CUNY Fiber Network Expansion to All CUNY Colleges

CIS has been engaged in an expansion of the CUNY Fiber Network to bring redundant, high-speed Internet access to all CUNY colleges. During Fall 2016, CIS expanded the CUNY Fiber Network from campuses in Manhattan and the Bronx to six colleges in Brooklyn and Queens. The College of Staten Island and Medgar Evers College were added in January 2017. The remaining college, Kingsborough Community College, will be added by the end of April 2017. As a result of being added to the ring, these colleges now enjoy redundant high-speed Internet access at 20 Gigabits per second (Gbps) – a twenty-fold increase over the prior average.

The expanded fiber network will enable all CUNY colleges to keep pace with the exponential growth of faculty and student Internet use on campus, with the ability to grow that bandwidth further as necessary. The fiber network infrastructure also lays the groundwork for a planned world-class research network, incorporating cutting-edge technology and providing speeds of up to 100 Gpbs. The research network will enable high speed access to the Internet 2 network from every college and the transfer of large data sets between the Advanced Science Research Center (ASRC) at City College, the High Performing Computing Center (HPCC) at the College of Staten Island, and every CUNY college. It will also allow the colleges to set up dedicated paths for special research and academic purposes, as needed.

CUNY Virtual Desktop Now University-wide

The CUNY Virtual Desktop now provides remote access for all CUNY students and faculty to select academic software applications. Historically, access to expensive software like SPSS and Mathematica was attainable by purchasing the software individually or by using it at a campus computer lab during lab hours only. The CUNY Virtual Desktop provides students and faculty with access to selected applications anytime and anywhere from their home computer, laptop or even mobile device on a 24/7 basis.

CIS piloted the CUNY Virtual Desktop in Spring 2016 at Hunter College, Baruch College, Bronx Community College and LaGuardia Community College. The software available included SPSS, MapleSoft, Mathematica and SAS. In Fall 2016, the CUNY Virtual Desktop was expanded to include all CUNY colleges that use CUNYfirst, and a fifth application (MATLAB) was added. To access the CUNY Virtual Desktop, please visit the CUNY Virtual Desktop website.

The University will expand these offerings to include additional software needed by students and faculty that can be offered virtually. Faculty members should feel free to email cisfeedback@cuny.edu with ideas for additional software that would benefit students University-wide.
CUNY Virtual Bookstore Launches

CUNY Virtual Bookstore

In an effort to lower textbook prices for students, CUNY contracted in December 2016 with the vendor Akademos to run the new CUNY Virtual Bookstore. The CUNY Virtual Bookstore integrates with CUNYfirst’s online registration function so that students can find and purchase all required books and course materials when they register for a course. The Akademos platform provides easier access to the books required for each course, in a wide variety of formats, and at the best possible price. By streamlining faculty’s entry of textbook information, this initiative will also help faculty provide the textbook information required by the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

John Jay College of Criminal Justice began operating a virtual bookstore (also operated by Akademos) two years ago, and three other colleges followed suit (Queens College, Medgar Evers, and the Law School). The CUNY Virtual Bookstore will now be made available to all colleges when their current bookstore operations contracts expire or are terminated. Eight additional colleges are currently scheduled to go live in 2017: Bronx Community College, Brooklyn College, City College, Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, Hostos Community College, Hunter College, CUNY School of Professional Studies, and York College.

DegreeWorks Undergoing Major Upgrade

DegreeWorks, the University-wide web based student advising and graduation audit tool, is now undergoing a major upgrade that provide new features and functions. DegreeWorks enables students to view the progress they are making toward their degree at any time via the web. It is used by students and advisors to monitor and track progress towards a student’s degree and is used to verify eligibility for graduation.

The upgrade of DegreeWorks will allow CUNY to take advantage of an Educational Planner feature. This feature allows campuses to develop templates, enables students and advisors to use those template and plan future semesters, personalize and modify those plans as they proceed through their academic career, and modify future plans based on specific courses selected. Implementation of the new Educational Planner feature is expected to occur in summer 2017 with the deployment of the upgraded DegreeWorks system.

Another significant new feature in the latest version of DegreeWorks is the Transfer Finder. The Transfer Finder enables students to evaluate how courses successfully completed at one CUNY college will transfer and count towards a degree at another CUNY college. CUNY plans to utilize this capability to support the University’s objective to improve reverse transfer graduation rates. This new feature will go live approximately one year later as it requires extensive configuration and loading of transfer articulation rules by the campuses.

A reminder that Microsoft Office 365 Pro Plus is now available to all active CUNY faculty and staff. Please visit the Office Pro Plus website to obtain free downloads of the Microsoft Office Productivity Suite on your desktops, laptops, tablets, and/or smart phones. Applications include MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint.
Blackboard More Accessible

CIS has established a practice of annually upgrading the Blackboard Learn environment during the holiday break in December, based on faculty feedback as to the best timing. This year’s upgrade took place on December 27 and 28, 2016, and upgraded Blackboard to version Q2-2016. This new environment is more ADA-compliant as it enables screen readers to better access on-screen data. It also has a more mobile-friendly interface and features a new streamlined interface, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, that does not require users to download a separate launcher or Java updates. Visit the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra webpage for more information.

For more general information on Blackboard and its services, contact your campus Blackboard administrator or visit the CUNY Blackboard resources website.

Don’t forget to brush up on good cyber-security practices and ways to avoid information theft! CIS has a brief 30 minute training program on tips to secure integrity, accuracy and privacy of personal and professional information at the CUNY Information Security website. The site also contains CUNY’s IT security policies, procedures and security advisories.

CUNY continues to provide faculty, students and staff with free access to Gartner IT research. Use Gartner for insights into technology trends, vendors and analytics. You can access Gartner research on the CUNY portal.

Faculty can find information on assistive tools, accessibility in system-wide applications, and relevant CUNY policies and best practices by clicking on the Accessibility link in the header and footer of any CUNY.edu page or by visiting the CUNY accessibility website.

Faculty, take advantage of the CUNY Academy Travel Awards that are given for presenting or moderating at a scholarly conference. Both the new Travel Award Program for CUNY Associate Professors and the Academy’s William Stewart Travel Awards for CUNY Assistant Professors have rolling application deadlines. Applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Additionally, the deadline has been extended to March 27, 2017 for applications for the Feliks Gross Awards, which recognize the outstanding research of assistant professors in the humanities or sciences, including social and life sciences. Further information on this award and the application can be found by visiting the Feliks Gross Awards webpage.

We welcome your comments and ideas for new initiatives at cisfeedback@cuny.edu

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