

3. University Portals

Visionary university leaders realise that campus portals are transformational resources. These resources will change the way students, faculty, staff interact, learn, do research and work. Universities recognise that portals may be the way to engage stakeholder and client groups, empower them with access to branded campus information resources and communication tools and retain their loyalties as potential students or alumni. It is a community building tool [\[5\]](#).

A portal vision is emerging. Portal technology provides a central on-line tool to access and exchange internal information as well as links to external information, vendors and resources according to needs, mission and priorities of the institution. However, in order to integrate portal technology, institutions must focus equally on technology, strategic thinking, planning and systems thinking. They have to re-examine organisational missions, processes, and student, faculty and staff needs and re-evaluate educational philosophy with the task of integrating web technology into the pedagogy. For universities, the goal is to combine horizontal and vertical portal concepts into an integrated, personalised and customised dynamic interface for all users - in order to also foster a sense of community and belonging to the institution. This portal has to be simple, easy to use, convenient and comprehensive in its access to information, people and processes. Its development requires strategic thinking and co-operation between disparate units on the campus. Although the technical challenges are considerable, the real challenge is to foster an organisational culture change - and changing organisational cultures is very difficult indeed.

It is important to emphasize that portals in any form are collaborative tools. Higher education in the new information environment demands collaboration between campus stakeholders who are used to a high degree of independence. Institutional wide portal is only possible with effective inter-departmental commitment.

Portal implementation is challenging. Richard Katz, Executive Vice President of EDUCAUSE, noted "that the implementation of a portal strategy is necessary, difficult, and perilous in higher education. It is necessary because colleges and universities - to both realise the full benefits of their investments in data warehouses, enterprise systems, and other elements of the campus infrastructure - will need to integrate information, services, and infrastructure across a seamless and easy-to navigate Web interface. A portal strategy is difficult and perilous because many on campus are weary and suspicious of yet another new enterprise-wide information technology initiative, and because portal initiatives, by definition, require across-the-institution agreements on approach and design that are hard to achieve in loosely coupled organisations like academic institutions." [\[6\]](#)

Robert Kvavik, Executive Vice President at the University of Minnesota, noted on a number of occasions while speaking on the implementation of the My One Stop portal that it forces those involved to think outside the box. The project illustrates the need for planning and the need to involve stakeholders early and for visionary leadership. [\[7\]](#) He points out that the campus portal receives about 13 million hits a month on average with about 3 million pages downloaded versus early numbers, which were around 13,500. Based on these numbers, one can conclude that the portal must be a success and real change is possible.

Exciting examples of working campus portals are the University of Washington's MyUW - <http://myuw.washington.edu/>, UCLA's very popular MyUCLA - <http://www.my.ucla.edu/>, University of Buffalo's MyUB - <http://www.buffalo.edu/aboutmyub/>, and University of Minnesota's My One Stop - <http://onestop.umn.edu/>.

Developing university portals in collaboration by sharing open source code is well described and documented by the JA-SIG Portal Framework Projects [\[8\]](#), in the Boston College Whitepaper [\[9\]](#) on the subject. Other examples of collaborative implementations are University of British Columbia's MyUBC - <http://portaldemo.ubc.ca/index.jsp> and University of Delaware's UD and ME - <http://www.misc3.udel.edu:9091/portal/>.

Footnotes:

- <5> Michael Looney and Peter Lyman, 33.
- <6> Richard N. Katz. "It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's a ...Portal?." EDUCAUSE Quarterly, 23:3 (2000), 11.
- <7> Robert B. Kvavik and Michael N. Handberg. "Transforming Student Services: The U. of Minnesota takes a fresh look at client/institution interaction." EDUCAUSE Quarterly, 23:2 (2000), 30-37.
- <8> JA-SIG Portal Framework Project. html<http://www.mis2.udel.edu/ja-sig/portal.html> Accessed February 14, 2001
- <9> Bernard W. Gleason. Boston College University-Wide Information Portal: Concepts and Recommended Course of Action. January 26, 2000. html<http://www.mis2.udel.edu/ja-sig/whitepaper.html> Accessed February 14, 2001

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