

As the buzz about “portals” escalates, we continue to bring you articles that we hope will illuminate the issues surrounding yet another new way of looking at the business we’ve been in for at least two decades—or more, depending on your definition of that business.

Certainly by the early ‘80s, with the publication of Synott and Gruber’s seminal work on the concept of information resources management (IRM), information systems perspectives had begun to shift from a traditional operational focus to a more strategic approach.¹ The rest of that decade and the early years of the next were characterized by major institutional investments in automated information systems and computing and communications technologies as well as by the growing realization that information—and the technologies that support its creation, storage, and accessibility—constitute resources that are just as valuable to an organization as its financial and human resources.

By the mid-‘90s, the profession was taking a broader view of the function of electronic information resources on campus, which were defined as encompassing “the *technology* (or conduit), the *information content*, and the *services* which link both of those elements with users at all levels.”² The vision then was that effectively integrating and managing these three components through a cohesive strategy for managing and using information resources would capitalize on the ability of information technology to transform higher education institutions to thrive (or survive!) in the knowledge age.

And now, as Yogi Berra so sagely put it, it’s déjà vu all over again. In his article about campus portal strategies, Richard Katz suggests that such strategies are needed to “integrate information, services, and infrastructure across a seamless

and easy-to-navigate Web interface.” Unquestionably, the Web infrastructure presents an opportunity to advance campus information resources management to the next level—immediate access to a full range of information and services that have been customized to the user’s needs.

Last spring the EDUCAUSE Publications Advisory Committee met to discuss future strategies for the association’s publishing and communications program. Their recommendation to ensure the success of the program was summarized in a simple mission statement: “To get the right information, to the right person, at the right time.” That pretty much sums up the mission of information technology on today’s campuses as well, whether the “right person” is a prospective or enrolled student, a campus administrator, a faculty member, an alumnus, a trustee, or a parent.

Several of the articles in this issue of *EQ* address critical components for achieving this mission—from building a personalized education portal interface (a lot about infrastructure), to transforming student services through a Web-based admissions system (a focus on service), to the development of a data warehouse (where information is key). All are excellent examples of the elevation of information systems to support institutional missions and strategies by universities that are now positioned to turn their attention to the next stage after IRM—that is, knowledge management. But more about that in a future issue!

Julia A. Rudy, Editor

Endnotes:

1. W.R. Synnott and W.H. Gruber, *Information Resources Management: Opportunities and Strategies for the 1980s* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), as referenced in J.I. Penrod, M.G. Dolence, and J.V. Douglas, *The Chief Information Officer in Higher Education* (Boulder, Colo.: CAUSE, 1990), p. 1.
2. Jane N. Ryland, “Information Resources: Technology, Services, and Information,” *CAUSE/EFFECT*, Fall 1994, pp. 3–4.

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With a focus on students, UNI is creating a “one-stop” student services center that will combine academic and administrative functions.

On the cover:

The University of Northern Iowa, located in Cedar Falls, enrolls more than 13,000 students; 19 out of 20 are state residents.

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