

Students Take Elections Online

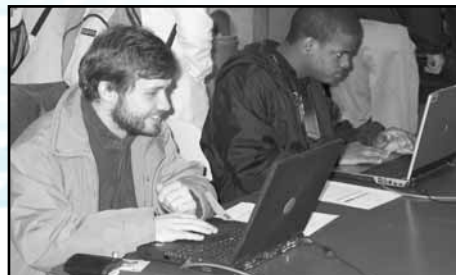
Elizabeth Brown cast her vote in the Associated Student Body (ASB) presidential election on February 21 with the click of a mouse instead of the mark of a pen.

Brown was one of 2,141 students who visited five polling stations across campus in the first ASB election to utilize electronic voting. For the junior, who is a graphic design major from Atlanta, Georgia, it was a welcome change.

"I liked not having to stand in line to fill out the paper ballot and then put it in the drop box," Brown commented. "This was just automatic. It's better than the old way, and I would like to see it continue. It's easier, quicker. It's very cool."

Comments like Brown's were music to the ears of 2005-2006 ASB Elections Commissioners Andrew Edwards and

George Henry (see sidebar for more student comments). The two had worked for several months to make e-voting a reality, and as Edwards knows all too well, they weren't the first to have the idea.



Tom Abell (left) was among the many students who cast their votes in the busy Student Union.

"Two years ago my sister was ASB Elections Commissioner, and she was involved in starting the legislation for electronic voting," explains Edwards, a sophomore marketing major from Dyersburg, Tennessee.

"I had always heard that electronic voting would happen one day, but there was never a time when the ASB had said, 'Let's do this now,'" notes Henry, a junior from Brandon, Mississippi, majoring in biology. "There was some concern about fraud in last year's presidential elections and then

the homecoming elections were just a nightmare to count, so we decided there was no sense in delaying e-voting. If it was a possibility, we should go ahead and do it."

Edwards and Henry worked with Veena Mantena in the Office of Information Technology to develop a secure and reliable online voting system.

"It's set up so only computers that have been authenticated by poll monitors can be used for voting in the election," explains Henry. "The monitors use an online interface to register each voter individually by ID number, and the system won't allow a student to vote until that's done. We wanted to make sure that someone couldn't just sit down at the computer and enter several votes using other people's WebIDs."

"The system won't even register students unless their hours qualify them to vote," notes Edwards, "and it completely assures that a voter can vote only once."



Laushelle Fair contemplates the online ballot before making her decision.

What the Voters Had to Say

"I thought the new electronic voting system was very easy to follow, and it should stick around. I felt like my vote was actually counted versus a paper ballot, where someone had to hand count those."

—Laushelle Fair from Clarksdale, MS
Junior in Hospitality and Management

"Logging in with my Web account information made me feel like my vote was secure, and I liked that the monitor checked my information before I voted. E-voting is the way we need to be going with advances in technology, and hopefully it will increase voter turnout."

—Jill Wacaster from Tupelo, MS
Senior in Broadcast Journalism

"I liked it. It was quick and wasn't hard to do. I think it should continue. I think it would be nice to work it out where you wouldn't have to come to the polling stations to do it."

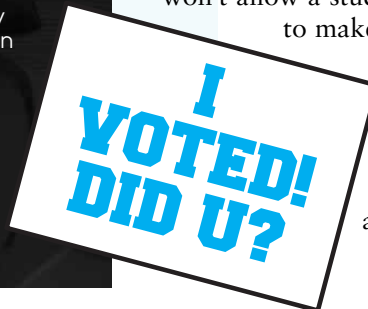
—Zeb Whatley from Greenville, MS
Junior in Biology and Chemistry

"I just transferred from Yale, and they do all their voting online, but there you just log in from your own computer and vote. I actually thought that was even better, because then people couldn't lean on you as you went to vote. But I guess they could do that if you were voting in your dorm room or at a fraternity or sorority."

—Tom Abell from Jackson, MS
Sophomore in Economics

"It was wonderful. It was very quick and well-organized. I felt it was much more accurate than in the past."

—Carlton Wilkinson
Sophomore in Accounting



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Interesting UM TechFacts

Here's a glimpse at some of the important university processes facilitated by technology in recent months:

- From January 9 through January 12, 2006, the Office of Financial Aid disbursed **\$34.6 million** in aid. On one day alone, January 10, FA disbursed \$28 million.
- By January 31, 2006, the Office of Human Resources had distributed **6,936 W2 forms** for the 2005 tax year; Procurement Services had distributed approximately **1,100** 1099-MISC forms; and the Office of the Bursar had distributed **18,425** 1098-T statements and 18,880+ 1098-T supplements.
- From November 1, 2005, through March 22, 2006, the Bursar's Office received **986 payments** through the new Biller Direct system totaling approximately **\$900,000**.
- On March 19, online registration for Orientation opened at 8:00 a.m. By the end of the day, **436 students** had registered for Freshmen and Transfer orientation sessions scheduled for the summer.
- Priority Registration opened on March 29, and by April 7 there had been about **40,685 course bookings**.
- As part of the ongoing transfer equivalency determination, the academic departments have equated **34,344 courses** from 809 different transfer institutions.
- **992** courses were offered in Blackboard for the spring semester.
- From January 6 through March 5, the home page of the UM website received **97,863,902 hits**. On April 3 alone, the number of hits was 2,655,626.
- Each day approximately **11,000** unique users make about **350,000** pop connections to the University's e-mail server (sunset). On average, **500,000 e-mail messages** are sent or received per day. Of these, 68% are caught as spam and 2% as viruses.

What's a Wiki?

by **M.K. Smith** in the Office of Information Technology

This question came to mind recently as I responded to a survey about the use of innovative technologies on the Ole Miss campus. Listed among the more familiar blogs, podcasts, and e-portfolios was the term, "wiki." I immediately thought of Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), the online encyclopedia I frequently visit when looking for information, usually on people or places.

Wiki is shortened from "wiki wiki," which is a Hawaiian adjective often used to denote something quick. The first wiki, WikiWikiWeb, created in 1994 by Ward Cunningham, was named after the "Wiki Wiki" bus line at Honolulu International Airport.

Wikipedia is probably the most prominent example of a wiki, which is defined there as "a type of website that allows anyone visiting to add, remove, or otherwise edit all content, very quickly and easily, often without the need for registration."

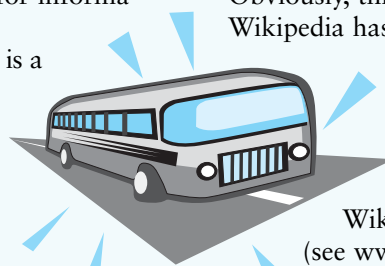
Started in January 2001, Wikipedia currently has 13,000 active volunteer contributors working on 3,800,000 articles in

more than 100 languages. The last time I checked, there were 1,070,486 articles in English alone, and that number grows daily.

There are no special qualifications for contributing to Wikipedia. Anyone with access to a computer and the Internet can write, edit, or correct entries on the site. Obviously, this openness can lead to errors or vandalism, but Wikipedia has a team of administrators that deal with these issues, which it claims are not very prevalent considering the size of the project.

Wikipedia is operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that oversees other wiki projects, including Wiktionary, Wikiquote, Wikibooks, and Wikinews (see www.wikimedia.org for links to these). All Wikimedia projects use MediaWiki, a free software package originally written for Wikipedia but now run on many other wikis.

So check out Wikipedia and other wikis on the Web. If you're thinking of an interactive Web project, a wiki might be the way to go.



Sun Microsystems Offers Matching Grants

Are you in the market for computing equipment for research or academic purposes? Then you should check out the 2006 Matching Grant Program offered by

Sun Microsystems at www.sun.com/edu/matchinggrant.

The program, which ends May 31, offers discounts of up to 50% off on selected Sun servers, workstations, monitors, or storage.



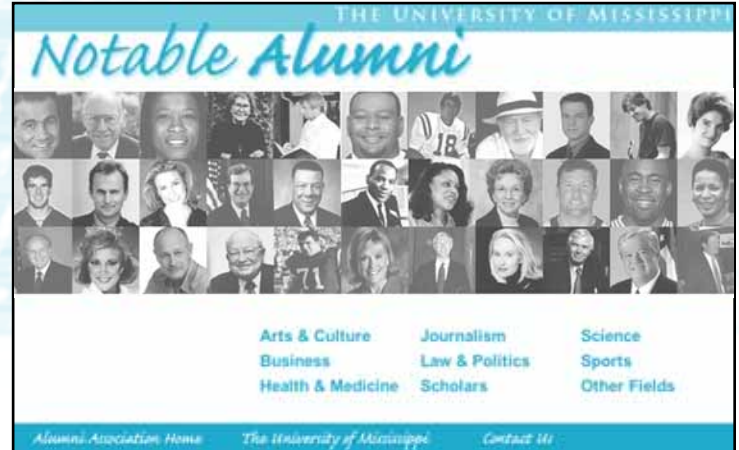
New Website Features Noted Alums

What do philanthropist Jim Barksdale, actress Cynthia Geary, novelist John Grisham, and Olympic gold medalist Jennifer Gillom all have in common? They are among the 225 notable Ole Miss alumni featured on a new website at www.olemiss.edu/alumni/notable.

"We thought this website would be of interest to several audiences, including alumni, friends, student prospects, and even current students," says Wendy Carmean, Director of Marketing for the Ole Miss Alumni Association. "Ole Miss has a lot to brag about. We are happy we have so many accomplished alumni that represent our great university to the world."

The featured alumni are displayed in categories which include arts and culture, business, health and medicine, journalism, law and politics, scholars, science, and sports.

"One of the best things is that this will always be a work in progress as we add more alumni who have made a name for themselves," notes Jim Urbanek, Assistant Director for Alumni Communications. "We hope visitors



will return to the website often."

For more information, contact The University of Mississippi Alumni Association at 915-7375 or alumni@alumni.olemiss.edu.

Are You Ready to Podcast?

by Penny Rice

in the Faculty Technology Development Center

Podcasting, a term coined by combining "iPod" and "broadcasting," is the latest on-demand technology for downloading audio files over the Internet.

You can listen to podcasts on a one-time basis directly from the Web, but most users subscribe to an automatic "feed" where new podcasts from the designated source are automatically downloaded as they become available. This allows you to listen to podcasts anytime on your computer or load them onto an iPod or other MP3 player for playback "on the go."

Many media outlets offer podcasts, including PBS, CNN, NPR, and The Wall Street Journal. Search the Web and you'll find an endless number of talk and music podcasts, English as a Second Language podcasts, and even a MuggleCast for Harry Potter fans.

What if one of the podcasts available featured your classroom lectures, allowing students to listen and review at a computer or on their iPods?

Many universities, including Stanford, are participating in iTunes U, a free, hosted service from Apple that provides 24/7 access to educational content such as lectures, interviews, and listening exercises. Instructors at participating universities can post and change content on their own, or they can allow students to upload content for sharing with the class.

The Faculty Technology Development Center is currently investigating the possibility of Ole Miss becoming an iTunes U campus for the fall semester. If you are interested in creating podcasts of your lectures or other instructional materials, please contact the FTDC at 915-7918 or ftdc@olemiss.edu for more information.

FreshTracks Coming to Ole Miss

Students, faculty, and staff will soon have the opportunity to partake in a new customized music subscription service offered by FreshTracksMusic (FTM) expressly for the Ole Miss community.

FTM is a browser-based service that features selections by independent artists in a wide range of genres, including Pop, Rock, Alternative, Hip Hop, Rap, and Country.

"The variety of artists will appeal to so many musical styles," says Rebecca Bertrand, past president of The Associated Student Body (ASB). "Ole Miss and Oxford are always popular venues for new music groups, and now our students will be able to access that type of 'fresh music' online."

For \$36 a year, subscribers will get unlimited downloads of MP3 files that are unrestricted and unencrypted. These tracks can be burned to CDs and will play on any PC, Mac, iPod, or MP3 player.

"FTM will offer Ole Miss students a legal path for downloading music," Bertrand comments. "The quality of the files is superior to what you often find online, and you don't have to worry about spyware, viruses, and other problems sometimes associated with downloading music."

Watch for upcoming announcements regarding this new service, or contact M.K. Smith in the Office of Information Technology at 915-3033 or mksmith5@olemiss.edu for more information.

FreshTracksMusic.com
new music. no boundaries.

Elections *continued from front cover*

After the polls closed, George Henry and Andrew Edwards (l-r) reviewed the numbers before announcing the results.



Edwards and Henry were surprised when their efforts to institute e-voting for the February elections met with some initial resistance from the ASB Senate before eventually being approved.

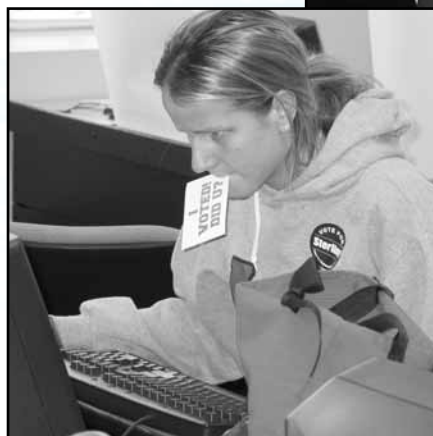
"I think nobody wanted to be the guinea pig," comments Edwards. "We'd been doing it on paper, and everyone was so used to that. But you had 20- and 21-year-old college students saying, 'I don't know about using computers for this,' and I was like, 'Are you listening to yourself?' We live in a day and age where everyone uses e-mail and the Internet all the time. Everything revolves around computers now."

Edwards continues, "I understand having some trepidation, but at the same time the old process had massive shortcomings. The card readers we used to check student ID cards didn't work well, and they didn't restrict anyone from voting."

"The old system wasn't efficient at all," concurs Henry. "For the Homecoming elections last fall, we counted votes until 12:30 a.m., and we still weren't finished. The second night it took another five hours just to count the votes for class favorites."

Since the online system can instantly tally the vote, the results of this year's presidential election were announced earlier than ever before.

"For me, the best part obviously was that the whole thing was over by 5:45 in the evening," says Roun McNeal, the winning presidential candidate and a junior in political science from Leaksville, Mississippi. "Being the test-subject



Voting took just a few minutes for students in a hurry.

was certainly an anxiety-filled job, but I think everyone agreed that, when all was said and done, this system was a tremendous improvement. Lines were shorter, voting was faster, and, honestly, I felt it to be more secure.

"I thought the day went great," asserts Henry. "The line for the Union polling station used to be out the front door, and this time, at its busiest, there were never more than 15 people in what was a quickly-moving line."

"Delta State is the only other school I know in the state where students use e-voting," reports Edwards. "Instead of using polling locations, they have a two-day window for voting from their own computers, and that hasn't worked very well. With our system, we've found a good compromise between paper ballots and being completely online. Granted, I would love to sit at the house in my underwear and vote, but having that convenience would compromise the security of the election."

"I see this system as what we'll use for a long time to come," concludes Henry. "We did get a mailing about voting machines, but they cost \$10,000 a machine, so I don't think that will ever happen."

The ASB used the online voting system again for Senior Class elections on April 4 and a runoff for Senior Class vice-president on April 6.

www.olemiss.edu/technews

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