

February 2024

Office of the Chief Information Officer Update

Ongoing hardware refresh efforts reduce risks of service outages and keep critical enterprise business services and file storage running smoothly: With the migration of 141 file storage servers earlier this month, ITS wrapped up a months-long effort to refresh the hardware infrastructure that provides key university services, including Banner, single sign-on, and the Q-drive file storage. The university's storage arrays and Network Attached Storage (NAS) hardware have reached the end of life and end of support, necessitating this refresh. The data stored on these devices were migrated to new hardware and process improvement recommendations were identified to enhance overall enterprise system health. This work helps minimize interruptions to university services and mitigates issues with a preexisting manufacturer defect within the storage arrays that left the university vulnerable to extended service outages. The Banner environment was moved on January 15 and 68 PowerStore servers have been migrated. The additional 141 servers migrated provide the Q:drive service, file storage for administration business units and colleges, and marked a significant milestone towards completing and closing this project.

Advancement and ITS partner to launch a complete cloud-based modernization of systems that will help drive philanthropic support and foster lifelong engagement with alumni, students, donors, and friends of our growing global community: Advancement and ITS teams launched Advancement's Techshift, a multi-phase strategy that includes a complete cloud-based modernization of all Advancement information systems to support the campaign, Experience Powered by Northeastern. Tech Shift was successfully deployed to all 200 Advancement users on January 29 and replaced the legacy Banner Advancement module. The modernization efforts include implementing a new Salesforce.com based advancement system called Ascend and building out a comprehensive enterprise data integration and data analytics strategy utilizing modern platforms such as Kafka, Snowflake, and Informatica Cloud. Millions of records were processed during the project, including seven million alone for Enrollment Management and another four million records of Mills data, to create one system of record for gift and prospect data, ensuring data quality and eliminating duplicated efforts. By developing a state-of-the-art advancement technology platform, Northeastern can enhance its efforts to foster lifelong engagement, drive philanthropic support, and increase awareness and advocacy of its unique global campus communities.

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Northeastern families are engaging with the university from across the globe following the announcement of the Family Hub this week and transitioning away from the soon-to-be-retired myNortheastern Parent Portal: IT staff partnered with External Affairs to announce the Family Hub, the latest digital experience powered by the Global Digital Platform, to Northeastern's parent and family community this week. This marks one of the final steps in the effort to transition away from the antiquated myNortheastern platform, which is planned to be retired by the end of March. In the past week, family members have visited the Family Hub nearly 5,000 times, representing 58 different countries. The Family Hub offers a personalized view and relevant resources that makes it easier than ever to navigate the university and support students throughout their Northeastern careers. Families are leveraging the feedback form, which IT staff will use to plan for future enhancements to the application.

Oakland Customer Experience team embarks on hospitality training to establish steps of service, elevating the technology support experience for the Oakland campus community and beyond: The Oakland-based Customer Experience (CX) team engaged in a hands-on hospitality exercise at Bay Area businesses that showcases world-class hospitality and customer service. This hands-on experience further cemented TS' steps of service in a white-glove concierge model of technical support and is an exercise and model that will be rolled out to the staff in Boston next. Since opening in the fall of 2022, the Oakland Tech Bar has assisted over 3,000 community members with in-person support. As Oakland works to add additional service offerings, such as technology lending, the team has been eager to further elevate the high level of customer service and experience that is offered by ITS both in the Tech Bar and around campus.

Classroom technology monitoring application improves the classroom experience for faculty and students and lowers troubleshooting support needs: Remote monitoring capability has been installed in 20 Oakland and 200 Boston classrooms, allowing for real-time alerts of tech issues. By monitoring classroom technology remotely, ITS can greatly improve the teaching and learning experience across the global network, allowing for issues to be identified and resolved before a faculty member even steps into the room and discovers the issue. The Symphony AV monitoring application can, for example, detect if a cable is unplugged and send a technician to correct it. In some instances, the monitoring application can start the troubleshooting remotely, including by forcing a reboot to see if that solves the issue before deploying a technician to the room. Since January 1, AV has responded to and resolved 100 alerts for support before faculty have noticed any outage or downtime. Since the start of the Spring 2024 semester, ITS Customer Experience has fielded 51% fewer support tickets than during the same period the previous semester.

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Academic Technologies releases new feature in Canvas that makes it easier for instructors to make engaging design accessible in every Northeastern course: A new sidebar, Cidi Labs's DesignPLUS, is now available to all Canvas users with course authoring privileges. DesignPLUS sidebar builds upon the legacy sidebar that provided faculty and instructional designers with numerous tools for customizing their Canvas pages. The new DesignPLUS offers expanded options, a modernized interface, and enhanced automatic accessibility checks. Faculty can now access their most frequently used tools and settings more easily, enriching courses with images and interactivity. Compared to the legacy Sidebar or Canvas's built-in authoring tools, DesignPLUS has the potential to make engaging design accessible in every Northeastern course. This summer, Northeastern plans to roll out support for Cidi Labs's UDOIT tool, which dramatically simplifies the process of making course content accessible to all learners.

The completion of phase one of the Technology Infrastructure Improvement Program (TIIP) enhances connectivity in five research-centric buildings on the Boston campus: ITS completed the overhaul of the network infrastructure in five buildings on the Boston campus: Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering Complex, Egan Research Center, Snell Engineering Center, Dana Research Center, and West Village H (Khoury). The project included new copper cabling to rooms and spaces, new wire management in server closets, new server equipment, and new wireless access points in all five buildings. This increased the wireless reach and bandwidth capacity to help meet the technological demands of Northeastern researchers and the campus community. The second phase of the project has already kicked off and will be focusing this spring on upgrading the wireless infrastructure in additional academic and administrative buildings, further enhancing the capacity and reliability of the Boston campus's connectivity and supporting teaching, learning, and business activities.

ITS completes latest upgrade to ServiceNow platform, enabling new AI and other capabilities for the growing number of critical service areas at the university: Northeastern's ServiceNow platform upgrade to one of the vendor's newest releases, called Vancouver, was successfully completed on February 22. This upgrade supports the ongoing maintenance for the ServiceNow platform, which plays a key role in many critical capabilities across the entire university ecosystem related to customer service, student support, human resources, IT service and operations management, risk and compliance, and project management. This upgrade provides Northeastern with new features and opportunities to innovate, including generative AI integration capabilities, text to code functionality, and makes available task intelligence for faster and more accurate categorization of items that are received by ITS.

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