers. The envisioned initial build-out of the Florida LambdaRail network is depicted in the adjacent map, and is expected to become operational late in 2003 or early in 2004.
On April 30 a new release of the ArgoNet environment, ArgoNet II, became operational. ArgoNet II is a key step in the ongoing upgrade of UWF's central information technology infrastructure.

ArgoNet is UWF's environment for providing information technology infrastructure services such as central file storage, web publishing, electronic mail, and sign-on services (i.e., usernames and passwords). ArgoNet II involves two major upgrades:

1. Replacing Novell servers with a network of large-scale storage appliances for central file and data storage.
2. Replacing Novell with Microsoft’s Active Directory Service (ADS) as the University-wide username/password directory service.

ArgoNet II is an improvement to the ArgoNet “foundation,” and thus many of its benefits will not be seen by users until new services are unveiled using this foundation. Computer lab managers are perhaps the most immediate beneficiaries of ArgoNet II, as they now have vastly improved capabilities to streamline management of resources in student computer labs. Faculty, students, and staff receive some immediate benefits as well, in terms of having more secure central data service with larger storage quotas; having more flexible access to files stored on ArgoNet; gaining the ability to have greater control over access to shared departmental and organization accounts; and seeing simplified ways of accessing their ArgoNet resources, such as removing the cumbersome "dot suffix" that was required by Novell. For more information on the changes in ArgoNet II and their implications, see the web site argofiles.uwf.edu.

New services to be unveiled next on the ArgoNet platform will be ArgoFiles, a secure, web-based means to access files stored on ArgoNet from anywhere on the Internet; and a consolidated, web-based ArgoNet account management service.

The vision for ArgoNet and the associated web portal system is to provide students, faculty, and staff with a seamless, integrated environment for utilizing UWF’s network-based information space. In addition, ArgoNet aspires to provide a robust central infrastructure that can be flexibly used by divisions, colleges, and departments seeking to simplify management and lower costs of their mission-critical information technology facilities and services.

ArgoNet II is also the foundation for enabling UWF’s wireless networking and mobile computing environment; for creating greater consistency and flexibility among student computer labs; and for improving the security and reliability of UWF’s mission-critical information technology infrastructure.

In April, ITS began project planning for the initial release of UWF’s web portal system, which will integrate the University’s existing “mini” portal sites (e.g., NAUTICAL, COMPASS, LightHouse, FirstMate, and the UWF home page) into a more seamless and consistent web information environment. Earlier this year, UWF licensed the Luminis web information system from SCT as part of the Banner system purchase. Luminis consists of the Campus Pipeline web portal (see www.campuspipeline.com) and the Documentum web content management system (see www.documentum.com).

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As currently envisioned, the initial roll-out of the portal will focus on the new
CIO and ITS Monthly Report for April 2003

Learning Management System (LMS) that is replacing Prometheus. The portal will be the “front door” for the LMS, providing students and faculty with an integrated view of their courses and related services, for both online and traditional courses.

The next upgrade to the portal will be to integrate a new calendaring and scheduling system that will replace Meeting Maker. Current plans propose that new system will be Microsoft Exchange, which is also UWF’s email system. Exchange calendaring will enable UWF clients to have an integrated email and calendaring system in their email clients such as Outlook or the web-based ArgoMail environment, and for the first time will provide calendaring services to UWF students as well as faculty and staff.

Successive updates to the portal will gradually integrate UWF’s web services into a consistent, seamless, user-focused information environment.

Wireless Networking

UWF’s wireless networking initiative moves slowly forward, although the specter of impending budget cuts may derail this effort.

The initial wireless networking pilot project in the Library this past term was a tremendous success. Contracts have also been initiated for installation of the equipment in three south-side dorms for a ResNet wireless pilot project to begin in Fall Term. Wireless projects in selected classrooms and computer labs in all three colleges are still in the planning stages.

This is a sensitive time for installing wireless networks. The current wireless standard, “b,” is being replaced by a new “a” standard that offers higher bandwidth. Luckily, the “a” and “b” standards can co-exist in a wireless network if properly installed. However, just appearing over the horizon is the “g” standard, which the industry recognizes as the standard that will become commonplace over the next 2-3 years. The “g” equipment is incompatible with "a" and "b" wireless networks. So, ITS is moving forward cautiously with selected pilot projects while we await the shake-out of these standards in the wireless networking world.

Issues and Concerns

SPAM Email

A new flood of unwelcome “spam” email began washing into ArgoMail accounts in April, much of it originating in Asian portions of the Internet. This new wave of spam represents an increase in sophistication by the spammers, who are now employing better methods for both collecting email addresses from the Internet and for “morphing” individual spam messages so they get past most email filtering systems. UWF’s IronMail email filter is one of the best available, and blocks all but an estimated 5% of spam messages targeted at UWF. However, since the volume of SPAM directed at UWF increased 500% in April, that 5% that is not blocked by IronMail resulted in a much greater quantity of spam messages being received by UWF email accounts.

A major upgrade to IronMail will occur this summer, with a corresponding increase in the sophistication of the email filtering software. We hope this will help improve the spam problem.

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Spam email represents a tremendous problem, and tremendous cost. IronMail blocks over 30,000 email messages daily that are directed at UWF email accounts. Protecting UWF email accounts from spam costs the University an estimated $35,000 annually.

"FIRN2" Network Conversion

We remain very concerned about the State’s outsourcing of the Florida Information Research Network (FIRN) to Hayes Computing. FIRN is the statewide education network in Florida, and is UWF’s sole connection to the Internet. The new "FIRN2" operated by Hayes has all appearances of being an environment of reduced services and increased costs. Hayes is not communicating well with clients, including UWF, regarding the details of the conversion. The replacement of FIRN by FIRN2 may result in periods of disruption, network outages, and impaired Internet services to UWF.

Currently, Internet service is not part of UWF’s budget, as service from FIRN has been funded by the State. Replacing UWF’s FIRN connectivity with a commercial Internet provider would cost the University as much as $200,000 annually. The long-range plan for Internet connectivity for UWF is to use the upcoming Florida LambdaRail network to provide both Internet and Internet2 networking.

Email System Storage

UWF’s faculty and staff email system suffered a major failure at the end of April. The event appears to have been related to an electrical power spike – a frequent problem for the IT infrastructure at UWF. However, the power spike resulted in failure of the storage area network, or SAN, which holds faculty and staff email.

The SAN – aging and problematic technology – is slated to be replaced by new file storage appliances this summer. The new storage appliances have higher storage capacity and increased reliability and failure protection. There will be an ArgoMail service outage when this conversion takes place; announcements will be made in advance so faculty and staff can prepare for this outage.

UPC Information Technology Committee

Student Access to Technology Fee Proposal

The University Planning Council’s Information Technology Committee will conclude its work on a Student Access to Technology Fee proposal at the Committee’s May 8th meeting. The proposal will be presented to the UPC at the May 15 meeting. The current draft of the proposal is available under the May 8 agenda for the UPC-IT Committee in NAUTICAL. The Committee has also established a web site related to the fee proposal, at uwf.edu/techfee.

Information Technology Strategic Plan

The UPC-IT Committee will also finalize a draft University Strategic Plan for Information Technology at the May 8th meeting. The draft plan may be viewed under the May 8 meeting agenda in NAUTICAL. This draft will also be presented to the UPC on May 15. Should the plan receive endorsement from the Council, it will be posted in the UPIC system.
Florida and State University System

NWRDC mainframe is nearing capacity.

Much of UWF’s administrative computing occurs on the mainframe system of the Northwest Regional Data Center (NWRDC) in Tallahassee. At the NWRDC Technical Committee meeting on April 30, information was shared that shows the mainframe system there is nearing its capacity. While an upgrade is planned for later this year, processing slowdowns and other problems will undoubtedly occur in the interim, particularly during the heavy August registration period. UWF should be prepared for the impact from these computer capacity restrictions. Most of this processing load comes from web-based information systems deployed by the universities (such as UWF’s COMPASS system) that use the mainframe for background processing.

Departments that use the NWRDC system can help by deferring non-critical work to non-peak hours, particularly outside the 10 AM – 4 PM range. Certain reports and batch jobs can be run at night, and that is preferred over daytime processing if possible. In addition to helping with the capacity shortage, this saves UWF money, as processing costs differ by the time of day. During the peak daytime hours, each hour of mainframe processor computation costs UWF $828.

University CIOs will meet in Tallahassee on May 28.

The annual spring meeting of the Florida public university CIOs will be held in Tallahassee on May 28. If you have issues you wish addressed at this meeting, please send them to me.

Michael Dieckmann