

University ushers in myUWindsor web portal

By Nick Olynyk
Lance Writer
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The newly created myUWindsor web portal, launched on Sept. 10 as part of the University of Windsor's re-branding campaign, continues to attract student users.

The portal is an online, virtual, student service centre that will serve as a navigator for the already existing databases of Webmail, Collaboration and Learning Environment Windsor (CLEW), and an increasing amount of the Student Information System (SIS).

"It is one-stop shopping for students. We have a one-stop office on campus but now we are talking about a one-stop, virtual facility," offered IT Services director Roger Lauzon.

After discovering last year that CampusEAI Consortium, a non-profit technological service group based in Cleveland, Ohio, offered universities in-kind grants, UWindsor's Web Management Committee jumped at the opportunity to apply. The result was \$1 million in funding and equipment, which has been put towards creating a more student-centred web site.

"Students are interested in content, not necessarily fancy designs and pictures. It is nice to have that. But at the end of the day — what are you looking for? Keep it simple, and allow [students] as much as they possibly can in the portal," Lauzon explained.

The portal's greatest advantage may be its most simplistic feature. Users have to log in only once upon entering, as opposed to separate multiple log-ins in past systems.

Vice-provost, students and registrar, Clayton Smith, claims that the consensus of past focus groups was that the University lacked a developed "virtual side." With this need in mind, developers decided to create a system that would work for students on a personal level.

"[IT staff] are seeking input every step of the way. [The portal] is not about what administrators want to see, or what faculty want to see. This is specifically geared to what students want."

Smith has been regularly giving demonstrations in various buildings around campus and is pleased with the daily progress of the system.

"Literally every time I go to do a presentation to another part of the institution about [the portal], I am seeing things that [developers] have brought in," said Smith. The portal's rapid enhancement is due in part to students, who are encouraged to provide IT Services with suggestions and comments about the new system. Developers are interested in user feedback for direction on what new features could enhance the site, Lauzon said with enthusiasm.

Each student will be able to personalize their own portal through features such as RSS feeds and targeted messaging from faculty, which only delivers professors' announcements to the students who need them.

IT staff have been met with student approval. On the first day alone the site received over 2,000 hits, followed by a steady stream of 6,000 log-ins over the next two weeks.

"I really like only having to log-in once for everything," Mathematics and Statistics major, Billy Hillier, said after exploring the new system for the first time. "It just makes things easier."

After completing the student portal, IT staff will focus on erecting a portal oriented towards faculty members. The student portal's full completion date is set for the beginning of the winter 2008 semester.