Committee on Computer Resources Newsletter

Academic Year 2005-2006

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The Knack for Macs
Geoffrey Burleson, Assistant Professor, Music Department

Mac users on the QCC campus may encounter small compatibility issues with certain programs that are essential tools for QCC faculty. Although running SIMS on a Mac does require an inexpensive 3rd party portal program (called DataComet), students can just as easily be advised by clicking on the "Online Services/Academic Advisement (Faculty)" link, from the "Registration" drop-down list on the QCC homepage. Possibly the most prevalent problem involves document attachments, and is encountered when using the MS Outlook Web Access browser to compose and retrieve email off-campus. Sometimes, these attachments arrive with corrupted file names, particularly involving extensions that are incorrect. To resolve this issue:

1. Download the file (example: "filename.dot" and "filename.do" are common corruptions of MSWord document titles.)

2. Manually change the name of the file, substituting the correct extension for the corrupted one (i.e., change "filename.dot" to "filename.doc," by single-clicking on the file name, and retyping the file name or extension.)

3. Open the file.

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Blackboard Bits
Sharon S. Ellerton, Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences

As reported by CUNY on 2/14/2006, Queensborough is the 9th largest user of Blackboard among all CUNY schools and is 1st among all Community Colleges in active courses for the Spring 2006 semester. According to Blackboard webmaster Dave Moretti, since that time the number of QCC Blackboard users has increased.

For the intimidated: Blackboard has become more user friendly, the online instructions are superb and ACC provides workshops to guide you through the process.

Adjuncts interested in using Blackboard cannot access the system for several weeks until they are officially on payroll. Any adjunct interested in using Blackboard can set up a course web-site that can be transferred to Blackboard once the administrative paperwork is completed.

Committees: consider Blackboard for ongoing discussions and as a means to keep in touch between meetings. Any committee interested in establishing a Blackboard site can contact Dave Moretti at the ACC.

Perils of Downloading
Sharon S. Ellerton, Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences

Surfing the web is not what it used to be. Dangers that didn't exist two years ago now lurk at every press of the keyboard. New terms, such as malware, spyware and adware have become part of our vocabulary. Our PCs are assaulted by annoying pop-ups and insidious viruses which relay our every keystroke (including our bank account numbers and passwords) to third parties interested in theft of money and identities.

Our desktop computers here at QCC are not immune. In fact, IT staff spends many hours cleaning infected desktops, sometimes an all day process. Loss of data remains a potential hazard. Most viruses infect our computers from programs we download. IT Director George Sherman warns not to download any program, particularly free ones, such as free screensavers, music, games or horoscopes. CNET has been a common source of malicious downloads. Even though QCC has firewall protection, when you click on a download, you invite that malware onto your computer. QCC is in the process of installing a Spyware, Phishing blocking network appliance to minimize these risks.

Downloading free games, horoscopes, peer to peer software etc onto your work computer is inappropriate and hazardous. For those of you that plan to download work-related files or software which does not originate from a known, legitimate source, ACC Director Bruce Naples offers ACC's resources to faculty. ACC can provide an opinion on the program or perform a preliminary safety test to ensure that it is virus-free.

Director Naples has provided his advice as to how to avoid common pitfalls. Don't install anything unfamiliar from websites such as "needed components or updates". Avoid downloading images from unknown sources sent to you by e-mail. Delete attached e-mail files which you do not recognize. Don't respond to e-mails requesting personal information from unsolicited sites.

For example a recent bank e-mail requested verification of a password or account number. Clicking on the link to the bank within the e-mail brought you to a site that looked identical to the bank's own website, except it wasn't. The best approach would be to close that e-mail and independently locate that bank's website to determine if the request is legitimate.

Needless to say, all of the above advice applies to the safety and security of your home PC. QCC's Internet Security Officer Quincin Gonjon warns that in today's environment, hooking a PC to broadband without a firewall and virus protection will quickly result in an infested, and probably unusable, PC. Simply opening some web-sites could cause unwanted and malicious downloads to invade your computer.

A free Symantic anti-virus program is available to all CUNY employees and is

obtainable through the CUNY portal. Take advantage! In addition, if your PC is not already protected by a firewall there is a good, free firewall available to download from the internet. It is Zone Labs at WWW.zonealarm.com.

Count Down To Graduation
Wendy Ford, Lecturer, Business Department

One of the major campus events is the graduation ceremony. When planning this ceremony, a key question is: How many graduates will attend? Answering that question just got a little easier, with the help of a new system for commencement tracking.

In the past, a student applied for graduation, received a paper receipt, presented it at the Bookstore, and purchased a cap and gown. The Bookstore staff collected the paper receipts and delivered them to the Office of the President, which is involved in planning the ceremony.

With the new system, a student applies for graduation and the information is captured in SIMS. It is then transferred to a secure Oracle database. As students purchase their ceremony attire, the Bookstore staff updates the database. Using a Microsoft Access application, Millie Conte, Executive Assistant to the President, has immediate access to the number of students who have purchased attire.

With this new system in place, the countdown to graduation just got easier.

A Brief Look at ePortfolios
Wendy Ford, Lecturer, Business Department

What is an ePortfolio?
An electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) is a web-based collection of materials that usually includes personal narratives of the learning experience, academic plans, and artifacts such as essays, stories, video and audio clips and resumes.
Why build an ePortfolio?
As a powerful tool for self-reflection, they are student-authored and managed. They foster collaboration through faculty and advisor feedback. They facilitate career development by providing a rich portrait of a student's employment history and abilities.
How?
The ePortfolio pilot project is made possible by a Carl D. Perkins Title V Grant. Multiple levels of support will be available for students and faculty working with ePortfolios. ePortfolio Coordinators and Technicians will provide guidance as students draft content for and design their portfolios.
Who?
QCC's ePortfolio Project currently includes students and faculty in the Business and Music Departments. The goal is to expand access to the entire college community.

Forwarding QCC Faculty E-Mail to Non-QCC Accounts
Karen R. Grant, Professor, Business Department

The Committee on Computer Resources (CCR) has been asked by one of the College's adjunct professors to have his/her QCC faculty e-mail forwarded to another e-mail account, such as AOL. Can this be done? Should it be done?

The following statement is from Tony Hong, Information Systems Specialist, Student E-Mail Administrator regarding this request:

> The QCC Faculty e-mail system is provided to facilitate communication between college communities. QCC e-mail is accessible on and off campus via the internet through any standard browser. Forwarding email from QCC to a non QCC e-mail account would most likely result in a responses being sent back from that unknown, unofficial account. QCC e-mail is kept virus free and protected by anti-spam appliances. All communication from the College should use the QCC.CUNY.EDU domain to avoid being blocked by anti-spam software or servers.

It is the policy of the College to have both faulty and students use QCC e-mail for QCC matters. Faculty members (both part- and full-time) are expected to frequently check their traditional mailboxes for printed materials. Since e-mail is now used to communicate with all members of the College, both full- and part-time faculty members are now expected to frequently access their College e-mail accounts.

How Can Faculty Request Software and Hardware Upgrades?
Danny Mangra, Instructor, Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology

Software
Faculty requesting software should obtain funding through the Departmental budget.

CUNY has site licenses for several software products which are available to faculty. This means that any campus can use the software for free. (do you still need to purchase the software? Is the license a separate expense from the software? Perhaps licenses should be explained). Emil Parrinello in the IT Department is Queensborough Community College=s CUNY software representative. This link to CUNY Site Licenses lists available software.

http://portal.cuny.edu/cms/id/cuny/documents/informationpage/011060.htm

Limited software licenses are available at the Academic Computing Center. (What is a limited software license?).   The Academic Computing Center can

obtain additional software for faculty if a majority (who is this referring to? majority of a department?) express interest in a particular workshop (what is a workshop referring to?)

Hardware

Faculty can request hardware through their department chairperson. The Chairperson can then contact the IT Department director George Sherman, who in turn will attempt to satisfy the request with available hardware.

As monies from the Student Technology fee places new computers in the labs the replaced PCs are refurbished by IT and made available to faculty. Such a computer may be a significant upgrade for a faculty member.

Faculty who are still running the Windows 95 or Windows 98 operating systems can contact IT for an upgrade to Window XP Professional and Office XP.

Departments receiving new equipment should call IT to evaluate the old equipment. If the equipment is salvageable IT will refurbish it and deliver it to that same department or another requesting department.

Other option:

When writing grants consider requesting funds for both hardware and software.

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Technology—Its Downside and Need for Impact Study before its Implementation
Nam Moh, Assistant Professor, Mathematics and Computer Science

New technologies are clearly changing our world. Beyond a doubt, these technologies also have a major impact on education. Their effects are at once positive and negative.

On the positive side, with the advent of wireless capability, students can download resources any time from anywhere that they need them, which otherwise might be impossible or require a trip to the library. The second point is that, in the spirit of "a picture is worth a thousand words", one can use graphics to explain things much more clearly. Also, technology in certain subjects such as mathematics frees us from spending an inordinate amount of time teaching by means of drill and obviates endless drudgery. Hence, it allows more time for communicating fundamental concepts and real applications.

The downsides of technology are that one, it can be abused, and two, it can become a crutch. The new technology, which features an almost instantaneous "cut and paste" function, facilitates plagiarism. There are so many resources available online on so many diverse subjects that a crafty, dishonest and unscrupulous "scholar" can put together a report by doing nothing more than combining another's pilfered work. The second downside is that technology increases the ability to cheat during exams. I personally have observed students in class communicating with others outside the classroom by using their personal digital assistants (PDAs) during the exams. Students can transmit photographs of their exams using their cell-phones.

Another potential problem is that students are using devices in such a way that

they do not learn basic skills. It is possible for people to develop such a dependence on spell checkers that they do not learn proper spelling. I have seen many of my students using calculators to perform elementary arithmetic operations such as six times seven.

In conclusion, we should encourage the use of technology as described above. We should also implement more programs to train faculty, who are often less tech savvy than the students. In particular we must train adjuncts. Moreover, we must encourage faculty to be more aware of the potential abuse of technology and give them suggestions for remedying such situations. Given the importance of this issue, it would be advisable to form a committee to study in more detail the impact of the use of technology.

Queensborough Faculty/Staff E-Mail
George Thorsen, Assistant Professor, Library

Queensborough Faculty and Staff have two very different ways to access their e-mail. If you have the Microsoft Office Suite with an on campus connection, you are probably using Outlook to manage your e-mail account. For many reasons, Faculty and Staff are also able to manage their e-mail account by using the Outlook Web Access. By using Outlook Web Access (OWA), most of the e-mail operations such as send, receive, create new message, etc. take place on the OWA server, not on your work station's hard drive. That means that the Exchange server is more or less "bare bones" in terms of functions and storage.

A Queensborough Faculty/Staff e-mail account has a limit of 50 megabytes of storage. The OWA does not allow the user to archive. Archiving is allowed in Outlook which greatly extends the 50 megabyte limit by storing e-mails and attachments on the local computer's hard drive. For that reason, it is important for OWA users to delete old or unneeded e-mails, especially those with large attachments. As you get closer to reaching your storage limits, the following events take place. At 30 megabytes, you receive a warning. At 40 megabytes, you lose your ability to send e-mails. At 50 megabytes, you lose your ability to receive e-mails.

Outlook Exchange, as configured at Queensborough, requires that a user create a new password every 120 days. At first glance this might seem excessive when compared to other e-mail applications which never require new passwords. The reason is because your e-mail account name and password are the same as your network logon. Because the Exchange user name/password serves two functions, it is necessary to change the password routinely to protect the security of the network.

IT has just recently improved the dialog box that requires users to enter their domain, user name, old password and new password. Now, the domain is incorporated in the form along with rules for password uniqueness.

If you find your inbox filling up too quickly, you can always opt out of _QCC Community Dialog. Often a group like _QCC Community Dialog generates e-mails with very large attachments. If someone wants to sell an item and attaches a 2 megabyte attachment of the item, they have unintentionally used 4% of your entire storage capacity. To opt out of _QCC Community Dialog, send an e-mail to Ralph Romanelli and he will take you off the list.

Another frequently seen problem is the apparent loss of the reply or forward function. To restore this function, the user has to turn off any pop-up blocker or create an exception on the pop up blocker "allow list" with http://mail.qcc.cuny.edu. Replies and Forwards are really pop-ups as far as the browser is concerned.

The Outlook Exchange software currently in use is a little long in the tooth. It reached its end-of-life-cycle on January 10, 2006. Queensborough IT has installed Outlook version 2003 and will be migrating all Faculty/Staff accounts in the upcoming weeks. Outlook version 2003 will have more functions and narrow the gap between Outlook, the work station application, and Outlook Web Access. The new software will offer: spell check, desk top notification of new e-mail, access to the global mailing list, personal tasks, and spam filtering.

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