

# PORTALS IN LIBRARIES

## MyUB: UB's Personalized Intranet Portal

by Hugh W. Jarvis

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**M**yUB is a customizable Web portal that delivers personalized, useful and timely information to the University at Buffalo (SUNY) community. Built in-house on a multi-server Oracle platform, it uses Cold-Fusion, Perl, XML (EXtensible Mark-up Language) and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) to display fine-grained information to the end-user.

With over 2000 links, a dozen customized applications, hundreds of wellness tips and a steady stream of announcements, news bulletins and events listings, MyUB provides timely and year-round access to the tools our faculty and students use for their everyday lives.

The portal is integrated with campus administrative systems. UB's institutional profile for each user is the keystone for the delivery of customized information, allowing myriad resources supporting each user's role at the university to display. In addition user records from personnel files, registration records and library circulation details provide customized information for each user.

The portal's project team is based in the university's Communications and Administrative Computing offices, with strong partnership from the Libraries, Office of Student Affairs, several other core divisions and MyUB's stakeholder network that has touched virtually every office on campus. In the past year, steering committees have been formed to coordinate strategic planning, marketing and development for specific audiences (faculty, staff and student).

### Streamlined Information

As users log in to MyUB, they are paired with their institutional identity to facilitate a process called *fine-graining*. By identifying faculty or student, departmental affiliation, division, program, employment status and even bargaining unit, the portal automatically streamlines the content it displays to what is most relevant to each person.

For example, both a physics undergraduate student and a professor in that department will see librarian-selected links to the same set of databases

and guides judged most suited to their scholarly activities. But, while the professor will also have access to MyUB's teaching and research tabs, the student will instead find our academic advisement and course planning tabs, plus links to the undergraduate catalog and services like Web registration. The student will further be pushed toward the library "research assistant" pages, while the professor will see a convenient channel of links devoted to teaching resources.

None of this would be possible without ongoing, active participation from stakeholders who suggest the appropriate resources, as well as the extensive behind-the-scenes access control coding, keywording and indexing. And very successfully, this knowledge base is adjusted proactively and reactively on a constant basis to meet predicted and observed user needs.

### Assessment

Various assessment tools are available, all utilized aggressively to maintain and enhance the portal content and function.

The portal initially rolled out to undergraduates in the fall of 2000. From login statistics, we know that penetration has reached 93% of undergraduates (of 18,000). Released to all students in 2001, use has reached a somewhat smaller 70% of graduate students (of 7400), and 62% of professional students (of 2000). Finally, in 2003, the portal was opened to all employees, with corresponding use by faculty reaching 37% (of 8700) and 56% for staff (of 6500).

These numbers are to be expected. MyUB is actively marketed to undergraduates participating in their summer orientation. But for the other less homogenous audiences, less aggressive approaches are applied. A recent training partnership with our Educational Technology Center should expand faculty use. Greater employee use is expected when such university-wide services as parking registration and the budget database are available.

Click data (Fall 2003) shows that students rely

on MyUB for online registration and academic records tools (31%), the UBLearns course management system (18%), library resources (13%), news (11%), critical alerts like academic deadlines (9%), planning tools (8%) and computing resources (5%). Similar information is monitored for all audiences.

A survey is launched the end of each spring semester. Regular and open-ended questions provide a useful, albeit subjective, track record to compare with previous years. In the most recent survey (2003), over 10,000 students (44%) responded. They reported a high level of contentment in the system, with 89% rating it “good” to “excellent,” 98% indicating it contained useful information and 95% stating it was easy or at least satisfactory to use. From a communication perspective, we were happy to see regular usage, with 71% reporting they logged in at least several times each week. This means our alerts, news items and event announcements are not landing on unwatched screens.

The general comments on these surveys contain a wealth of useful suggestions and ideas for new resources, ranging from an interactive scheduler to design changes to a more powerful search engine and closer integration with other systems like campus email, course schedules, registration and UBLearns. Also popular were deeper links to specific department resources, news and weather, as well as ready access to the library circulation system (which has since been integrated).

MyUB receives feedback for all the integrated campus systems, so we are able to pass along a wealth of comments, as well as a general consensus for one, campus-wide sign-on and universal 24/7 hours.

This year we launched MyPage, a truly customized MyUB. In addition to controlling design features – colors, font size and whether links are underlined – users can now draw on existing portal channels for almost total control of their MyPage content, although we do require the presence of institutional “Need to Know” alerts (see Figure 1). Our respondents took this enhancement for granted and immediately requested further personalization – typical Generation Y behavior. As a result of that feedback, we now allow users to set MyPage as their default start page.

Finally, we receive a year round flow of unsolicited feedback from MyUB users as well as automated, weekly search keyword reports (actual terms used during portal searches). These are monitored for content areas in need of expansion, old information needing removal or programming flaws, and all join the lively interaction with our stakeholders.

All of these communication avenues form a dynamic, complex ecosystem with the portal at its heart. For more information on this project, please visit our public website – [www.buffalo.edu/aboutmyub](http://www.buffalo.edu/aboutmyub) – where you can read a series of articles, access demo versions or leave feedback.

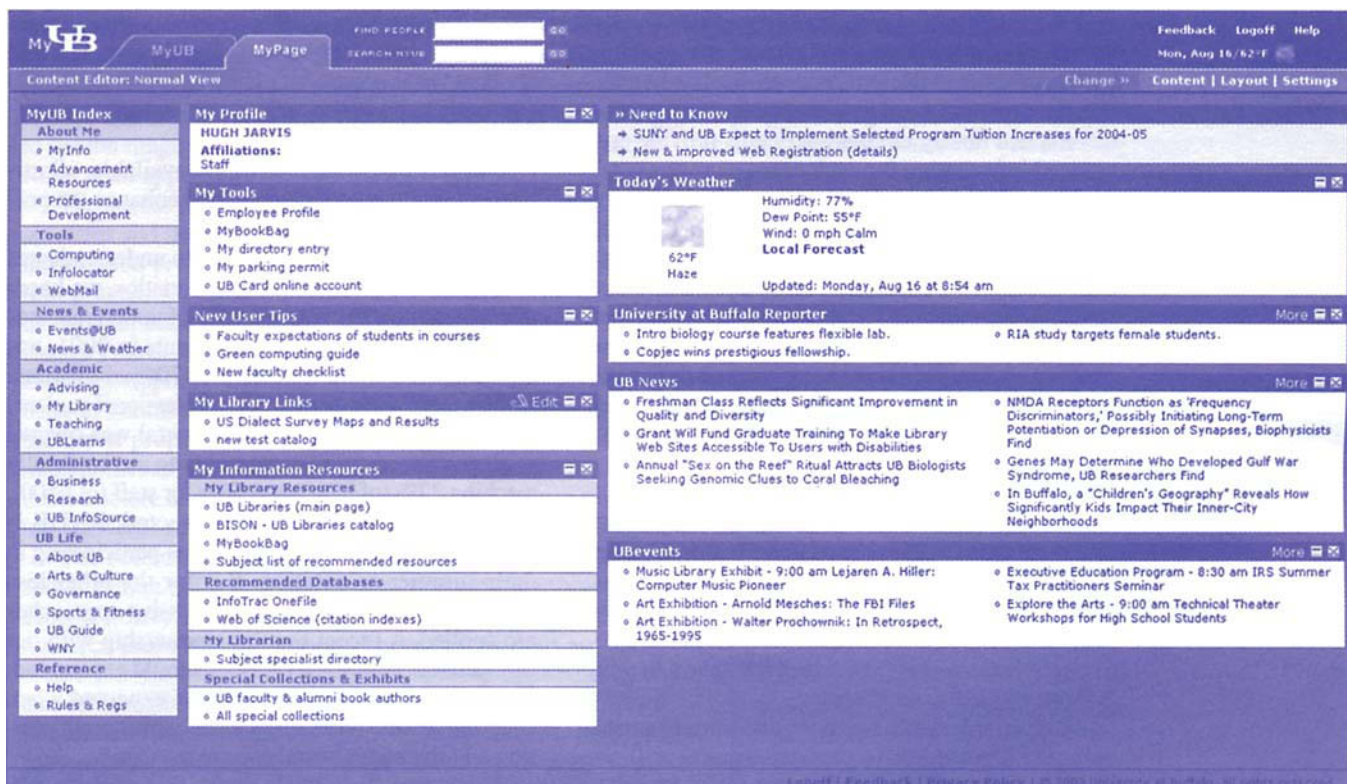


Figure 1: The author's MyPage shows a customized display of several news, events and library resource channels.