EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this case study, you will encounter some of the issues of lab development for delivering lab-based information systems courses online. Many small campuses have very limited budget or no budget at all for the computer lab specifically designed for information systems majors. Sometimes, even with new computers purchased, very few people know how to set them up for lab-based information systems (IS) courses. What are the software and hardware requirements for getting the lab online? How much will it cost? Where can you find resources for the lab development? To ensure quality teaching on IS-related topics, you have to deal with these issues. This case study will discuss how to create a lab that allows students to get hands-on practice for courses such as network management or database processing online with a shoestring budget.

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BACKGROUND

Jackson University was founded in 1973. The university’s primary teaching site is established in a rural area surrounded by ranches, farms, and small towns. The primary role of the university is to provide junior, senior, and graduate level courses for the students graduated from several local community colleges. The university offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education, business administration, accounting, marketing, management, computer science, mathematics, English, psychology, communication, criminal justice, history, biology, and other areas of arts and sciences. About 1,600 students are taking classes in three major teaching sites that are about 100 miles away. Some of our students may need to drive 50 to 100 miles to attend classes. Faculty members travel from campus to campus to teach the classes. There are some online courses; most of them are lecture-based courses. The computer science and computer information systems program currently has about 100 students enrolled. The program offers more than 30 undergraduate and graduate courses for the upper division (junior and senior level) undergraduate and graduate students. On today’s job market, students majoring in information systems-related fields are expected to know the theories about information technology and have hands-on skills for problem solving. To prepare information systems students to meet these expectations, the emphasis should be on both theory and hands-on practice in teaching. There are many publications emphasizing the combination of theory and practice (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). For the hands-on practice, the information systems majors need a teaching lab specifically designed for them. The students also should be able to access the labs through the Internet to reduce the burden of long-distance driving. However, like many small campuses, there is limited budget and support from computer service for the technology-based courses. The following sections will discuss the challenges and how to overcome the difficulties in order to meet the needs of teaching and learning of information systems courses.

SETTING THE STAGE

In this section, let us get started with philosophy, technology utilization, and management practice. First, the discussion will be on the description of various IS courses and their lab needs, particularly those that use the same resources but have conflicting requirements. After describing the courses and lab needs, the discussion will be on why a special lab is necessary for our information systems students. Then, it will focus on how the students use the lab and on the conflicts caused by multiple courses using the same resources. It will include current computer service staffing, resources, and requirements vs. needs. This discussion will illustrate why it is hard
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