New University Computing Environment
Benefits include improved service, security

This fall, the University is set to undergo major changes as it replaces Novell with a completely new computing environment. The transition from Novell to a Microsoft Active Directory (AD) domain in a newly built General Computing Network (GCN) provides UNCG with a higher secure computing environment.

The replacement of the Novell enterprise platform with an AD/GCN environment aims to improve service, reduce ongoing hardware and software costs, and better protect University data. Donna Heath, Associate Vice Chancellor for Systems & Networks says, “The AD/GCN will provide faculty and staff with an easier to navigate and use campus computing environment that is more stable.”

Faculty and staff will notice significant changes in the new computing environment. To remove much of the burden of system maintenance from the user, centrally managed settings will ensure that computers in the AD/GCN are up-to-date with operating system patches, antivirus software, and a firewall before they can access the campus network. Computers in the GCN will compute on a “private” campus network, making them less vulnerable to attack. Users will have to compute in the GCN and join the campus AD domain to access enterprise services, such as network file space, printers, and applications directly without using virtual private network (VPN) software.

ITS understands that this transition will be disruptive to faculty and staff, and will work with departments to facilitate the migration process. For more detailed information about the AD/GCN project, visit http://its.uncg.edu/Projects/AD/ or contact 6-TECH at 256-TECH (8324).

Campus Telephone Service Converting to Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP)

ITS began the campus’ conversion to a Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) telephony system this summer. The VoIP system leverages the campus’ investment in the data network and will reduce the rates that campus departments pay for voice mail. The VoIP system also offers an improved voice mail system and better support for Automated Call Distribution (ACD) systems such as the one used by Financial Aid.

Telephone Services is contacting campus departments to discuss their telephony needs and present the options available under the new VoIP system. Clients who continue to use analog phones will be minimally affected by the change, but clients who wish to use digital phones have a few choices to make. Digital phone clients can choose between a physical phone or a “softphone,” which is computer software that provides the functionality of a physical phone.

The VoIP transition is expected to last through October. Visit http://its.uncg.edu/projects/voip/ for more information.
Students Evaluate Technology Services

In 2008 and 2009, students evaluated campus technology services via surveys administered by the Office of Institutional Research (http://ire.uncg.edu/).

In the 2008 Spring Graduating Senior and Sophomore surveys, 94.3% of seniors and 95.3% of sophomores who use technology services rated that overall technology services were “excellent” or “good.” (These calculations exclude those who responded “don’t know”/“did not use”). The Sophomore and Senior surveys also revealed that UNCG continues to have higher satisfaction levels in various technology-related categories when compared to an average of similar schools in the UNC system (for example, see sophomore graph below). The Office of the President mandates these two surveys for all UNC system schools.

The Spartan Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) is a UNCG-specific survey administered to a random sample of undergraduate students on a biennial basis. The survey results from the 2009 SEQ were particularly positive for iSpartan email services. 90.3% of respondents indicated they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with iSpartan email. This is compared with 63.4% satisfaction with e-Spartan email in 2007. Only 2.1% of respondents were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with iSpartan and 7.5% were “neutral.” iSpartan email for students (hosted by Google) was implemented in August 2008.

Campus Technology Updates

Postini Anti-Virus/Anti-Spam
In July, UNCG implemented Postini, a new anti-virus/anti-spam solution for faculty and staff email. Postini, which replaces Sophos PureMessage, identifies and quarantines spam and viruses. For more information about Postini, go to http://spamcontrol.uncg.edu/.

Element K Discontinued
The contract with Element K, an online training solution, was not renewed for 2009-2010 due to budget constraints.

Campus-wide Hardware Procurement Program
University departments can order desktop and laptop computers at substantial discounts through the Campus-wide Hardware Procurement program. Visit http://its.uncg.edu/Technology_Purchases/CHP/ for more information about the program, including computer specifications and how to place an order.

Information Security: Reducing the Risk of Web Browsing

There was a time when Web pages were simply Web pages—basic text with linked image files.

This changed in 1995 when Netscape introduced a capability for its Web browser to execute programs embedded in the page. This let Web designers create more active pages, but it also delivered code to your computer that executes automatically—something a hacker wants it to do.

In the early days, compromising computers though their Web browsers wasn’t attractive to criminals for various reasons. This changed with the rise of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer (IE) as the predominant Web browser. IE was tightly integrated into the operating system, which meant it could offer hackers greater access.

So, what is the current threat to Web users? The news is not good. There has been an increasing trend to push more “active content” to the browser. JavaScript, ActiveX controls, and Flash movies are all potential means to run unsolicited programs on your computer.

There are steps you can take to reduce the risk associated with Web browsing. Don’t run browsers under Administrator privileges. Make sure your browser is the latest patched version and is set to update itself. Block all advertisements and active content that you do not implicitly permit. Restrict browsing, especially at work, to trusted and necessary sites.

One recommended setup is to use the Mozilla Firefox browser with the NoScript and Adblock Plus add-ons. NoScript will block almost all active content on the pages you visit and AdBlock will do the same for advertisements. Your Web experience will be noticeably different and some pages might not work, but remember that it’s a flaw in the site, not your browser.

— ITS Security Office