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Thomas College Web site makes top 100 list

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WATERVILLE — A well-known educational research center has ranked the Thomas College admissions Web site as one of the best in the nation, rating it 22nd of more than 800 college sites surveyed.

Thomas has the only Web site in Maine to be named in the top 100 list issued by the National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA).

The Web site got higher marks than most because it is linked to the college's Web-based administrative system — a highly interactive "extranet" that is a rarity among colleges — according to the college's director of information technology services, Christopher Rhoda.

"The Internet site itself is probably just like any other college Internet site," Rhoda said. "What makes ours stand above the crowd, at least as far as (NRCCUA) is concerned, is the fact that we have that extranet component."

Microsoft Corp. has conducted two case studies on the college's administrative system, considered one of the most advanced college systems in the world.

The nonprofit NRCCUA is a college admissions-research service providing information for colleges, universities, high schools, and college-bound high school students.

This is the first year the service has ranked admissions Web sites. Each site was ranked by three computer-savvy college students who had recently gone through the college-application process.

The students looked for user-friendly features, such as the capability to pay fees on-line, to apply on-line, and to request more information or application materials electronically.

Ease of use was part of the ranking criteria, and the survey also looked for sites that had links to other useful college sites.

Rhoda said the endorsement essentially tells those who may be interested in going to Thomas that the college is making more effective use of technology than the majority of its peers, at least in the area of on-line communication.

Thomas President George Spann said staff are proud that Thomas was the only college

in Maine to make the list.

"It is further objective confirmation of our commitment to excellence," Spann said.

The NRCCUA ranking differs from the more publicized Yahoo Magazine's "Most Wired" ratings, because it focuses only on the admissions component of a college's electronic systems, rather than criteria selected by Yahoo — an on-line magazine — which some colleges have criticized.

"We have been told many times that we have an extremely sophisticated and innovative computer system in place, and this is reflected by the (NRCCUA) selection," Rhoda said.

"I would say this is an honor for Maine as well. It shows that a Maine-based institution of higher learning can achieve national prominence for technological innovation."

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