

Technology

■ The Softer Side of Tech

The new technology-infused classroom at Washington State University's College of Business and Economics in Pullman, Washington, isn't quite what most people expect when they think of "state-of-the-art." Instead of a room filled with glowing computer monitors and desks with data ports, visitors to WSU's "Boeing Wireless Classroom of the Future" are met with bean bag chairs, comfortable red and black sofas, and a generally relaxed atmosphere.

"Many students think it's a faculty lounge or a coffee lounge when they first walk in," jokes Craig Cumberland, a Ph.D. student and one of the first to teach a class in this environment. "They are stunned to learn that it's a classroom. But students in the current classes rave about the room, not only because it's different, but also because it takes them and their instructors out of their traditional roles. Rather than the 'sage on the stage,' the instructor is more of a 'guide on the side.'"

The classroom's design is meant to create an environment where the technology remains accessible, yet inconspicuous. Moreover, students can move freely in the room to form groups and work in teams; in addition, they assume a more active—and interactive—learning style, explains Cumberland. "The point of wireless technology is to free the user to be mobile, yet still remain connected," he says. "With fixed desks and tables set up in the traditional 'horseshoe' design, students often feel restricted by the space. So, we chose to build an environment that encourages mobility and redefinition right from the beginning."

The classroom is equipped with



WSU's new wireless classroom requires faculty to take a different approach to teaching. Here, WSU professor Joan Giese teaches students not from behind a podium, but from the arm of a comfortable couch.

two computers, one that controls the projector system and one that controls other media technology such as DVD and CD players. The "dual projector system" can send information to a 20' x 10' screen along the rear wall of the classroom. The room is also enabled with Bluetooth technology—a new wireless protocol—to allow users to connect to their computer environment via laptop or PDA. Students can upload information wirelessly from their own devices to project on the large screen.

"The facility is also a symbol of our focus on entrepreneurship and innovation throughout the College," says Len Jessup, the school's dean. Jessup co-teaches a course on strategic information technology with Cumberland. "The classroom has become a showcase for the university. In just a few short months we've brought into the classroom literally dozens of leading executives from around the country either in-person or via video conference."

For Cumberland, an ideal class in the wireless Boeing room is no longer one in which he is able to deliver a lecture point-for-point in the time allotted. He now views an ideal class as one where he doesn't make it through the first bullet point of his first slide before he's facilitating a raging debate on the previous

week's assigned reading. "It's very active and very different from the traditional lecture-and-note-taking activities many faculty are accustomed to," says Cumberland. "Faculty have to be prepared to manage the class, not deliver it."

■ AthenaOnline.com Introduces Online Collaboration Tool

AthenaOnline.com, a Reno, Nevada, publisher of multimedia training, education, and career development products, recently announced the launch of a new service for real-time knowledge delivery and learning. The Athena KnowledgeShare Server can be applied to distance learning, classroom follow-up, panel discussions, and other collaborative events, say company representatives. In addition, any event conducted on the KnowledgeShare server can be recorded so that its information can be searched and retrieved for later viewing.

The system accommodates video, audio, slides, and the use of white board technology for online presentations. These presentations can be viewed by two to several hundred users simultaneously.

The server, which requires the current Macromedia Flash plug-in, is

now available to subscribers of the Athena Knowledge Network, which offers short video lessons from business faculty and authors. To obtain additional information, e-mail sales@athenaonline.com or visit www.athenaonline.com.

Personal Surfing Is Good for Business

Companies that restrict their employees' personal use of the Internet during company time may have to rethink that decision. The University of Maryland Robert H. Smith School of Business in College Park, Maryland, and Rockbridge Associates, a marketing company in Great Falls, Virginia, recently conducted a "National

Technology Readiness Survey."

The survey found that workers in the U.S. spend less time at work using the Internet for personal use (3.7 hours per week) than they spent at home using the Internet for work (5.9 hours per week). These numbers suggest that employers may be better off with lenient policies governing how their employees use the 'Net on the job.

The division between work and personal life has become increasingly blurred, Ronald Rust, director of the Smith School's Center for e-Service, told *Computerworld*. Companies that crack down on personal Web surfing may inadvertently cause workers' productivity and morale to decrease, he said.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Jones School Faculty Report Direct-to-the-Web

The Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management at Rice University in Houston, Texas, has implemented a system to automate and simplify the process its faculty use to enter data into the school's computer database and Web pages. The Jones School recently added a Faculty Reporting System module to its xCatalyst software platform. The software and module were developed by Houston's ESX Engineering (www.esxengineering.com).

The Jones School has been using xCatalyst for more than a year to manage its Web site. Since the new faculty reporting module was added to the platform, the school has been able to replace its existing electronic faculty reporting system, which required redundant data entry. Now, professors can enter their annual reports into the system; those reports are then immediately accessible by the provost and deans. Professors no longer rely on a Webmaster to update their Web pages—the new module allows them to input their own updated information, which is automatically published to their Web pages.

The features of the faculty reporting module "reduce the amount of staff time needed to keep the Web pages up-to-date," says Debra Thomas, director of public relations for the Jones School. She adds that the software also has helped the school streamline its operations both internally and externally. "The platform has really helped us with our Web initiatives, allowing us to be more efficient in getting our information to the public."

Features of the Faculty Reporting System module include three levels of security access to the system; data entry and user action forms, which allow faculty to input defined information on demand; and specified sections of data output, where certain collected data can be published on the public Web site.




NEWSBYTES

IUSB LAUNCHES MIS

This fall, Indiana University, South Bend, will add a business major with a concentration in management information systems to its undergraduate program. IUSB's School of Business and Economics is adding the program in response to positive feedback to its master of science in management information technologies, which it launched in 2000. Undergraduates pursuing the new major will take classes in subjects such as database management systems, Web page design, e-commerce, and computer programming.

TWO COUNTRIES TOP TECH LISTS

Finland recently ranked No. 1 in its use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in a recent report on global information technology. The report, published by the World Economic Forum with the World Bank and INSEAD business school, ranked 82 countries in their readiness to use and deploy network technologies. Finland edged out the U.S. for first place. Meanwhile, a report from Cap Gemini Ernst & Young found that Sweden outpaces its European counterparts in the accessibility and sophistication of its online services for public and corporate consumption. 

DATABIT

The National Technology Readiness Survey from the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business found that of those who use their work computers for personal Internet surfing, 22 percent checked account information from a utility company (up from 13 percent in 2001) and 20 percent paid a credit card bill online (up from 15 percent in 2001).