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UMass to partner with Google for campus email

Friday, May 15, 2009

In a move that will save money, resources and space, the University of Massachusetts will give undergraduates the option of leaving their existing online communication system behind for a Google-based one.

By the end of summer, the campus' 19,000 undergraduates can sign up for an advertisement-free version of the Google suite designed for educational institutions - made available for free to any school or university and its students.

Undergraduates will be able to have their own Google Apps account, choose to have their official university email sent to Gmail and start using the other tools in Google Apps, including collaborating on documents, spreadsheets and presentations in real time using Google Docs, creating Web sites using Google Sites, coordinating schedules and events on Google Calendar, and chatting instantly with Google Talk, all of which are accessible through a personalized start page.

"Many students are, of course, very familiar with Gmail, so this will have a certain comfort level to it," said university spokesman Ed Blaguszewski.

Students' current university email, UMail, provides 30 megabytes of email storage, while Gmail will allow for up to seven gigabytes, which Google increases for all its users over time. With 1,024 megabytes in one gigabyte, that gives students about 239 percent more capacity to save emails.

Each student's @student.umass.edu address will remain the same on Gmail. Those who wish to stick with the old system will not be forced to make the jump to the Google system, but the university will make Gmail the default email platform beginning with undergraduates who join UMass in spring 2010.

The current email system uses open-source software that does not cost the university any money; however, the need for resources like servers to run the software and for staff to maintain it does, said Web communications manager Kerry Shaw, of the UMass Office of Information Technologies.

OIT anticipates the Google Apps system will allow the IT staff to refocus their time, attention and resources on other projects instead of expanding and maintaining the email system.

UMass is also hoping to provide the same email platform to faculty, staff, other university employees and graduate students as well, and are in negotiations to add the service to each group's contracts. Shaw said she hopes a decision will be reached by midsummer.

Google Apps at UMass Amherst will be governed by Google's privacy policy, but Shaw believes the current acceptable-use policy the university uses for student OIT accounts - the NetReg Conditions of Use - will still apply.

"We reserve the right to copy and examine any files or information resident on University systems allegedly related to unacceptable use and to protect our network from systems and events that threaten or degrade operations," state the conditions all students must say they agree to before they can access their OIT email and other account features. "Violators are subject to disciplinary action as prescribed in the Code of Student Conduct, Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities, and employee handbooks. Offenders also may be prosecuted under laws."

The launch of "Google Apps at UMass Amherst" comes as part of a partnership between OIT and Google first announced in a campus-wide email May 7 from special assistant to the chancellor and OIT's chief information officer John Dubach.

"We decided upon Gmail and Google Apps after a study of options for an email system to help us meet our rapidly growing needs and students' expectations," he said in a university statement. "Google Apps

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stood out because it offers cutting-edge technology and a high level of service."

UMass Amherst joins thousands of other schools, including other large research institutions like Arizona State University, Northwestern University and the University of Southern California, that have adopted Google Apps through Google Apps for Education program.

Students who already use Gmail can still sign up for a UMass Gmail account, as the two are separate. Some Google Apps used in a standard Gmail account, for example Google Groups, are not included in the Google Apps for Education suite.

Dubach's email said students will be informed and instructed during the summer on how to sign up for Google Apps.

Updates on the project can also be monitored at www.umass.edu/googleapps.

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Comments

Fri, 05/15/2009 - 08:41 — dave

Newspaper reporters shouldn't do arithmetic

"that gives students about 239 percent more capacity to save emails."

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