Datatel: How Will it Affect Me?

Stuart Davis

I am currently leading the Datatel Curriculum & Faculty Information team for Santiago Canyon College. Our team is responsible for all academic programs, courses, and sections. Sections are a name change from our commonly used ticket number. While some things have changed in Datatel from our old G-link and Winsked systems, many things are very similar, thus reducing the learning curve in some areas. There are new things that we must all learn when going into this new system though: the screen layouts, Datatel syntax and how the system handles our sometimes overly complicated scheduling scenarios. Many of you have standard classes that meet one to three times a week, but we also have apprenticeship sponsored sections, fire technologies, criminal justice, nursing, carryover sections and many other variables making up our list of offered sections for students. We have spent numerous hours testing and retesting these scenarios, and I am confident with minor tweaking, we can accommodate all of these variances.

Section building has always had little intricacies and nuances that schedulers were required to know. Moving into Datatel is no different. In some ways schedulers will be required to know more now about scheduling than they were previously. By moving to Datatel, we have required division offices and support staff to place G-link and Datatel coding, as well as payroll information, on documents. That is a small stepping stone into bridging the data between the two systems. Once we are live in Datatel that will eventually go away, and you will be mainly working from Datatel only. I say mainly because, as we all know, no one system can handle all the requirements that we need to run an entire college district.

I would like to introduce you now to a few other key components that we are implementing along with Datatel to help cover some of the gaps in moving to a centralized system.

Astra Schedule was purchased to handle all of our Event management needs. Under our current system, Winsked was the system of record for this data, and this software will be removed with G-link. Astra Schedule has a very user-friendly interface and allows us to make event or section specific reports "on the fly." Astra Schedule also maintains a built-in notification hierarchy that utilizes email for notifications as well as a web component to showcase events. Astra has a very intuitive system for room management and allows us in the future to customize room optimization. We will also be utilizing Astra to help with room conflicts that arise within Datatel Colleague. Within Colleague there are very few limitations to creating a room conflict, such as a double booking of a room. Astra will help ease that by allowing us to search for available rooms and replace any conflicts we see. The data we place in Astra Schedule will then be fed back into Datatel so we will not be required to do double entry.

Another system that was purchased was CI Track. This system will replace all of our card swipe software systems on campus. You may have seen these systems in places like the Math Study Hall or Tutoring Center. We were running three different types of software in the past; and while they were helpful, the new system I have heard is very user friendly and works

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The Cramster: A Way to Cheat or a Study Aid?

Cindy Swift

Recently, one of my students told me about a website she subscribes to, cramster.com, because it has step-by-step solutions to all the problems in her math textbook. I have since discovered that the site also includes answers for physics, chemistry, and engineering textbooks. A solutions manual has always been available to my physics students, but it only shows step-by-step solutions to some of the odd-numbered problems. I was surprised to discover that Cramster provides students with easy access to all the solutions—the even, as well as the odd-numbered problems!

Of course, I had to check out the website for myself, and I was expecting to find some kind of underground community created by students trying to cheat the system. Instead, to my surprise, I found a very reputable website. Launched in February 2003, Cramster describes itself as “a global study community comprised of students and teachers helping each other understand how to solve problems.” Calling itself a study group, Cramster publicly declares that it wants to help students be better prepared for exams.
Cramster even has an anti-cheating policy that discourages students from copying answers just to get an assignment done. Cramster actually promotes learning and understanding.

Two things in particular have contributed to the website’s success. (1) Cramster offers two levels of membership. A free membership offers students access to step-by-step solutions to all odd textbook problems as well as lecture notes and practice exams. For a $40 annual fee, a premium member receives all of the above, in addition to step-by-step answers to the even-numbered textbook problems, the ability to print solutions, and access to “priority responses” to questions from the discussion board. (2) The step-by-step solutions to textbook problems come from several sources. You can ask one of the experts how to solve a problem, and fellow Cramster members can also post solutions. When members post a solution, they are rewarded with a prize ranging from a t-shirt to increased site privileges. On a related note, I do have to give Cramster credit for its ingenious way of keeping up with the newest textbook releases.

In addition to homework solutions, the site provides lecture notes, outlines, equation sheets, video lectures, practice exams and access to other web pages. Clearly, the site can be beneficial to students, but I feel at a disadvantage when I don’t know what kind of help and information my students are able to access. I’m glad I know about the site; but as far as I’m concerned, the jury is still out about Cramster’s impact—positive and perhaps negative—on our students’ education.

**Online Video Tutorials**

*Alice Ho*

According to a report released by Truveo, the leading video search engine, the number of videos uploaded to the web has increased by a dramatic 20 fold from just five million videos to over 100 million videos during the year 2007. In addition, Truveo saw spectacular growth in usage; and queries across the Truveo video search network increased 20 fold during 2007.

With the increased interest in video resources, the number of video tutorials uploaded to the web has also grown dramatically. If you are searching for tutorials on YouTube, you can easily find and view a lot of interesting tutorials. Many of these tutorials were created using screencasting software.

What is screencasting? A screencast is a digital recording of computer screen output, often containing audio narration. Essentially, it’s a movie of what a user sees on his or her monitor. The screencasts are useful tools to demonstrate software features or to illustrate technical concepts. The video and audio components make the topic more engaging and appealing.

There is a number of screencasting software available that makes the screen capture easy to do. You can also add audio narration, photo, and music to the video. Once completed, the screencasts can be easily distributed through webpage or video sharing sites such as YouTube, Blip.tv or even screencast.com. The following screencasting tools are available in the Faculty Development Center (FDC) in the SCC Library.

**Camtasia Studio** – Camtasia allows screen recordings, audio, voice narration, PowerPoint, Picture-in-Picture and webcam video. Also, you can edit and enhance your video with callouts, titles, credits, zooming, panning, quizzes and additional audio tracks. It allows the most flexibility in the creation of various file formats (.swf, .flv, .wmv, .mov, .avi, and .m4v). Camtasia also produces player code for you to add to your webpage.

**Captivate** – Captivate from Adobe lets you create powerful and engaging Flash-based simulations, software demonstrations, and even scenario-based training without any programming knowledge or multimedia skills. This tool is fast becoming the de facto standard tool in this area.

**Smartboard** – Smartboard has a recording feature that allows you to record everything you do on the SmartBoard in avi movie format. If you have a microphone, you can even record audio in sync with screen video capture.

Screencasting is a great technology. It may take some time to learn the software and plan the best approach; however, once you’re familiar with the process, you will have fun producing your own video tutorials.
VoIP!
Curt Childress?

This is an acronym that you may hear more about in the coming year. VoIP takes voice communications and converts it to a digital signal and then transmits it over the Internet. This is similar to how computers use digital signals to send emails and web pages over the Internet, but they use different equipment. Many cable companies now offer VoIP telephone services. These services may be identified as Digital Phone or Digital Telephone depending on the provider. They offer a digital phone service without your local telephone company.

VoIP is coming to RSCCD. Our current district telephone system has been in use for a couple of decades, and there has been discussion about replacing the equipment. Digital is in, and analog is out; so when looking for new telephone equipment and service, our next telephone system will most likely be a digital phone using VoIP.

All the digital phone systems have features that were not available when our current system was implemented. Most systems allow you to access your voice mail messages using your computer through Outlook, which you currently use for your email, calendar and contacts. If you like Outlook, you may love this feature.

As with any new technology, before a VoIP system can be implemented, some of the existing communication closets will require work. There is currently no time frame established when all the tasks will be completed.