SMU’s six schools – The Lee Kong Chian School of Business, School of Accountancy, School of Law, School of Economics, School of Social Sciences and School of Information Systems – are geared towards grooming Asia’s creative and entrepreneurial business leaders of the future. To bring out the best in its students and prepare them to excel in the business world, technology plays an important role in enabling the University to create the best possible learning environment.
Case Study:

Software is an enabling tool. The more natural it is, the more it helps people to organize their thoughts and manage the volume of data that they have to deal with every day. That’s what Office 2003 is doing for us.

- Associate Professor Leong Kwong Sin, Chairman of the Faculty IT Advisory Board, Singapore Management University

Associate Professor Leong Kwong Sin, Chairman of the Faculty IT Advisory Board, said, “At SMU, pedagogy drives technology. To that end, we are constantly seeking to harness technology to enhance our competitive strengths and help us improve. Our goal is to encourage participative learning, and to foster as much interaction as possible between faculty and students, both inside and outside of the classroom.”

SMU’s challenge was to find technology that could help them to achieve these goals. That technology had to provide a framework for effective collaboration among students and faculty, enable interactive exchange, and be intuitive enough to support classroom learning without being a distraction.

Solution

SMU chose Microsoft Office System, Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 and the Microsoft Office Outlook 2003 messaging and collaboration client, to create a globally competitive teaching environment that enables both students and faculty to excel.

Now, Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 enhances communication between students and faculty with robust and intuitive e-mail. Outlook Web Access ensures that emails from classmates and professors are accessible from any location with Web access.

But it is the role of the Microsoft Office System inside the classroom that is gaining the most attention. Led by Associate Professor Leong and Dr Thernin Suwardy, Associate Dean of the School of Accountancy, SMU has created a pilot project called Virtual Canvas that uses Office 2003 Editions programs to reinvent classroom instruction. These programs — which include the Microsoft Office Powerpoint 2003 presentation graphics program, Microsoft Office Excel 2003, and Microsoft Office Word 2003, along with Microsoft Office OneNote 2003, are being used with Tablet PCs, wireless networks and projectors to create a truly interactive learning environment.

In his classroom, Dr Suwardy uses a wirelessly networked Tablet PC running Microsoft Office 2003 Editions to present lecture materials upon which he can freely illustrate and annotate using pen input. Students have their own laptops running Microsoft Office 2003 Editions, and can request control of the projector via software to share their ideas and work with the class. This system encourages students to interact with Dr Suwardy and with each other in new ways.

Through projects such as the Virtual Canvas, SMU is using the Microsoft Office System to train the information workers of the future. Associate Professor Leong says, “We are in the business of education. Faculty, through their research, work experience, and expertise, lead and guide our students in their learning journey, imparting information, knowledge, and life-long skills. The Microsoft Office System is well used in SMU to support these goals, both in administration and in communication and interaction between students and faculty.”

Benefits

1. Natural Computing Keeps the Focus on Interaction

The key to SMU’s innovative classroom pilot, Virtual Canvas, is the intuitiveness and familiarity of Office 2003 software. “The PC forced us to rethink our approach in the classroom, but it was important that it would...
not be a distraction,” said Dr Suwardy. “Give someone OneNote 2003 and a pen and they know how to use it right away. That’s the hallmark of good software, and that allows us to concentrate on interaction.”

The pen support in Office 2003 Editions and OneNote 2003 note taking program is so natural that Dr Suwardy’s students have often caught him reflexively brushing nonexistent “eraser dust” off his PC screen after “erasing” digital ink with his pen.

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2. An Innovative Environment Attracts the Best Students

Students, a university’s most important stakeholders, are confirming the success of SMU’s innovative use of technology. “Office 2003 has greatly enhanced the faculty and student’s productivity and increased the quality of our course delivery,” said Associate Professor Leong. “The feedback from the students is that they believe their learning experience has been enhanced by our use of technology.”

3. Productivity for Students and Faculty Alike

Part of helping students and faculty to succeed is enabling them to manage the information overload that the modern world can generate. Office 2003 helps people to find, use and disseminate information effectively, which is important for both students and professionals. Said Associate Professor Leong: “Software is an enabling tool. The more natural it is, the more it helps people to organize their thoughts and manage the volume of data that they have to deal with every day. That’s what Office 2003 is doing for us.”

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