ID Interview 12/8

This week's interview is with Christopher Rhoda, director of information technology services at Thomas College.

Interface: Tell me about Thomas College and how it has incorporated technology into its mission.

Rhoda: We aspire to be the pre-eminent regional center for quality in higher education in the business arts and a resource center for economic and business development.

After personal one-on-one contact, technology is a top priority for us. It is the backbone of almost everything we do. It helps us communicate, helps our students research information for classes, keeps our records, helps us make decisions and is a format for some of our courses.

Interface: What does the Information Systems program entail?

Rhoda: Our core IS courses include: an introduction course, database development, systems management, programming (Visual Basic, COBOL, Java, and C++), network design and implementation, data communications, system analysis, emerging technologies, hardware and software concepts, and multimedia development.

Interface: What degrees do you award graduates?

Rhoda: We have several degree programs: AS (2 year); BS (4 year); BS/MBA (5 year). We are also currently considering an MS/CIS and an MBA with a CIS concentration.

Interface: How many students are enrolled in the IS program?

Rhoda: If you add all of our computer/technology related majors together, they are the third largest major at the college. While our admissions office actively recruits students for these majors, unfortunately Maine follows a nation-wide trend where the number of high school students choosing these majors is well below the number of skilled employees needed by businesses.

Interface: Do you offer any programs for businesses?

Rhoda: Our computer training program for companies, called "BITS" (Business Information Technology Seminar), includes training in Microsoft NT and BackOffice

packages including: installing and administering NT servers, Web servers, email servers, database servers, and systems management servers.

Interface: How has technology been applied to the administrative functions of the college?

Rhoda: We are currently converting all of the college's information systems to Web-based systems. We have been told by some of our vendors that we have systems more sophisticated than some of the larger schools in the U.S. Our students can access their grades, bills, course information, instructor information online 24 hours a day as can our administrative staff and our faculty with information related to their jobs. We also have plans to extend our information to others outside the college environment by creating Extranet applications for certain groups.

Interface: What applications are you using?

Rhoda: We primarily use Microsoft applications. Our three servers are Windows NT and BackOffice servers, our 150 PCs and thin-clients on campus are all running some form of Windows (CE, 95, 98, or NT). All of our students learn how to best complete business tasks using Microsoft Office Applications including Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access as well as Internet Explorer and FrontPage Express. Many of our students also use Aldus Pagemaker, Peachtree Accounting, and several packages for other courses (everything from sociology to management). Our IS students also get training in Unix environments and are strongly encouraged to participate in an internship during their Junior or Senior years.

Interface: How is the college-wide emphasis on technology preparing your students to excel in the real world?

Rhoda: Almost every business position today requires some level of technology skill. Employees are increasing being asked to become knowledge workers instead of task workers. We believe that the skills we give our students will help our students not only get their first job, but to realize that they must keep learning and upgrading their skills for future career or changes(the lifelong learning concept).

For more information visit the college's Web site at http://www.thomas.edu