Reducing Password Clutter, continues

When alumni, family, and friends return to Blacksburg after an absence, they invariably remark on the changes to the campus and the community: the new buildings, the new roads, the new stores. They may even comment on the commonness of smartphones and mobile computing devices, although these are not unique to Blacksburg! Equally amazing changes have occurred in the complexity of the university itself: more students, more faculty and staff, more programs.

One area significantly affected by all these changes is the University Switchboard. Years ago, the switchboard provided callers with the phone number of a faculty or staff member, a department, or an on-campus student. Now, individuals typically handle those easy look-ups themselves, finding information from their contact list in their cell phone, or using the HokieMobile app on their Android device or iPhone, or using VT People Search from the university’s website. Instead, today’s calls to the switchboard tend to be complex with people not knowing exactly what they are looking for—someone to help them get the grubs out of their yard, or looking for the “Spanish” department.

The university’s coming communications system—Unified Communications—is working with the switchboard and other departments that have a high volume of telephone calls. The new system will use improved technologies to provide callers with the information they need. Smarter telephone menus provide for quicker and more direct service to each caller, matching availability and skills of the staffer to the type of call. The system opens options to work across different call centers (for example, the University Switchboard and 4Help), allowing a more efficient workflow, and Document Management, and other services.


“The form of the report is an example of the higher education it celebrates and advocates: that of the networked university. The report is not merely on the web, it is the Web, built on an open-source, collaboratively developed blogging platform called WordPress.”

By shaping the report on a blog foundation, the forum invites interaction through searches, keyword tagging, commenting, and the “trackbacks” generated by incoming links. Keyword tagging permits a non-hierarchical view of the report, with readers able to “shuffle” the pages and excerpts based on commonalities of the keywords, and so experience the report richly.

As the task force worked to invent a high level view of the future of higher education, materials mounted, and mere text was unassisting. Multimedia elements bring the writing to life. The website itself brings sufficient unity to the report while encouraging readers to interact with the site and to explore areas of interest, while continuing to build the site with their own comments. The task force included faculty and staff members and students from academic and administrative support areas. In addition to Professor Campbell, members and contributors from Information Technology included Anne Moore, task force co-chair and Associate Vice President for Learning Technologies. Others from Information Technology included professionals from Learning Technologies, experts on network architecture from Network Infrastructure and Services, and the co-chair of the subcommittee on organizational systems, Associate Vice President Debbie Fulton.
While videoconferencing operates on television-style sets, TelePresence’s 55-inch plasma screens allow the “life size” view of the remote location to include important details like facial gestures and real-time eye contact. This immersive experience means participants at a distant site feel as if they were physically present in the room. Ludwig Gantner, the supervisor of the Video Network Operations Engineering group, which includes David Schuh and Kyle Kirk, part of Video/Broadcast Services (VBS), noted that the design of each TelePresence room enables the participant’s field of view to be filled with the view of the remote location. High fidelity, stereophonic sound accompanies the high definition video.

Room 312 Burruss Hall was the first TelePresence room at the university, followed closely by 1100 Torgersen Hall for larger groups. The National Lambda Rail’s TelePresence Exchange links the Cisco TelePresence rooms among the four universities. Courses originating at one university can include students at other universities, participating simultaneously alongside their distant, fellow students.

Through the TelePresence Interoperability Project, participation is possible from multiple devices. The meeting pictured here shows a high-definition video-conference room, a laptop, an iPad tablet, and an Android-based smartphone, taking advantage of both the interoperability project and the high-speed network available at Virginia Tech.

Reducing Password Clutter

How many passwords do you have? Too many to remember? Do you use the same password for work, a banking service, and the rewards program at your favorite retailer? We know that we protect our work and personal information better if different providers (work, bank, store) don’t have the same password, and if we don’t write the passwords on yellow sticky notes. But it can be difficult to remember so many, or even to keep entering the same one over and over!

The university’s Central Authentication Service (CAS) allows you to sign into several university online services by entering your PID and password only once. CAS verifies that the combination of PID and password is correct, and sends a message to the online service that you are “authentic.” CAS also sends information...