New Microsoft Cloud Storage and Collaboration Tools

Prior to the start of the Fall semester, CUNY announced an expanded “Microsoft Office 365 for Education” suite for active faculty and staff members. The new offerings include OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, Yammer and Skype for Business, which provide cloud solutions for storing, sharing, and synching files from a variety of devices. OneDrive for Business, for example, allows you to update and share files from multiple devices and work collaboratively on a document at the same time. Users also receive 1 TB of free storage.

In order to protect data from unauthorized access, users should review the new policy for the Acceptable Use of Microsoft Office 365 for Education prior to using these cloud solutions. This policy was drafted by CUNY’s Cloud Advisory Group and is summarized on www.cuny.edu/office365ed, a site devoted to Microsoft Office 365 that provides FAQs and links to Microsoft video tutorials.

You can access Microsoft Office 365 for Education solutions through this new site, or by clicking on the Microsoft Office 365 for Education icon on CUNY’s faculty Technology Service page, login.microsoftonline.com, or portal.office.com. You then log in with your CUNY Login credentials (your CUNYfirst username@login.cuny.edu, e.g., Jane.Doe99@login.cuny.edu, and your CUNYfirst password). Faculty members who are not in CUNYfirst (e.g., some RF employees) may not have CUNY Login credentials and may wish to contact their college Help Desk for assistance.

The Cloud Advisory group continues to explore other collaboration tools including Google and Dropbox for CUNY use.

Please direct any questions to your college Help Desk.

New Accessibility Training on Blackboard

Faculty will notice a new Accessibility Training tab when they log into Blackboard. This tab continues CUNY’s commitment to making content accessible for the entire CUNY community, including those with various abilities. The tab currently contains three modules and will be expanded as more training is developed and published.

First is a link to a new Blackboard course on creating accessible Blackboard courses. This course was created by CUNY faculty at the School of Professional Studies for CUNY faculty. It is self-paced and entirely online. It instructs faculty on the many ways to make online courses and materials accessible to all students, including accessibility of Blackboard, Microsoft Office and PDF documents, multimedia, and materials from publishers.

A second module provides eight video recordings from an accessibility training course for content developers. The videos contain information on making websites and documents compliant with accessibility guidelines.

The tab also points users to general accessibility information about CUNY and Blackboard accessibility and provides a contact e-mail for questions or comments about accessibility.

Upcoming CUNY IT Conference

The 17th annual CUNY IT Conference will take place on November 29-30, 2018 at John Jay College. The theme this year is “Technology and Education: Challenges and Opportunities,” exploring the complicated balances in using technology in higher education.

The theme addresses such questions as:
1. How does technology provide challenges and opportunities for multiple stakeholders at CUNY and across the varied sectors of teaching, learning, research, and administration?
2. How do educators perceive the challenges and opportunities of technology in the classroom? And how do they balance them?
3. How can technology create new opportunities for students? What challenges does technology present that may also be viewed as opportunities for teaching and learning?

Key note speakers are Anya Kamenetz, Educational Futurist/Lead Education Reporter on Day 1, and Stephen Brier, Senior Academic Technology Officer/Professor, PhD Program in Urban Education / Co-Director, New Media Lab, The Graduate School and University Center, CUNY on Day 2.

You can find more information or register (free to education professionals) at the CUNY IT Conference Registration Site.

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Technology Services at Your Fingertips

Faculty can find in one location all applications and services that are offered CUNY-wide. The new Faculty Technology Services page lists all services (such as Blackboard, DegreeWorks, FACTS, and the library) and provides a log-in link and additional information for each. This site also provides links to Training Resources (for CUNYfirst, Blackboard and campus trainings), as well as information on CUNY Site Licenses and Service Maintenance Windows.

The Technology Services page can also be accessed from the Faculty Services page on www.cuny.edu. Separate Technology Services tabs exist for students and staff.

New Functions in DegreeWorks

DegreeWorks contains new functions since the tool was upgraded in August 2017 and integrated with single sign-on. The Student Educational Planner, deployed at the time of upgrade, displays courses planned to be taken in the upcoming and future semesters. In addition, the Advisor Administrator Tool, which enables the college DegreeWorks Coordinators to assign specific security roles to their advisors, launched in spring 2018.

Next, CUNY plans to launch the new Transfer Finder “What If?” feature, which evaluates how completed courses meet degree requirements at another CUNY college to support transfer and the Reverse Transfer Initiative. This feature is currently scheduled for initial release for the Spring 2019 term.

Since the tool was upgraded, CUNY has continued to work collaboratively with all DegreeWorks coordinators and Ellucian, which created DegreeWorks, resolving defects and performance issues as they arise and to fully integrate DegreeWorks into the University’s operations.

Blackboard Usage Hits All-Time High

Blackboard usage has grown steadily and reached a record high at the start of the Fall 2018 term. A peak of 136,522 unique logins in a single day was reported on 9/4/18. This number exceeds all prior usage levels for any given day in prior semesters. Previous peak logins were 133,531 in the Spring 2018 term and 131,447 in the Fall 2017 term.

Expansion of Virtual Bookstore

CUNY’s Virtual Bookstore, operated by Akademos, continues to expand. This past spring, two additional colleges (School of Professional Studies and Bronx Community College) transitioned to the CUNY Virtual Bookstore service in time for the Summer 2018 term. This brings to 14 the total number of colleges now using the CUNY Virtual Bookstore. The Graduate Center, Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, Macaulay Honors College, and the School for Labor and Urban Studies are also planning to use the virtual bookstore in time for the Spring 2019 term.

CUNY also worked with Akademos to develop an option for Open Educational Resources (OER) and a building block presence on Blackboard so that students can see the books they need when they sign on to an online course. In addition to OER-based resources, the platform also contains a CoursePack Creator and Course Materials Recommendation Engine to assist faculty. Additionally, links to Akademos’ site are integrated on the Student/Faculty Self-Service and Class Schedule pages in CUNYfirst.

Significant Milestones for CUNYfirst in 2018

This past April, the last phase of schools – the Graduate Center, the Graduate School of Journalism, Macaulay Honors College and the CUNY BA Program – began using CUNYfirst Campus Solutions. These additions marked a significant milestone with the completion of all modules in the original CUNYfirst scope of work. Since then, the full CUNYfirst Admissions implementation for freshmen enrolling for Spring 2019 completed in June and the new CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies was added to CUNYfirst in July.

For faculty, CUNYfirst provides a single way to view and manage class schedules, rosters, grades, exams and advisory services, whether for one or multiple colleges. For students, there is a single system to manage their CUNY transactions and records, from applying to college, to enrolling each semester, to graduating and everything in between. For staff, there is now a single and consistent approach to viewing and managing academic and business information and transactions across the university.

As the university’s system of record for academic and business transactions, CUNYfirst also provides a single data source that can be used with complementary applications and services, including:

- Global Search — allows students to find relevant classes across the CUNYfirst course catalogs
- Virtual Bookstore — displays the students’ courses from CUNYfirst and assigned materials
- CUNY Alert — delivers emergency messages through communication preferences set in CUNYfirst
- CUNYsmart — incorporates CUNYfirst data in business analysis and reporting queries
- DegreeWorks — loads courses and grades from CUNYfirst
- MyInfo — an alternative to CUNYfirst for looking up essential student and faculty data

A review of business requirements for implementing new CUNYfirst finance and benefits modules as well as other enhancements is under way.