CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

Registrar Launches ISIS with NERDC Resources

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Registrar Launches ISIS with NERDC

NERDC Instruction and Research Users' Committee (I&R) members were treated Feb. 7 to a demonstration of the Integrated Student Information System (ISIS), a UF-written application that gives students unprecedented ability to transact university business via the World Wide Web. A representative from the Office of the University Registrar (O.U.R.) demonstrated ISIS's capability to display individual student records on demand, as well as interactively deliver academic advising and course registration.

Steve Pritz, associate university registrar, demonstrates ISIS to members of NERDC's Instruction and Research (I&R) Users' Committee. ISIS allows students to access their records via the World Wide Web.

ISIS is easy to use. But behind the scenes ISIS is a complex system whose workload and functions are divided among multiple systems, platforms and applications. NERDC's UNIX-based NERSP computer hosts the Web interface; NERDC's ES/9000 computer hosts the CICS (Customer Information Control System) applications used to process student records; and nine IBM PCs, running OS/2, function as servers and application-development platforms for Electronic Workforce (EW), the software used to orchestrate the flow of information between CICS applications and the Web. Students communicate with ISIS via WWW browsers. EW is a product of the Edify Corporation in Santa Clara, Calif.

Students will find that, with ISIS, they can go degree-shopping and do degree-tracking (ISIS will compare any UF program course requirements to a student's record of completed courses, and present a list of missing requirements). Students can also register for, add, and drop classes; read course descriptions; find open sections by course, department or Gordon Rule category; and view schedules in day/hour format.

Also available from ISIS: student biographical information; enrollment and degree certification; financial aid tracking, including awards and disbursements; transcripts, record holds, registration fees, and student debt information; and grades notification by term.

Students access ISIS by entering their Social Security number in conjunction with their Telegator PIN (personal identification number), and the NERDC Web server on NERSP works with the secure socket layer of supported Web browsers (currently Netscape Navigator and MS-Internet Explorer) to transmit and receive encrypted data so student records remain confidential.
When a student connects to ISIS via the Web and makes a request, the NERSP Web server routes the request to one of two Electronic Workforce servers (133-MHz IBM 320 servers with 162MB of RAM). EW employs a metaphor of agents who wait for a call from (student) customers. Each server has 54 agents, so the system can currently support a total of 108 simultaneous transactions. Once the requested information reaches the appropriate CICS screen, the ISIS applications "scrape" the desired text directly from the 3270-style CICS screen and convert it to HTML (HyperText Markup Language) for display on the Web.

According to Barb Sedesse, ISIS technical coordinator at NERDC, the ISIS project required quick mobilization and a high level of coordination among contributors at NERDC, Academic Affairs, the Office of University Registrar, and the Office of Student Financial Aid.

Sedesse learned of the project in late October 1996, when, with only days notice, she flew to Santa Clara for training on setting up EW software. "It's not like installing a word processor," Sedesse remarked. "EW runs on layers including OS/2, DB2/2 and Communications Manager. I had to learn how to install, configure and run all this software in a week." NERDC Associate Director Andy Olivenbaum and Systems Manager John Bevis cleared a path for Sedesse, insuring that the people and resources she needed were available at the right place and time. As O.U.R. programmers completed applications in EW's visual programming environment, they sent the files to Sedesse via FTP, and Sedesse compiled and installed them on the master EW server.

A letter was sent to students announcing ISIS and explaining how to use it.

In the letter, UF President John Lombardi encouraged students to access the system. "By using ISIS you can get the information you need at any time and from any place with a computer connection to the Web. ISIS services continue to expand and change, so you should check in regularly and see how we are doing."

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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