ITS strives to make students’ lives easier

By Victoria McCabe
Crusader Copy Editor

Holy Cross’ web development team recently completed and unveiled the first applications for the new student web services feature accessible on the official college website. Released on the website on Dec. 10, 2001, an announcement of the new available services was made to students a few days prior to the winter break.

The first group of services to be offered under the new system includes access to individual student bills, schedules and grade reports dating back to one’s first semester at Holy Cross, as well as the full current course guide. Services can be accessed from any computer, on- or off-campus, by using a Novell login name and password.

A five-member web development team, headed by Chuck Caputo, manager of web development for ITS, researched possible software products offered by outside parties for approximately two years but was unable to find one that was comprehensive enough in its capabilities. At the end of last year’s spring semester, a third-party product was released, but could not handle enough users to meet Holy Cross’ needs.

In early September, after searching unsuccessfully for a compatible existing software package, the web development team decided to design its own independent system that could be expanded over time as ideas for new services would continue to surface. A concept was drafted and later approved by the director of ITS, the Office of the Registrar, the Office of the Bursar, various committees and finally President of Holy Cross Fr. Michael C. McFarland, S.J. “Our goal was to develop initial services in time to meet students’ needs. All the services the website now offers are important, especially grades and financial aid information like student bills. I think that it is very important for us to be able to know where we stand.,”

Said Caputo. “Our goal through this endeavor is to make life at Holy Cross easier in terms of access to the information students, staff and alumni need from anywhere, be it at school, at home or at the public library. We cannot provide official transcripts, for example, but we can offer students something to quickly show if they are applying for a job at home. Student lives are not run nine to five like office jobs; if a student needs information about their grades or their bills at midnight, it will be there for them.”

“We have a good framework but we know that there are other services that students would like to see offered. We really encourage students to send us feedback through e-mail; we would like to begin developing options that they want as soon as we can,” he said. Through a different program, the team is planning to put actual course registration and the housing lottery process on the official website and anticipates completing these options by April.

On May 1, 2002, the team expects to add faculty web services to the Holy Cross website. Initially, the only application for faculty and staff will be an online faculty file system, web-based replacement for the current faculty information system, which allows faculty members to update their biographies and resumes for the administration. Said Caputo, “We want to find out what online services the faculty and staff would like to have and develop options based on their needs. We plan to eventually give faculty the means to submit their grades through this online service.”

In addition, the team hopes to offer alumni services, such as access to transcripts. The ultimate goal of the web development team is to establish multiple services for students, faculty, staff and alumni. All users will access the site using a single sign-in screen, and based upon username properties, an options screen listing all the services available will follow.

“I loved having the ability to find out some of my first semester grades before I even left for winter break; it was a new option that was not available to us in the past. It’s great that the school has been able to combine so many services on one website. Services that students actually need,” said Erin Bartram ’04.

Susan Kelly ’02 said, “I think that the new student services are an effective way to meet students’ needs. All the services the website now offers are important, especially grades and financial aid information like student bills. I think that it is very important for us to be able to know where we stand.”

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By Laura Sniebold
Crusader News Staff

Clinton Shows Support for Israel in Palestinian Conflict

During Bill Clinton’s presidency, he worked to terminate the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. On Jan. 21, Clinton returned to Israel to ask both sides to continue working toward a peaceful resolution to their conflict. He also placed blame on Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader for the failure of his peace initiatives while in office. The purpose of Clinton’s visit to Israel was to accept an honorary doctorate from Tel Aviv University, and to approve of the university’s new Clinton Program for American Studies. However, he also gave a speech in which he highlighted Yasir Arafat’s faults with the peace process and encouraged his Israeli audience to remain hopeful.

While Palestinians are more partial towards Clinton than President Bush, due in part to the fact that President Bush has refused to shake Arafat’s hand. Clinton moreover chose not to meet with Arafat on this trip. Currently, Arafat isquested in the West Bank city of Ramamllah, where he is being watched by Israeli troops, and he is becoming internationally isolated.

In the conclusion of his speech, Clinton spoke of the importance of keeping faith and hope alive during such a time of turmoil. He said: “There is nothing more I can do. But I have lived long enough and had enough success as well as enough failure to tell you that you can never get discouraged, and you can never quit. Because you can never know when there is a chance for a miracle will pass you by.”


Education Spending in Massachusetts

This week, Massachusetts Governor Jane Swift will propose a $136 million increase in education spending for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The new funding is designed to especially help the state’s poorest and fastest growing communities, special education, and the construction of new buildings. With this 3.3 percent increase, the state can now offer a total of $4.3 billion to schools, $20 million for school building assistance, and $50 million for special education, ensuring that more special needs students will be placed properly in school.

However, at this point in time, the national economy is struggling and state revenues are down nearly $200 million. The increase that Swift is offering is the smallest increase in education spending since the state’s 1993 Education Reform Act. However, as the weakening economy is forcing $650 million in budget cuts, basic education spending has been raised by seven percent. Geoffrey Beckwith, executive director of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, which lobbies for cities and towns, recognizes how difficult it will be to maintain Massachusetts’ current level of educational quality. He is, however, appreciative of Swift’s efforts in such a trying time.

Unfortunately, $34 million of the new spending is offset by cuts to certain educational programs, which include promotion of desegregation, aid to districts which are losing students to charter schools, and an Internet access program for teachers.

The size of the budget shortfall is so large that any expansion of spending, no matter how desirable, is very questionable. “Somewhere they have got to find savings,” says Michael J. Widmer, president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation. The solution that Swift has been considering is to use the state lottery to increase the aid to cities and towns by reducing the payments to winners. The Massachusetts Lottery devotes 70.7 percent of its revenues to prizes, and Swift wants to reduce that to 62.9 percent.

Source: The Boston Globe, Jan. 20, 2002

American Aid to Afghanistan

In Tokyo, Japan, on Monday, Jan. 21, representatives of over fifty countries and organizations, including the United States, assembled to discuss the rebuilding of Afghanistan. The United States agreed to provide nearly $300 million for initial reconstruction efforts. The first year contribution from the United States, which will be one fifth of the $1.7 billion that the United Nations has speculated will be needed for the first year, will be used to aid agricultural, health and security programs, as well as refugee assistance.

Afghanistan will need $10 billion in the next five years. This greatly exceeds any relief that has already been promised for basic programs, and the construction of new buildings. The Massachusetts Lottery devotes 70.7 percent of its revenues to prizes, and Swift wants to reduce that to 62.9 percent.