

Worldwide Epidemic Hits Home as Fall Semester Starts

Everyone living in the Oxford area is familiar with the increased traffic that occurs when Ole Miss students return for the fall semester. This year, though, the worst congestion wasn't on the streets. It was on computers...in offices, dorms, and homes all around town.

"It was terrible," reports Margaret Talbot, Senior Secretary in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. "We had an increased number of students registered, and 80 to 90% of my work with them involves using the Internet, and yet I would find myself just sitting there waiting and waiting."

The situation wasn't unique to Ole Miss. Around the globe, computer users waited interminably for websites and e-mail accounts to open. Back-to-back attacks by the Blaster worm and SoBig.f virus virtually shut down the Internet for several days, just as classes at educational institutions around the country were getting underway.

"Things got so busy, we couldn't keep track of how many calls we were getting," says Robby Seitz, who works at the Information Technology Helpdesk. "These viruses were incredibly resilient and very sneaky. We were getting really odd calls saying, 'I can't copy and paste,' 'There's nothing in my Eudora inbox,' and 'My computer boots up and then goes into shutdown mode and I can't stop it.' It took a while before we started recognizing all these different problems as being virus-related."

The IT Helpdesk also received calls from people whose computers weren't infected, but who couldn't access the Internet or their e-mail.

"Part of what these viruses did was monopolize network bandwidth to such an extent it bogged everything down," explains Seitz. "Web pages within the UM domain were still somewhat accessible, but there were times when they just wouldn't open, and for faculty and staff trying to do their jobs and students trying to view their accounts, this was a problem."

It was a problem shared with virtually every other institution of higher learning in the United States, if not the world. Oberlin College in Ohio found infections in 9 out of every 10 student computers and threatened to fine students \$25 when they inadvertently spread a virus. Salisbury University in Maryland shut down its entire network for student residence halls for one day. Many universities, including Vanderbilt, MIT, and Ole Miss, blocked infected computers from accessing the network.

When the major outbreak of viruses occurred, the IT Technical Services group recorded a marked jump in the

number of daily e-mail messages generated from 350,000 to approximately 1 million. Even after the main viruses subsided and the Internet recovered, some 15.5 million messages were recorded in the month of September, 7.7 million of which contained attachments and were scanned, and 2.3 million of which contained suspected viruses.

"Basically, the viruses are still out there, and they're still generating messages," says Teresa McCarver, IT Helpdesk Manager, "and there will be major attacks again in the future, possibly very soon, so you've got to protect your computer."

Are There Flu Shots for Computers?

These sites have information and updates to protect your computer:

<http://www.olemiss.edu/virus/>

for the UM Virus Center with recent alerts and prevention tips.

www.olemiss.edu/depts/it/av_pol.pdf

for the UM Anti-Virus Policy.

www.microsoft.com/security/protect/default.asp

for Windows updates (or in Internet Explorer, you can click on "Tools" and then "Windows Updates").

McCarver says the very best way to do that is to keep both your anti-virus software and Windows system up to date (see box). The Office of Information Technology has a site-licensing contract for Symantec Anti-Virus Software and can provide that to departments wishing to purchase it.

Thanks to a series of firewalls and other protection systems, the computer congestion at the beginning of the semester didn't cause any damage to the University's servers or affect the information stored on them. But it was a major nuisance.

"We weren't very productive that week," says Janae McDonald, Manager of the Employment Office. "The virus prompted departmental and personal e-mail accounts to send infected messages to everyone in the address books and anyone who had ever e-mailed us. People we didn't know were calling and saying, 'I can't open your attachment.' It didn't make us look very good, and it was an enormous hindrance to our work. I just can't understand why anyone would create these viruses."

TACIT Program Gives Faculty a Technological Boost

These days technology and teaching increasingly go hand in hand. But with limited budgets and rapidly changing technologies, it's not always easy to keep up. That's where the University of Mississippi's TACIT program can assist.

TACIT (Technology Acquisition for Curricular and Instructional Technologies) is funded by the Provost's Office and facilitated by the Office of Information Technology. Its aim is to replace outdated computers for faculty members, giving them access to available technological resources and the ability to create their own.

Dr. Bradley Robinson, Associate Professor of Music, credits the program with being a major factor in both the success of his research and the quality of his teaching.

"My first TACIT computer replaced a primitive laptop

which had only five (*yes, I said five*) megs of RAM," he explains. "I was given instant access to the Internet and all its informational wealth! Now TACIT is furnishing a more advanced machine which will allow me to conduct top flight research, seek new ways to improve my teaching, and run the advanced musical programs needed to produce new vocal anthologies for publication."

Ninety-three faculty members received TACIT computers this fall. They were required to attend a general TACIT training session and two additional sessions on topics of their choice. Offerings included digitization, the academic web, multimedia classrooms, and hidden e-mail features.

For more information, contact the Provost's Office at 915-5974, the Faculty Technology Development Center at 915-7918, or visit www.olemiss.edu/tacit/.

Tech Tip from Jason Hale

in the Mississippi Center for Supercomputing Research

Got Too Much E-Mail? Filters Can Save the Day!

You can employ filters in your e-mail client (Eudora, Outlook, or Webmail) to automatically catch incoming messages meeting your specified criteria and divert them into named folders, or into the trash, before they can clutter your inbox or offend your sensibilities. I use them to cut down on the number of unwanted spam I have to process each day and to automatically organize the incoming messages I want to keep.

I have created a folder for a class I teach with a subfolder for each student in the class. I also created a filter for each student which automatically files their e-mails in the correct folder based on the "From" address of the message. The new e-mails are still brought to my attention by Eudora, but not in an intrusive way. I also set up deletion filters based on the "Subject" line for repeat spam and viruses with subjects containing phrases like "Your Details," "Wicked Screensaver," or "A Nice Game."

In Eudora, choose Tools->Filters, or right-click a trigger-worthy e-mail in your inbox and choose Make Filter. In Outlook, try Tools->Message Rules->Mail, New. You can get more info on filters and other e-mail features at http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/bookshelf/doc/email/email_table.html

Or attend (or request) the IT Seminar: Mail Call—A Guide To Customizing Your E-Mail at Ole Miss, or just review the seminar notes at <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/it/seminars/guides/customemail.html>

For specific questions on filters or other e-mail topics, contact the IT Helpdesk at 915-5222.

Teacher Evaluation Process Goes Online

This fall Ole Miss students will have the opportunity to utilize new online forms for evaluating their instructors. Senior Alan Farris, who did a test run of the new system, thinks they will welcome the change.

"Oh, it was very smooth," he reports. "It's very easy to do. You just click on your responses and then hit submit. There's no time restriction, and you can do it any time of day from anywhere. I think students will love it."

Students can access the evaluation forms by using a web interface that is part of the student services site. Once they enter their webID and password, they can click on a link called "Evaluation of Teaching" which will display a list of courses in their current schedule. Clicking on each course will open an evaluation form to complete. In order to maintain students' anonymity, no personal identifiers will appear on or be stored with evaluations. The submission window runs from November 14 to December 5.

"We have two main goals in moving to an online process," explains Dr. Maurice Eftink, Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School. "One is to provide convenient access for student input, and a second is to offer added features that will make the process even more useful for improving instruction."

One new feature on the evaluation form is a text box for answering the question, "What do you want other students to know about your experience in this class?" The comments students submit in this box will be included when teacher evaluation results are made public, allowing students interested in a particular course to see what their peers said about it and the instructor.

"I think this will be a huge advantage to the new system," says Farris. "If students don't recognize right away how helpful these evaluations can be, they'll definitely know by next semester."

Moving online will allow customized questions to be added to evaluations in the future. Departments wishing not to use online evaluations this semester will have a paper-based alternative.

Some Cyber Thoughts from David Rock

Spam, spam, spam...and more spam.

As an advocate of technology for the use of teaching and learning, I cannot help but be concerned and overwhelmed by the useless e-mail trash that comes through our computers. E-mail is an integral part of several courses I teach. Even after I have employed filtering techniques, my inbox is still inundated with 300 messages, of which only 25 are from students and the remainder just trash. I also feel for our students as well. They are required to use e-mail to complete assignments only to find that our system is bogged down due to the spread of viruses and spam. Their e-mail messages are rejected and returned which adds to everyone's frustration. Recently, a faculty survey was conducted regarding spam and the use of filtering systems (see box for results).

So what is the answer? For one solution, visit the following link: www.bordergatewayprotocol.net/~jon/humor/web_animations/may02-smilepop-soapbox4.swf

There you'll find a humorous animation that also rings with truth about the situation (see still shot shown here to get the gist of it). If we follow a few simple rules, our e-mail world might become a better place.



A note about the author:

Dr. David Rock is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Secondary Education and current Chair of the Faculty Senate.

He is a tech-savvy guy and has utilized computers and the Internet in some new and exciting pedagogical ways.

The results of the Faculty/Staff Spam Survey are in, and here's a breakdown of the numbers:

98% percent of respondents said they check their olemiss.edu account several times a day, and **86%** said they receive at least 10-20 spam messages daily.

When asked if the amount of spam they receive makes them check their e-mail more frequently, **45%** agreed, **34%** disagreed, and **21%** neither agreed nor disagreed.

87% said they would be interested in seeing a spam filter installed on the University's e-mail server level. If doing so might filter legitimate e-mail, though, then only **45%** expressed an interest in having it installed.

One of these, sponsored by the UM Mathematics Education Program and located at www.olemiss.edu/mathed/contest, presents five mathematical problem solving contests each week. The contests are suitable for different age levels ranging from elementary school students to adults. Participants submit their answers by e-mail and receive responses saying whether they are correct or not. If correct, a student's name and school address are listed on the contest site, and at the end of the month, one name from each site is awarded a graphing calculator donated by Texas Instruments.

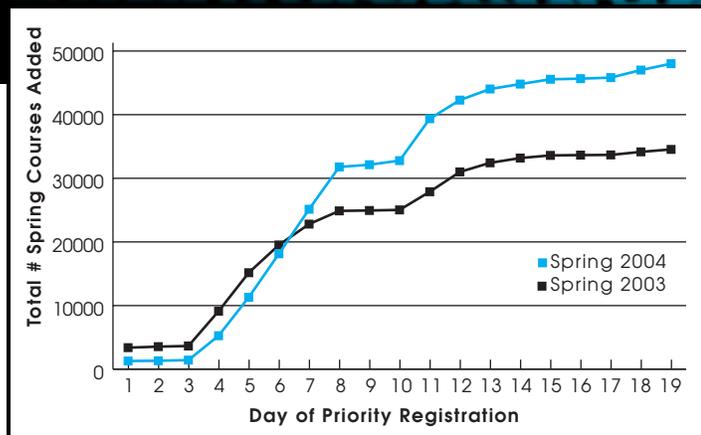
These contests are viewed by students from around the world with participants in over 3500 cities in all 50 states and 80 different countries. The sites receive approximately 800 to 1,000 e-mailed solutions per day.



IT Helpdesk workers Clay Pounds and Brent Warner paid a recent Sunday night visit to the Student-Athlete Computer Lab in Kinard, where they found Bryant Thomas, Taye Biddle, and Jaclyn Toohey (pictured, l to r) hard at work. Karen Schiferl, Assistant Athletic Director for Academic Support, said she asked the Helpdesk folks to come over and share information with student-athletes on obtaining and protecting their webIDs, setting their passwords, and just generally using Campus Management. "We wanted to be proactive in preparing them for priority registration and helping them understand the capabilities of the new system as far as checking grades and accessing their account information," she noted.

What's New in CM These Days...

Priority Registration Numbers Climb



Cecile Labuda, a graduate student in physics, was first to book a class during priority registration this fall. She signed up for Math 656 at 8:03:39 a.m. on Friday, October 24, 2003.



Students were allowed to begin viewing grades on Monday, October 6, and by the end of the week, 5,606 of them had done so. Paper copies of grades were also sent to freshmen at their home addresses.

New Features Available

Ever get an e-mail from a student, but you can't quite connect the name with the face? Well, now in both CM advisor interfaces and on-line class rolls, a student photo can be accessed simply by clicking on the student's name. This feature was suggested by Dr. John Williamson in the School of Pharmacy and facilitated by the work of Kathy Tidwell and Candice McMinn in the ID Center.

Links for posting and viewing advising notes are enabled now in CM advisor interfaces. These features allow advisors to make notes, such as "I strongly encouraged this student to take such and such course," which can then be stored as part of the student's record and viewed by authorized users through the Web or SAPGUI.

The Dean of Students' Office is using a new tool in CM to notify instructors of student crises via e-mail. It works by locating the student's schedule and looking up the e-mail addresses for all his or her instructors and the dean of the school involved. E-mail messages with pertinent details and the subject line, "Student Crisis Alert for ...," are then sent, providing much faster communication to instructors than with the paper notifications used in the past.

Mid-Term Grades Submitted and Checked Online

A total of 28,620 mid-term grades were submitted this semester as part of the new web-based grading system in Campus Management. Instructors were able to submit grades any time of day from anywhere they had Internet access. This is a marked change from previous years when instructors had to deliver grades on Scantron sheets to the Registrar's Office during normal business hours. The stats since web-based grading began last spring show that instructors are taking advantage of their new-found freedom, with grade updates by time of day occurring as follows:

Midnight to 8:00 a.m.:	4,682
8:00 a.m. to noon:	43,574
Noon to 5:00 p.m.:	62,355
5:00 p.m. to midnight:	24,745

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