

Digest

► **June 3, 2009**

A newsletter for North Georgia College & State University

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Take note...

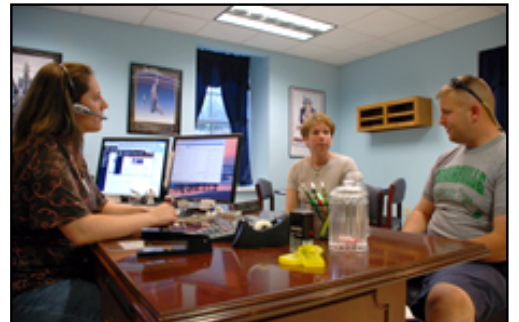
USG publications available

Campus In Action

Get Involved events

North Georgia opens veterans center for education benefits

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Memorial Hall. The center is a 289-square-foot office decorated wall-to-wall with posters of tanks and aircraft and one of Uncle Sam that reads "I WANT YOU TO GET FINANCIAL AID."

Vista upgrade to boost online education strategy



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existing tools from the current Vista 3 software. The latest version of the Blackboard Inc. learning system is being implemented throughout the University System of Georgia.

The Digest is published weekly by the Office of University Relations for North Georgia's faculty, staff, students and community.

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North Georgia opens veterans center for education benefits

By Joshua Preston

To coincide with the nation's tribute to American armed service members Memorial Day week, North Georgia opened a new Veterans Success Center in Price Memorial Hall.

The center is a 289-square-foot office decorated wall-to-wall with posters of tanks and aircraft and one of Uncle Sam that reads "I WANT YOU TO GET FINANCIAL AID." The center is a clearinghouse for all financial aid information and education benefits available to military service members enrolled at North Georgia.



Kayla Cox in financial aid helps U.S. Air Force Reserve officer Janita Mastin and Georgia Army National Guard soldier Blake Weaver with their military education benefits in the new Veterans Success Center. (Photo: Joshua Preston)

As one of only six senior military colleges in the nation, North Georgia has a significant military population that includes former active duty military members and reservists in every branch of the armed services. The university's unique 770-member Corps of Cadets includes a majority of these service members, who are primarily soldiers in the Georgia Army National Guard or U.S. Army Reserve.

"The mission for the center is to be a place where veterans and their families can find out about veterans' educational benefits," Jill Rayner, director of financial aid, said. "We also hope it will be a place where we can promote other services on campus that will benefit veterans, such as career services, tutoring assistance, disability services, and academic services."

North Georgia has several financial aid options specific to the institution, including the Georgia Military Scholarship and stipends for cadet leaders in the military program. The Veterans Success Center will be a single location for veterans to complete paperwork for the Montgomery G.I. Bill and where they can find assistance to other services, such as Tuition Assistance.

The center's major service will be to help cadets and veterans, active or reserve, to receive the maximum educational benefits for which they are eligible, Rayner said. Financial aid staff members at the university deal regularly with soldiers and are sensitive to the nature of the military lifestyle, which is one reason the Veterans Success Center was developed.

Units within Georgia's largest combat group, the National Guard's 48th Brigade, are deploying to Afghanistan, and many students will be affected by the deployment.

"We want to be ready to assist veterans and their families to start at NGCSU or continue their education" after the deployment, Rayner said.

"Our ultimate goal is getting the local community involved as well," she said. "We would love to have our local veterans be a resource for our returning soldiers, for those veterans to be a sounding board and for the Veterans Success Center to be a safe listening place for soldiers to share their experiences."

Vista upgrade to boost online education strategy

By Joshua Preston

GeorgiaVIEW Vista 8, North Georgia's newest platform in online learning, will debut fall semester and give users more flexibility in how they can upload content and includes time-saving enhancements using existing tools from the current Vista 3 software.

The latest version of the Blackboard Inc. learning system is being implemented throughout the University System of Georgia (USG). Distance learning courses account for 5.4 percent of the system's courses. The USG is using Vista 8 to help reach its strategic goal of 8.4 percent of all system courses being offered through distance learning by 2012.



More than 40 percent of all courses have an online component through Vista and a staggering 90 percent of students logged on the system last year. Online access is even easier with more than 50 computer labs on campus. (Photo: Joshua Preston)

Vista 8 will accommodate North Georgia faculty members looking to make the jump into cyberspace with Web-only courses or enhance their classroom lectures with online components. The format promises faculty members freedom from the constraints that may come with traditional lecture halls and the opportunity to empower them with new teaching methods.

Leading up to the rollout of Vista 8 in August is an on-campus effort to create an infrastructure for technical support. Information and Instructional Technology's Web services and the Center of Teaching and Learning Excellence have been testing new patches on Vista 8, Java and browser compatibility, and

adjusting server settings for new features and customization. The USG will support Vista 8 with 10 dedicated servers to store data from all courses that are delivered through the software.

For maximum flexibility, the Vista platform upgrade will allow faculty members to transfer existing courses from the older Vista 3 or to rebuild the courses completely using the innovations that Vista 8 offers.

Judy McHan, the university's Web Resources & GeorgiaVIEW Vista administrator, sees the opportunity for Vista's virtual classrooms to grow with the fall semester launch.

"You've got students tweeting, and, of course, they still have their MySpace and Facebook connections, so what they're doing is already communicating and collaborating online socially," McHan said.

"Vista allows them to extend their academic activities from a distance," she said. "They can check their classes, check their grades, and they can do their academic work from anywhere, and I think that is what's appealing to students — they aren't physically tied to campus for all their academic activities."

Vista has already reached a critical mass among students — about 40 percent of all courses use Vista in some capacity, averaging 5,200 users a semester, including 150 faculty. That translates to more than 90 percent of the total student population, a significant indicator of Vista's success.

"If faculty members can get their students to embrace Vista and they embrace it, they can teach their students to navigate an online learning environment and prepare them for the future," McHan said.

One of the largest advantages of Vista for faculty, and incidentally for students, is that it is asynchronous by nature, said Dr. Irene Kokkala, director of the Center of Teaching and Learning Excellence. "A faculty member can post content whenever they want and from wherever they want," she said.

To make Vista 8 a robust learning environment for students and a content delivery system that faculty will further embrace, other software packages will be supported through Vista.

Faculty members can currently deliver virtual lectures by incorporating, for example, PowerPoints and live audio through a Vista tie-in called Wimba. Also, management of tests and quizzes will be significantly streamlined with support from Respondus, which is being tested now.

Migration of existing online courses from Vista 3 to 8 started this past spring, but a large majority of courses still need to be transferred, according to McHan. Workshops will take place throughout June to help faculty make the transition before fall semester and to give the campus community an understanding of the significant role Vista is playing in the development of North Georgia's online education strategy.

Unstable hemlock tree removed on campus

Workers removed a hemlock tree at the edge of West Main St. in front of Price Memorial Hall on June 3. Tree specialists working for the city recommended removal of the tree, noting that the tree was structurally unstable and presented a danger to the public given its proximity to traffic and sidewalks. The tree had grown with a split trunk and had a high probability of falling, according to consultants and the local county extension office. The university plans to use the mulch created from the tree around campus and will plant another tree in its place.

(Photo: Joshua Preston)



Take note...

USG publications available

The University System of Georgia has published new issues of [Legislative Update](#) and [The System Supplement](#). This is the final issue of Legislative Update for the 2009 legislative session, and it contains a wrap-up on the disposition of legislation of interest to the University System.

Campus in Action

Berdanier publishes textbook

Lynne Berdanier, anatomy and physiology instructor, has published her first book, *Case Studies in Physiology and Nutrition*. The book is co-authored with her mother, Carolyn Berdanier, an educator and researcher at the University of Georgia. The text provides students with stories about patients, their symptoms and clinical findings, and then poses questions to help students develop critical thinking skills. The book presents a range of issues including anemia, diabetes, obesity, over- and malnutrition, starvation, parasites, dementia, and vitamin deficiencies.

Berdanier credited the faculty members in biology and physical therapy with making the book possible, as they participated in the review and editing process of the book.

Robinson moves to academic affairs office

Ramona Robinson has joined the Office of Academic Affairs as the administrative specialist/coordinator. Robinson has worked at North Georgia since July 2006 in the academic support programs unit. Most recently, she coordinated the early alert/intervention program and assisted in the testing office.

North Georgia faculty and staff are invited to submit news of professional accomplishments for the Campus in Action section to digest@ngcsu.edu.