CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

Interactive Services: Consumer-Driven Computing

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Interactive Services: Consumer-Driven Computing

NERDC is a service organization, with a long history of responding and adapting to our users’ changing needs. We found many opportunities this year to provide new and improved services in response to the growing demand for information technology. The Application Support section and the CICS group both saw significant opportunities to respond to our customers' expanding needs.

Laura Guazzelli and Barb Sedesse of NERDC Application Support provide support for the UF document imaging project, Edify, FACTS, and WebSphere.

Looking Toward the Future

When asked about her long-range view of NERDC's future, Sedesse replied, "I see NERDC getting more into a kind of application service provider model, hosting more services and providing more consulting to customers. NERDC is in a central position within UF, and we get to see the common needs which might be more efficiently provided centrally. I would love to be able to find solutions for these common needs."

She foresees WebSphere being the new direction for web-enablement on campus, because of its flexibility and scalability, and anticipates the use of Enterprise Java Beans to provide common services, such as authentication and authorization.

Application Support

A significant development at NERDC this past year was the implementation of a WebSphere environment-IBM's Java-technology based Web application server, which integrates enterprise applications while leveraging open technologies. Barb Sedesse of NERDC's Application Support recalls, "UF Information Systems was starting to build Java applications to run under WebSphere but saw that they would run out of power using their NT servers. We set up an environment and helped them move to NERSP where they can get the capacity and performance they need."

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The UF document imaging project was another major initiative for this group during the past year. It lets users store documents as images for access via the Web, and will eventually replace paper files and microfiche. The UF Registrar and Student Financial Affairs are currently using the imaging system for student records. There are currently approximately 700,000 documents in the system. During the last year, two new UF departments (Disbursement Services and University Financial Services) were brought onto the Imaging System. Laura Guazzelli assisted these departments by formulating the proposal, and configuring the requirements. Guazzelli and Sedesse also helped perform upgrades on the workstations and servers.

Setting the stage

"Our current document imaging system is a step towards a paperless environment. Now that many of the 'start-up issues' have been resolved, we should be able to really start doing some cool things with imaging and workflow processing," Sedesse said.

With respect to WebSphere, "Everything is Internet-based nowadays, and WebSphere is a robust scalable platform that enables our customers to develop Internet solutions fairly easily," Sedesse observed.

Looking Toward the Future

Looking down the road a few years, NERDC CICS Coordinator Barry Brooks says he is confident that CICS will continue to be fundamental to the operations of UF, UNF, and many other of the organizations we serve. "It's only going to get better, faster and more stable."

The NERDC CICS group: Back Row, left to right: Steve Ware, John Van Mill, and Barry Brooks. Front: Cathy Honeycutt.
CICS

CICS (IBM's Customer Information Control System) at NERDC provides online access to the critical data infrastructure of certain universities and state agencies in Florida, including the University of North Florida, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), the Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA), and many departments at the University of Florida.

Most of the NERDC CICS group's work this past year involved providing support to various campus programming shops. One of the reasons the NERDC CICSplex is so reliable is the extensive up-front assistance provided by the NERDC CICS group to application developers, ensuring that programs are stable and "well-behaved" before they are installed into the production regions. This past year, they processed several hundred CICS change requests, for both new and old CICS applications.

In addition to helping developers, the group prepared and tested all CICS components for the recent OS/390 conversion (from 2.8 to 2.10), and installed and provided support for a locally written automated CICS transaction dump processing system with e-mail notification. Group member Steve Ware also installed and supported the NERDC "softserve" OS/390 product documentation softcopy publications server (in conjunction with Tina Morris of the OS/390 group), which is accessible via http://booksrv.cns.ufl.edu.

Changes in the works

IBM will soon be dropping support for NERDC's current version of CICS (v. 4.1), so we are preparing to install a new version, CICS Transaction Server 1.3. (The CICS component of CICS TS 1.3 is at level 5.3.)

A key component of IBM's WebSphere suite, CICS TS 1.3 provides new and enhanced Web and Java support for CICS applications. While NERDC has provided Web-enabled CICS regions for the past couple of years, the new release will make programming easier for application program developers.

In preparation for the upgrade to CICS TS 1.3, the CICS group installed it on an alternate OS/390 partition for internal testing—plans are to make this CICS version available to NERDC customers later this year. They also installed a new version of CA-InterTest (6.0) that includes support for CICS TS 1.3.

Your Comments are Welcome

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this and all UFIT documentation. Please send your comments to:

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