

Network News

THE ITUNES GENERATION IS USED TO BUYING music, watching television, and playing video games on screens perched in their laps, not going to record stores, student lounges, or mall arcades. Getting all of that information from faraway servers to laptop computers places an enormous burden on campus networking resources and IT departments, many of which are underfunded and understaffed, yet are expected to meet students' expectations of ever quicker access to entertainment.

Modern-day data hogs were too pricey to keep up with, but thanks to an external vendor, the shows go on.

Such was the situation at **The College at Brockport** (N.Y.) a half-dozen years ago. "Between downloading videos and movies and the gaming, they were just overbearing the network," says Shannon Sauro, director of telecommunications and business processes. Other issues the school faced included a virus that paralyzed networks for three days, no

wireless access for its 2,700 residential students, and a need to implement an emergency electronic notification system for residents.

To remain competitive, the status quo was not an option. But with fiscal and human resources strained, officials had to get creative to solve the problem.

While many schools invest heavily in infrastructure improvements only to do the same in a few years to battle obsolescence, Brockport looked outside. After engaging in an RFP process, it contracted with Apogee, an Austin, Texas, firm that provides residential network (ResNet) solutions, and within a few months, the situation had improved markedly. "We were looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade initially and then about every three years to do it over and over," Sauro says, "whereas Apogee provides the service and the equipment along with the upgrades."

The college estimates that foregoing additional staff and equipment upgrades in favor of an outsourced solution saved it at least \$500,000. Student residences now are completely wireless, and Apogee provides 24/7, 365-day technical support.

"Apogee has the strategy of answering everything within 30 seconds," Sauro says. "It's amazing. They've done it very well. They don't always hit it, but they're very consistent."

Brockport surveys report a nearly 90 percent satisfaction rate with residents' internet connectivity service and an 80 percent satisfaction level with Wi-Fi access.

"Our buildings were built in the '50s and '60s," Sauro says. "They're not made for wireless at all. We have elevators, concrete, and brick. We're trying to educate the students that when your neighbor is turning on their microwave, your wireless might go out. When someone's going down the elevator, your wireless might go out. We managed to work with Apogee to get more wireless access points out there, and the students seem to be very happy now."



The townhomes and other campus residences are completely wireless, and technical support is available any time of any day.

The virus is gone, and with the ResNet now separate from the administrative network, institutional computer resources are much safer. The school's new ResNet also gives administrators a direct way to communicate emergency notifications and warnings to all residents through a campus television network. The solution, says Sauro, is simply "a no-brainer." —*T.D.*

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER *Montgomery County Community College*

Industry Standard

IN THESE DAYS OF INSTANTANEOUS COMMUNICATION, having to wait for an answer feels anachronistic. If our e-mail isn't returned within five minutes, we call our colleague to make sure she got it. Technology, it seems, has sped communication as well as slowed it down, as multiple means of messaging—telephones, online channels, face-to-face conversation—crowd one another for attention.

At **Montgomery County Community College** (Pa.), students trying to register for classes overwhelmed the Student Success Center and the admissions and registrar's offices with 800 calls a day. Handling electronic inquiries and walk-ins along with all of those calls tied up staffers so that many calls were routed straight into the college's voicemail system and many others bounced around campus a half-dozen times or so.

"The front-line folks would say to a student standing in front of them, 'hold on.' while they picked up the phone," says Steady Moono, vice president of student affairs. "The student would be frustrated because they weren't getting the service they were expecting, and the privacy of the person on the phone was compromised."

Wanting to improve student interaction and streamline the response process, MCCC administrators engaged in several months of field research to benchmark best practices. Officials didn't limit themselves to higher education; they also visited private-sector