

Online Policy Directory Now Available

Do you know the official University of Mississippi policy for the disposal of unknown chemicals? Wondering about the policy for awarding honorary and posthumous degrees? Perhaps you're interested in the policy on vending machine refunds?

These and hundreds of other policies are now listed online in the UM Policy Directory. The directory, which debuted April 1, can be reached through the UM website index or information pages for students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

The idea for an online policy directory grew out of conversations last year between Dean of Students Dr. Sparky Reardon, University Attorney Lee Tyner, and others.

"We realized there was some frustration," Reardon comments. "Situations would come up, and one of the questions always was, 'Where is this policy, where can we find that policy?'"

"The M-Book, the faculty/staff handbook, and even the course catalog were some of the places policies were stuck," says Tyner, "and then there were a ton of policies that were none of those places but in someone's file drawer somewhere. Some departments had web pages with policies, but there was no central repository where you could go and find all the policies of the University of Mississippi, how they get adopted, and how long they've been in effect."

Reardon and Tyner took their concerns to Provost Carolyn Staton, who formed a task force last July to oversee

the development of a policy administration system.

"One of the first things we did was create a policy on policy management," recalls Reardon. "Before that, the

University didn't have an official way to create and approve policies, so Lee and I could just write one ourselves, if we liked."

The task force considered policy management websites at other universities before brainstorming what should be part of their own.

"Maurice Eftink had a lot of great ideas," Tyner notes, "and Clay Jones played a big role because he has a lot of policies in his area."

"As a committee, we sat down and really thought through all the options we'd like to have in the interface," says

Reardon, "and then the folks in Information Technology added even more to those."

The result is a sophisticated but user-friendly system that

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The Policy Guys: Lee Tyner and Sparky Reardon

Network Upgrade Begins Soon

The Office of Information Technology will begin a major upgrade of the campus network in early May.

Robin Miller, Director of Technical Services, says the current equipment has been in use for over five years, and during that time changes in technology have increased the need for network bandwidth and services.

"Our intent is to deliver an available, reliable, and responsive network to the end user," Miller states. "We've seen a growth in demand that cannot be managed without this upgrade."

According to Miller, the upgrade will also address such issues as security and wireless management.

"It is imperative that we have better tools to manage

such things as virus outbreaks because those kinds of security breaches are the single largest impediment to reliable network service," he explains. "And as wireless deployment continues across campus, we want to ensure a unified service which lets you authenticate with your webID and then roam to different areas without interruption."

The upgrade will involve some disruptions in network service as equipment is installed and configured.

"We'll communicate the upgrade schedule to affected areas of campus well ahead of time," Miller says. "With a very aggressive implementation plan, our goal is to complete the upgrade before fall semester begins."

Technology Just the R_x for Wilkin

Ask Dr. Noel Wilkin about PCCS, the Pharmacy Continuity Care System, and he'll gladly fill you in on all the details. If a dry erase board is handy, he'll even draw you a diagram!

Wilkin, chair of Pharmacy Administration, is very excited about his department's development of PCCS, a large data warehouse that has the capability to store and analyze the prescription and medical records of Medicare and Medicaid patients across the nation.

"When you go to a doctor, hospital, or pharmacy, they fill out a claim form and send that to your insurer," he notes. "Merging the data from these entities provides a tremendous amount of information about patient behaviors. We can look for patterns in prescription drug use and subsequent undesirable outcomes, like hospitalization for falls or cardiovascular events. This can help us identify negative effects of certain drugs, as in the recent case of Vioxx."

The idea for PCCS evolved from a small study with Information and Quality Healthcare (IQH) in Jackson, which is funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). IQH monitors for quality healthcare in the state, and in this study Wilkin and his group investigated prescription drug use in the elderly.

"We found a lot of inappropriate drug use and drug-drug interactions that could be harmful to patients," he recalls. "As we developed innovative strategies for mining data, conducting analyses, and generating reports, CMS asked first if this work could be done electronically and then if it could be done for the entire nation. We said, 'Sure!' and that's when we built PCCS."

The timing couldn't have been better, because just as PCCS was coming together, the United States Congress voted to extend prescription drug coverage to Medicare patients.

"I like to make the analogy that you're standing in the living room, your child knocks over a flower pot, the doorbell immediately rings, and there's a salesman with a vacuum cleaner in hand," says Wilkin. "That's how we were, the University of Mississippi, because we were already working with CMS on mechanisms to do large-scale monitoring of prescription and health-related outcomes when the legislation passed. We were right there with the vacuum cleaner."

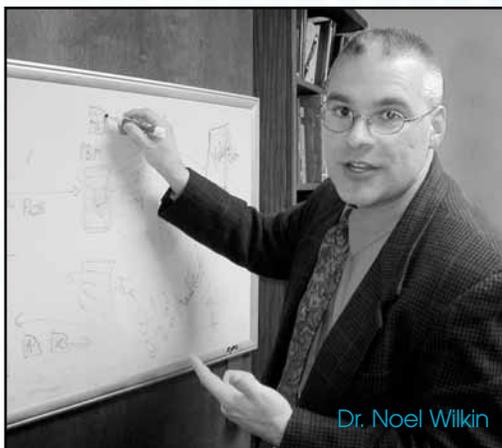
Wilkin and his group collaborated with a data warehouse subcontractor and the Office of Information Technology to

build PCCS and integrate it into the network.

"Collaboration was the key to success in this project," he asserts. "We wouldn't have been able to ensure the functionality of the system and security of the data without their help."

Special software and a pin number are required for researchers to access the data, and the reports are served through a secure website.

"Other researchers have merged prescription and medical data before," Wilkin explains, "but no one has done it on such a huge scale as this. Side effects from medications are extremely rare. You might need to look at a million patients to find just that one who has a side effect from a drug. We are able to look at millions and millions of people in this system because we're using data



from the federal government, which is one of the largest insurance payers in the country."

For Wilkin, the combination of pharmaceutical research and database technology are a natural fit.

"I'm very visual, and maybe that's why this all makes sense to me, because I can see how it all comes together," he notes. "In pharmacy school, I took a programming course as an elective. Ever since I have tinkered with computers and databases, and soon after I came to Ole Miss, I programmed the student information system for the School of Pharmacy."

Wilkin also pushed for the acquisition of the first video server on campus to synchronously webcast a state of the industry address hosted by the Pharmacy School. And he talked an old friend of his into donating the WeatherBug station on Baxter Hall.

"I'm a meddler!" he laughs. "But I really enjoy technology and plugging it into the things I can influence."

For Wilkin, though, the use of technology is just a means to a more important end.

"With PCCS, we can do a tremendous amount of research and create new knowledge about medications that affect patient care," he declares. "We're in it to improve patient care. That's the driving force behind this for us."

A TECHNews Update

The January 2005 issue featured an article on the importance of making websites accessible to users with disabilities. To that end, the Office of Information Technology has recently installed the LIFT Text Transcoder software from usablenet.com to convert UM web pages to text only versions. Users can now link to this service from the Ole Miss home page and use it to view any pages in the www.olemiss.edu domain. Pages in the secure.olemiss.edu domain, which include Online Services, soon will be covered by the service as well.

"Pictures and graphics can be a hindrance to people with disabilities who access the web with tools like Zoomtext or optical character recognition," says Stacey Reycraft, Assistant Director in the Office of Student Disability Services. "While this program doesn't replace the need for websites to be written in an accessible way, having a text only option will definitely help these users and others with slow computers or Internet connections."

Cool Tech Corner

Go Wireless with Your Next Presentation!

If you're tired of stringing cables between your laptop and projector for multimedia presentations, Johnny Price in the Office of Information Technology has a few suggestions for you.

"A variety of wireless projectors are available now," says Price. "We just got a really nice one in IT Media, the MT1075 from NEC, which operates with a wireless card and specialized software on your computer. It makes it easy to have multiple presenters in a class or meeting, because you just switch the wireless access from laptop to laptop instead of having to stop and change cables."

Price notes the NEC projector has some nifty features which allow it to adjust automatically to uneven and non-white projection surfaces. Best of all, it has a brightness of 4200 lumens, making it ideal for use in rooms that

can't be darkened very well.

If you already have a standard projector but would like wireless capabilities, Price suggests an adapter like the Komatsu AirProjector, which plugs into your projector and receives information wirelessly from your computer.

Price warns that, when using a wireless connection, you will lose some transmission speed compared to being hardwired. While this isn't really a factor in PowerPoint and other "photo" presentations, it can show up when playing video clips.

"Video can be choppy with a wireless signal," Price explains. "Radio Shack has a video sender/receiver set that can really help with this. You connect the sender to any source with an RCA jack, such as a DVD or VHS player, camera, digital presenter, or TV, and then the receiver is connected to the projector which shows the video. It uses a 2.4GHz signal, which means you can pick up a little interference sometimes, but I've had really good luck with this item."

Price notes that not every situation calls for a wireless connection.

"If you're going to be two feet from your projector, just use a cable," he says, laughing. "But the next time we set up in a room where we used to run two 50 foot cables from the podium to the projector, I'm sure going to be glad we can go wireless."

Call Johnny Price at 915-5686 or visit the related company websites for information on the devices mentioned in this article.



Video Sender



MT1075

Online Transcript Service Fast and Easy

A new online service makes it easy for University of Mississippi students to obtain official and unofficial copies of their transcripts.

Rebecca Bertrand, President of the Associated Student Body (ASB), says the service is a result of campus democracy in action.

"A resolution suggesting the University offer online purchase of transcripts came before the ASB Senate," she recalls. "The Senate was overwhelmingly in favor of this, because it benefits students anytime they can do something online instead of having to walk across campus and wait in line."

Current students and recent graduates with active webIDs can purchase official copies of transcripts with a credit card and have them sent immediately or at a later date to multiple addresses. Students can also get a free unofficial transcript as a PDF file, giving them immediate access to their academic record.

Previously, students had to visit the Registrar's Office or fax in a request form to purchase transcripts.

"Anytime you fax credit card information, you're going to get a little nervous," notes Bertrand. "Being able to use a secure internet site will give students peace of mind."

According to Registrar Charlotte Fant, processing transcript requests is streamlined by the automated service.

"We used to enter requests manually," she explains. "Now the system automatically prints out the requested transcripts and cover letters, and we just put them in the mail. Then we note that in the computer, and confirmation e-mails are sent to each student."

Fant states that authorized faculty and staff, including deans' offices, advisors, and department chairs, will also have access to unofficial transcripts in the new system.

The transcript service can be reached through the online services website or from links on the information web pages for students and alumni.

UM Shows CM to UK

A group of technical analysts from the University of Kentucky visited Ole Miss the week of March 28th to learn from the Information Technology staff about the Campus Management (CM) technical framework. These peer-to-peer training sessions will continue throughout the spring and summer as UK ramps up for its own implementation of CM.

Shown from left to right in the front row are Mark Combs (UK), Veena Mantena (UM), Ezra Schroeder (UK), and Chris Provence (UM), and in the background are Jie Tang (UM), Linda Bailey (UM), Anil Vinjamur (UM), and Sarah Styer (UK).



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offers a wide variety of options to both those submitting and those reviewing policies.

“The system has different interfaces depending on the role of the user,” explains IT’s Jie Tang, who did much of the web programming. “Those submitting and approving policies can take many actions, such as viewing, editing, adding notes, or managing keywords and related resources. These options are dynamic in that the policy’s status dictates what is available to the user. For instance, an active policy won’t offer the ‘delete’ option.”

Training took place in March for faculty and staff responsible for submitting policies to the system.

“Clearly, in the short term, this has created work,” admits Tyner. “But, in the long term, it will put us all in a much better position, and it’s going to save time and effort, because people will have access to everyone’s policies, and not just faculty and staff, but students, parents, and members of the general public as well.”

“It will take personalities out of policy enforcement,” Reardon notes. “In our office, we have students or parents

who want to know why they have to do something a certain way, and now we can direct them to the official policy right there online.”

“One thing this will do is highlight the gaps and overlaps in our policies,” Tyner adds. “By having them in a central location and doing regular reviews, we can start cleaning them up. Within two or three years, I think we’ll be in much better shape than we are now.”

Reardon and Tyner may have had the vision for the new system, but they’re quick to credit others for making it a reality.

“It wouldn’t have happened if the Provost hadn’t supported it,” declares Reardon. “Buster Clark kept the process moving as task force facilitator and first policy manager, and the IT team created the design and developed the new service within SAP.”

“That’s right, all we were doing was complaining!” laughs Tyner. “We’d still be sitting here if this had been just Sparky and Lee’s project.”

The UM Policy Directory is located at www.olemiss.edu/policies.

www.olemiss.edu/technews



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Information Technology

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