Integrated Learning Environment

The Office of Information and Instructional Technology (OIIT) provides comprehensive systemwide services that bridge applications and work together to serve students, faculty, staff, and state residents. OIIT’s objective is to build and sustain an Integrated Learning Environment (ILE) in which administrative and instructional applications, such as Blackboard Learning System –Vista Enterprise License (GeorgiaVIEW Vista), interface and coordinate seamlessly within the University System of Georgia (USG).

A stable, tightly-coupled, reliable and secure infrastructure, as well as supporting enterprise technologies and services must exist for the ILE to function effectively. Building and supporting that critical framework successfully is one of OIIT’s main objectives. Some of the elements of the ILE and its inter-relationships are illustrated by this honeycomb.

GeorgiaVIEW, Georgia’s Virtual Classroom

GeorgiaVIEW, Georgia’s Virtual Classroom, provides USG institutions with an integrated set of academic enterprise services. It supports both on-campus and off-campus learning experiences through a framework offering communication, resource access, testing, and management that serves the learning and communication needs of faculty, students, and administration. These services include the management of the GeorgiaVIEW Vista license; the setup and maintenance of regional GeorgiaVIEW host centers; oversight of the Online Support Center; and project management, planning, and training.

GeorgiaVIEW develops resources to support campus adoption and use, including training and support materials for students, faculty, and administrators. GeorgiaVIEW seeks to achieve a higher standard for minimum hosting and application capabilities, and to achieve the economies of scale associated with developing a critical user mass by leveraging expertise across the University System.
When we began GeorgiaVIEW nearly five years ago, our goal was to offer a consistent, sustainable level of instructional technology services to all USG institutions who wanted to offer online courses to their students. Last year, we hosted over 70,000 course sections, supported over 130,000 active users, and logged over 200 million individual actions. A recent survey of USG students found that 75 percent had taken at least one course that used GeorgiaVIEW Vista.

This document highlights some of the innovative ways that GeorgiaVIEW influenced teaching and learning at USG campuses in 2006. University of West Georgia students use communication tools to build teams with colleagues at Colorado State University. At Valdosta State University, international study programs integrate GeorgiaVIEW Vista with video to provide students with the opportunity to understand cultural differences in health sciences. Southern Polytechnic State University students and faculty use GeorgiaVIEW Vista to stimulate communication across the campus and with external audiences.

Stories, such as those shared by Anil Lewis, a recent graduate of Georgia State University, and Dr. Mary Wolfe, a faculty member at Macon State College, illustrate the effect that GeorgiaVIEW Vista is having on serving students with a wide variety of circumstances and learning needs. With the number of courses and actions doubling each semester, more and more faculty and students are identifying innovative ways that GeorgiaVIEW Vista can improve their campus experiences.

As the first public four-year college opened in the U.S. this millennium, Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) is challenged to implement a 21st century learning environment. Students who are attracted to GGC want a different learning experience, and GeorgiaVIEW Vista provides a medium for faculty to meet those needs.

In March 2006, GeorgiaVIEW’s response to a call for help from Georgia Southwestern State University proved the importance of building community and communications. Combining system-level production support with institutional innovation, GeorgiaVIEW is a model for strategic technology planning and implementation for the USG.

Thomas L. Maier
Interim Chief Information Officer and Vice Chancellor for Information Technology, Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
To survive in today’s business environment, organizations must think globally. Using GeorgiaVIEW Vista’s communication tools, business students at the University of West Georgia (UWG) teamed up with students at Colorado State University to conduct an experiment in virtual interaction-based teamwork during Fall 2006. The successes, as well as the challenges, gave the students experience conducting business virtually, important for an increasingly global economy. The project was the result of a collaboration between Dr. Eric Bergiel, an Assistant Professor of Management at UWG, and Dr. Travis Maynard, an Assistant Professor of Management from Colorado State University, with the help of Janet Gubbins and the UWG Distance and Distributed Education support staff.

According to Dr. Bergiel, “The activity was designed to enable students from both of our respective Organizational Behavior classes to communicate only through GeorgiaVIEW Vista to accomplish the assignment. We created a course page labeled ‘Virtual Team Activity,’ and students from both universities’ Organizational Behavior classes were assigned into equally representative groups and granted access to the course.”

The groups were asked to read a “ship-wreck” scenario that described an incident in which an individual was stranded in the middle of the ocean with 15 different items. The group’s task was to discuss the importance of these items and to come to a team consensus ranking them from 1 (most important) to 15 (least important). They were instructed to use their team discussion boards as their primary means of communication and were given approximately a week to complete the exercise.

Several interesting observations and learning experiences arose from this exercise. The students enjoyed the convenience of a group activity whereby they did not have to assign a specific meeting time or leave their homes. Additionally, the idea of working with Colorado students was perceived as “neat.” However, after completing the exercise, not all students remained so positive. Some believed that they could have accomplished face-to-face in ten minutes what took days virtually.

Another issue involved scheduling specific times to correspond online. Students often forgot about the time differences between Colorado and
Georgia. Some students also became frustrated when team members would not respond in a timely manner – or at all, and were dismayed to realize that they had no other way of contacting the missing team members.

Dr. Bergiel believes that both the instructors and the students learned more from the GeorgiaVIEW Vista exercise than anticipated. He states, “GeorgiaVIEW Vista greatly helped us to prepare them for the inevitable virtual world of high-tech communication.”

“GeorgiaVIEW Vista greatly helped us to prepare [students] for the inevitable virtual world of high-tech communication.”

Dr. Eric Bergiel
Assistant Professor of Management
Surrounded by ringing telephones, a bursting email inbox, and various office gadgets, Anil Lewis is an intrepid president of a local non-profit who is juggling the professional and personal responsibilities of advocate, leader, student, and father. Lewis clicks his mouse to quiet the voice prompts that scan through his email and he jokes about the amount of junk and spam. This is a seemingly ordinary scene although his is an extraordinary story.

Anil Lewis is legally blind. Diagnosed at age nine with Retinitis Pigmentosa, Lewis lost his sight in the middle of his undergraduate career at Georgia State University (GSU). Determined to complete his degree and manage his blindness, Lewis used GSU’s instructional and assistive resources for blind students and received his BBA in computer information systems in 1993 and his Masters of Public Administration in 2003.

When describing assistive technologies, Lewis quips, “They are not foreign from mainstream [technologies] - they can be as simple as a pair of reading glasses.” Some of the technologies that surround Lewis in his life are his PAC Mate (his portable computer with a Braille keyboard that reads email and talks while scanning subject lines and authors), a Perkins Brailler, his white cane, and GeorgiaVIEW Vista. “The beauty of GeorgiaVIEW Vista is that it forces the professor to become more digitally savvy and allows me as a student to interface on an even playing field with the other students.” GeorgiaVIEW Vista’s integrative capabilities, coupled with Lewis’ own assistive technologies, empowered Lewis to control his learning and pace, thus freeing him from burdening readers and graduate students who “have lives too.” Lewis exclaims, “Independence, integration, freedom, and flexibility are really what make GeorgiaVIEW Vista an essential tool for me.”

For some, completing the degree, landing a job, or blending into society would have sufficed. Resolute that others receive appropriate training and unlimited opportunities, Lewis parlayed his new skills and held various positions as an advocate, counselor, and manager.

Lewis is the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia, Inc. (NFBG), serves as the chairman of the board of directors for the Disability Law and Policy Center of Georgia, and volunteers as a teacher and mentor for blind children. Lewis’ future plans include applying to law school, and running for a Senate seat in Georgia, or, perhaps one in Washington.

“Independence, integration, freedom, and flexibility are really what make GeorgiaVIEW Vista an essential tool for me.”

Anil Lewis, GSU graduate
President of the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia
Dr. Mary Dwyer Wolfe’s involvement in the scholarship of technology in instruction began by meeting the needs of her non-traditional student population. In addition to supplementing her campus courses with materials in GeorgiaVIEW Vista, she teaches two fully online courses each semester. She has taught eCore® math courses for the past three years using GeorgiaVIEW Vista.

Dr. Wolfe’s engagement does not end in her own classes. As one of the Macon State Campus Administrators for GeorgiaVIEW Vista, she regularly shares her insights and experiences with colleagues statewide. She was instrumental in implementing departmental guidelines for technology usage, and in building communities of inquiry for professors and instructional technologists within the USG and across the region.

Building Scholarship around Colleagues
After attending an international conference, Dr. Wolfe noted that the most innovative presentations and ideas came from Georgia. To avoid time away from instruction and the complications that arise with traveling and conference budgets, Dr. Wolfe and colleagues launched the Southeastern Scholarship Conference on E-Learning (SSCEL), a regional conference with a broader focus on teaching and learning with technology.

The SSCEL provides an opportunity for faculty in all academic disciplines within the state and region to share research on e-Learning. Attracting both the novice and veteran attendee, conference papers and presentations cover all aspects of teaching with technology, regardless of delivery mode.

Dr. Wolfe and Macon State’s focus on scholarship of teaching and learning with technology offers a model for both the scholar and the institution committed to fostering instructional communities and providing learning opportunities for the 21st century adult learner.

Building Learning around Students
Five years ago, Dr. Wolfe and her colleagues in the math department fielded requests from students who needed tutorials and additional lessons in using their graphing calculators. A self-proclaimed techie, Dr. Wolfe and her colleagues, Dr. Barry Monk and Dr. Steve Davis, developed a fully online TI-83 and TI-84 tutorial loaded with Adobe Flash animation videos organized by calculator function and course topic.

Ensuring that students had access to rich online course content was the next step. Dr. Wolfe mapped GeorgiaVIEW Vista templates to each course and section allowing access for all mathematics students whether their course was delivered face-to-face, completely online, or, as a hybrid.

“The first thing I do is turn on the computer and pull up two tools: GeorgiaVIEW Vista and our Math calculator,” Having online access to her math sections’ content in GeorgiaVIEW Vista allows her to teach from any classroom and enables students to use materials anytime.
Rapid Deployment of System Resources Averts Crisis

Occasionally, a crisis reveals our strengths; disaster draws individual talent into new and powerful alliance. In the middle of the spring 2006 semester, Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) faced a disaster when its instance of WebCT CE was corrupted. As a result, all backup tapes became invalid. The data for 60 fully online courses, and an undetermined number of courses that used WebCT CE in a supplemental manner, were lost.

On March 2, 2006, Royce Hackett from GSW contacted OIIT staff, and together they developed a plan to address the disaster. Although GSW was not scheduled to implement GeorgiaVIEW Vista until summer 2006, the recovery team decided to migrate to the hosted environment as part of the disaster recovery plan. The data recovery effort, along with the mid-semester migration to GeorgiaVIEW Vista, needed to happen quickly so that GSW could resume normal operations. To that end, the recovery team sought the knowledge of individuals from USG institutions and organizations. In response, USG WebCT Certified trainers and consultants from across the USG agreed to bring their expertise to GSW. Additional volunteers from USG institutions agreed to assist with the data recovery effort.

The assembled team of experts worked on-site at GSW, applying their knowledge of the common challenges and solutions regarding GeorgiaVIEW Vista implementation, to prepare students, faculty, and staff for the new environment. They provided one-on-one consultation and training for 85 full-time and adjunct faculty to prepare for the migration of materials to the hosted environment. On March 13 at 1:00 p.m., seven business days after the disaster, GeorgiaVIEW Vista was opened to the GSW community. Thanks to the additional expertise of USG volunteers, the release also included documentation, access to the Online Support Center, and the new GSW GeorgiaVIEW Vista website.

As Chancellor Erroll B. Davis, Jr. stated in a letter thanking the USG WebCT Vista Trainers,

"[This] collective response exemplifies what ‘customer service’ means on many levels."

Erroll B. Davis, Jr.
Chancellor, Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
“[This] collective response exemplifies what ‘customer service’ means on many levels: the teamwork approach from a number of institutions, the focus on solving the problem for the benefit of customers rather than dissecting who had responsibility, the timely response that led you to put aside a weekend, and ultimately, dedication to see the task through to success as defined by the ability of our customers to use the service.” By leveraging the expertise and relationships that have developed as a result of the GeorgiaVIEW Vista hosted environment, USG devised a solution that was quick and cost-effective. A disaster that threatened to impede service to customers became an opportunity to learn new and better ways to serve them.

The WebCT (now Blackboard) Certified Trainer Program is an advanced professional credential. It is designed for those who wish to train and support others in online teaching and learning. The program offers trainers a chance to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions that are implementing GeorgiaVIEW Vista.
Dr. Jiri Stelzer of Valdosta State University (VSU) used GeorgiaVIEW Vista to connect students in his Kinesiology and Physical Education department with students at Palacky University in the Czech Republic and Abant Izzet Baysal University in Turkey. In partnership with the VSU Distance Learning Department and VSU International Programs, Stelzer developed the online courses to provide students with the opportunity to understand cultural differences in health sciences, and to help them think critically about institutional racism, classism, sexism, ageism, and xenophobia.

The GeorgiaVIEW Vista courses provided a framework which facilitated the multinational team’s collaboration on instructional design and course delivery. The course format combined content delivery and interaction via GeorgiaVIEW Vista, streaming video, and IP videoconferencing to make real-time video and audio connections between the three campus sites. Through this combination of advanced learning technologies, students accessed course content, participated in class discussions or worked together on small group projects, and communicated via online discussion forums, e-mail, and videoconferencing.

In addition to demonstrating a successful blending of GeorgiaVIEW Vista and video technologies, the program provided an innovative forum for researching the synthesis of international exchange programs and distance learning. Research conducted jointly by Dr. Stelzer and faculty from the collaborating universities supported the idea that students exposed to cultural differences through participatory experiences gained a clearer understanding of and appreciation for these complexities. The GeorgiaVIEW Vista courses served as a working model for technology-mediated courses in international exchange programs.
At Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU), faculty, staff, and students use GeorgiaVIEW Vista to communicate amongst themselves as well as with groups outside the institution.

The Computer Science Capstone Project class, CS4894, uses GeorgiaVIEW Vista with HorizonWimba Live Classroom for project team coordination and project delivery. The threaded discussion allows participants to communicate with their customers, and automatically maintains a complete record of the project’s progress.

Other information technology courses have used GeorgiaVIEW Vista to create a community of practice for students. Using a rubric and a discussion topic, students publish and review papers covering tips and techniques for information technology. The approach expands asynchronous interaction and professional practices. Students report that they find it useful and look forward to being updated on the ever-expanding areas of information technology.

SPSU’s Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) created a course so faculty could discuss their use of various GeorgiaVIEW Vista course tools, plan for coming CTE seminars, and share examples of rubrics. Even faculty who do not teach online have joined the discussion groups.

SPSU also offers experimental “virtual guest lectures.” Individuals who are not readily available to come to campus and give a lecture are invited to provide online materials for lecture attendees to review, participate in online discussions for a couple of weeks, and then end the course with a chat-and-whiteboard session. The completed course is archived and made available to the general campus.
Not many campus IT administrators have the luxury of planning technology and learning resources for a student body of 160, participating in the hiring of faculty members, or designing a technology environment and infrastructure without the growing pains of retrofitting legacy software and hardware. Dr. Lonnie Harvel has all of these joys, and challenges, as Georgia Gwinnett College’s (GGC) first Vice President of Educational Technology. His task: to implement the 21st century learning environment.

What initially attracted Harvel to GGC was the opportunity “to actually deploy the technologies in a more ubiquitous way instead of a small environment.” Harvel explains that existing innovation and technology on campuses were designed in small incubators and rarely involved the entire campus. “I believe that we have reached the point where the Petri dishes are too small, so for us to find out if these technologies are really making a difference, we actually will have to grow to a level of ubiquity so that it becomes part of the student’s learning model and not just an exception for that particular class.” The other attraction was “developing a technological environment while building your curriculum.” This new environment makes GGC unique and energizes Harvel.

In fact, it appears that he has a perfect storm: faculty who are committed to preserving the culture of innovation in higher education and a student body that is dynamically cooperative. Students attracted to GGC want a different learning experience but may define it differently based on their own technological preferences. A student who owns a Nintendo Wii will demand an engaging, interactive educational experience, while the student who has never used technology may only want their syllabus online. However, Harvel believes that all students share a common interest by wanting a better relationship with faculty, and so he
has selected technologies that support the learning relationships of faculty and student, student and student, or faculty and faculty.

Harvel plans to enhance these relationships by creating a targeted delivery system that will deploy content at an appropriate time, providing curriculum with a rich metadata set, and even sending text reminders to students’ cell phones. Who knows what fantastic multimedia about the Inuits could soon be co-opted into Sociology 101? Dr. Harvel plans to seek out exciting new partnerships and acquire production quality content to benefit GGC students.

“[Our faculty are committed to a culture of innovation and our students are dynamically cooperative.”]
GeorgiaVIEW
Accomplishments 2006

GeorgiaVIEW Functional Sub-Team (FST)
Volunteers from eight institutions (Georgia Southern University, Georgia State University, Savannah State University, Augusta State University, Dalton State College, Kennesaw State University, Medical College of Georgia, and Georgia Perimeter College) continued to provide support and were instrumental in testing upgrades, patches and PowerLinks. The group also assisted in the development and deployment of the Student Technology surveys.

!IMPACT 2006: 8th Annual WebCT User Conference
Thirteen presentations were made by USG representatives. More information regarding the sessions can be found at http://www.webct.com/2006.

Online Support Center (OSC)
The 7/24 helpdesk for support of faculty, staff, and students was made available to all schools utilizing GeorgiaVIEW Vista. The OSC is available at http://help.view.usg.edu.

External Authentication
Three institutions (Kennesaw State University, Gainesville State College, and Georgia Southern University) rolled out external authentication to GeorgiaVIEW, allowing a student to access a variety of campus resources with a single set of credentials.

USG Annual Computing Conference at Rock Eagle
Multiple presentations were given on GeorgiaVIEW Vista. Peter Segall, President North American Higher Education and Operations of Blackboard Inc., presented on the vision of the newly merged WebCT and Blackboard companies and their commitment to Georgia. More information regarding the sessions can be found at http://www.usg.edu/oit/re/re06/.

The Emergency Communications Service
As part of continuing efforts to improve communications, a text messaging system was deployed to allow instant notification to campus support personnel when any circumstances arise that negatively impact the GeorgiaVIEW service.

System-wide GeorgiaVIEW Vista Growth
During Fall 2006, 33 USG institutions were active in GeorgiaVIEW Vista. There were 9,744 active sections representing 28% of the total sections offered by the hosted institutions. There were 135,385 unique users active - 52% of the total student population of the hosted institutions.

September was the most active month of the year – with September 5th as the most active day of the year. Tuesdays were the most active day of the week. Weekends (and Saturday in particular) remained the least active days of the week. The hours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. remained the most active for students and faculty.

GeorgiaVIEW Active Users Fall 2006

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GeorgiaVIEW Active Users Fall 2006</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,001 - 5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>5,001 - 10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>≥ 10,001</td>
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GeorgiaVIEW Vista Growth

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<tr>
<th>Number of Sections</th>
<th>Spring 2004</th>
<th>Summer 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2004</th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Summer 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
<th>Summer 2006</th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>483</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,852</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>2,487</td>
<td>6,055</td>
<td>4,546</td>
<td>9,744</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Actions</td>
<td>3,370,225</td>
<td>3,633,005</td>
<td>8,147,499</td>
<td>10,289,818</td>
<td>5,843,556</td>
<td>27,594,654</td>
<td>74,605,356</td>
<td>43,186,766</td>
<td>114,637,912</td>
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The past year was another record for the GeorgiaVIEW project. Through the innovative and extensive efforts of faculty throughout the University System, there were almost three times as many active courses in 2006 than in 2005. GeorgiaVIEW provided Blackboard (formerly WebCT) Vista hosting services for 32 USG institutions and special projects with one in every two students in the University System accessing GeorgiaVIEW services. GeorgiaVIEW also provided support for Valdosta State University’s Vista instance and contract support for the University of Georgia and Georgia Institute of Technology’s Campus Edition instances.

The past year also brought many changes in and around the GeorgiaVIEW project. WebCT completed its merger with Blackboard and we have worked closely with our new vendor partners to build the tight partnership we always enjoyed with WebCT. Several campus and University System representatives have participated in Blackboard’s Product Development Partners Program, the USG still maintains a strong presence in the expanded Dr.C program, and the USG was represented on the company’s Merger Advisory Council.

Several projects begun in 2005 came to fruition in 2006. Fully supporting all institutions utilizing GeorgiaVIEW, the Online Support Center had over 50,335 article accesses and 11,813 live contacts. An additional 36 campus and system personnel received Administrator Certification with 30 more scheduled to complete the certification process early in 2007. The University System’s Campus Edition hosting was completely phased out by the end of December. The coming year will see more growth and increasing innovation. Many projects are in the works to reach out more to K-12 teachers. More and more faculty are using the tools available through GeorgiaVIEW to research the impact of technology on student learning and retention.

We began 2007 with challenges. This will be a year in which we focus on providing the most stable and reliable platform for technology enhanced learning. Ensuring we have a platform that will grow with the demands of the users is the highest priority for this project and everyone who works on it. We will roll out changes in the product, in our relationship with Blackboard, with our infrastructure, and with our business processes to focus on growth and stability. We will also focus on new approaches to data retention and business continuity to continue to provide the level of service required to support the ground breaking efforts across the USG like those you have read about here.

Dr. Brian K. Finnegan
Director of Emerging Instructional Technologies
Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia

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www.alt.usg.edu/gaview