

GradWeb updates formerly arduous Graduate School tracking methods

Created by two University staff members, GradWeb has eliminated the need for an extended paper trail

By Caron Alarab
News Reporter

When it comes to unique and innovative software creation, two heads are better than one.

For two University staff members, 30 years of institutional knowledge and three years of software engineering experience combined to make "GradWeb," the first software program designed specifically for graduate school business.

GradWeb, which has been in use at the University for more than two years, has transformed student records management at the Graduate School, saving thousands of dollars in administrative costs.

"GradWeb has positively changed the way the Graduate School does business," Toby Deemer, assistant dean of the Graduate School and co-creator of the program, said in an e-mail interview.

Before GradWeb, all Graduate School business practices required a paper trail on interactions among students, department staff, faculty, Graduate School staff and the Office of the Registrar. The University had 23 forms to track and record the progress of each graduate student from admission through to the application for his or her degree. Every form had to be copied, filed with the Graduate School and sent both to departments and to students.

"The Graduate School printed 45,000 pieces of paper each year and none of our processes were online," Deemer said.

Today, only two forms remain while everything else is done electronically. Through GradWeb's six interactive modules, or features, the program

has cut the need to print, mail and process more than 30,000 forms annually, while just one of the modules has saved 300 administrative hours each year.

"The University of Oregon takes great pride in the effective use of technology to do business, and it seemed to us in the Graduate School that the time had come to change the way we did business," Deemer said.

During the summer of 2000, Deemer came up with the idea for GradWeb when she decided to plan her retirement and realized her institutional knowledge would be leaving with her.

"I began to design a plan to present to the dean of the Graduate School that would construct a method to transfer my knowledge and experience into a clear and transparent format," she said. "Web technology was, at that point in time, providing excellent service for the exchange of information."

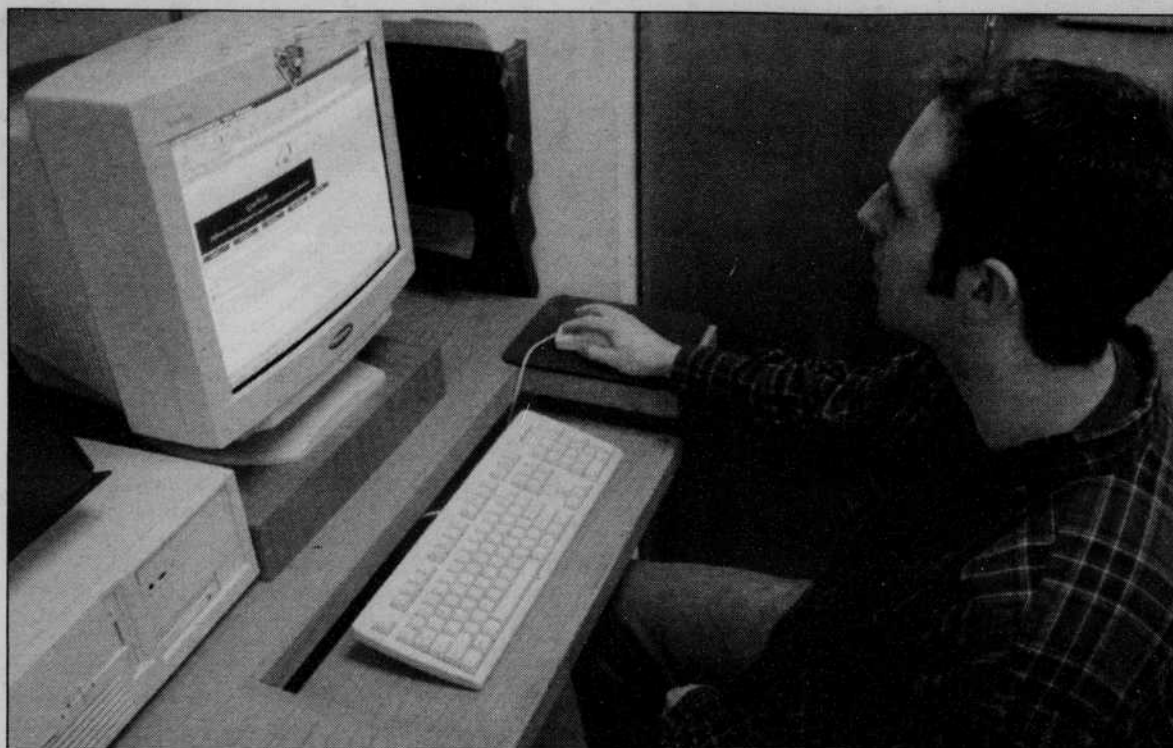
She recruited former graduate student and software designer Asif Suria, and together they created GradWeb.

"We searched the Web sites of other graduate schools and did not find a fully integrated system that supported the business practices of graduate education," Deemer said. "It was at this point we decided to construct our own."

Since the creation of GradWeb, Deemer and Suria have entered into a licensing agreement with the University and formed Eugene Software Solutions to help market it.

Suria, who is president of Eugene Software Solutions, once worked at the Graduate School as a graduate teaching fellow. He said when he called Deemer in early 2001 in search of an opportunity to return to campus, he liked her idea and decided to move back to Eugene from San Francisco.

"Working with Toby on GradWeb has been a very enriching experience," Suria said in an e-mail interview. "She



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Graduate School staff member Jared Nagel uses the University's new GradWeb software, which allows graduate students to complete several tasks, such as applying for admission and filling out surveys, online.

has a vast amount of knowledge of graduate school practices and an excellent way of working with people."

Currently, GradWeb allows interaction between students, the Graduate School and departments to be handled electronically with automatic e-mail notifications sent to all parties. By creating a record of interactions, such as applications for admission and advanced degrees, GradWeb creates virtually error-proof permanent student records, Deemer said.

Political Science graduate coordinator Ilene Proudfoot said she finds GradWeb quick, easy and efficient.

"Because there is less paperwork, there's less of a chance of documents getting lost," she said. "I can also keep a nice track of students' records."

During the 2003 calendar year, 312,794 pages were accessed on GradWeb, which includes individual usage directly related to Graduate School business, Deemer said. Last year, GradWeb processed 1377 applications for graduate degrees, showing a 30 percent increase from the year before.

Since last December, the first month of the admission application cycle, Deemer said she's already seen a 15 percent increase in online processing compared to December 2002. She added that a number of other

universities are extremely impressed by the GradWeb modules and "have shown a real interest in having something similar for themselves."

Since GradWeb's completion, Deemer said the biggest challenge has been "keeping our excitement from spilling over and trying to do too much all at once."

From a technical point of view, Suria also said two big challenges were migrating more than 10 years of data across different databases and platforms and ensuring accessibility across all browsers and platforms.

"For the project as a whole, the

biggest challenge that any new software system faces is adoption by users and making sure that the software is easy to use," Suria said.

Deemer said she is very proud to have been a part of the software creation because of the opportunity to serve the University.

"I have been blessed with a long career at this institution and have always worked with people that have been supportive and creative," she said.

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at caronalarab@dailyemerald.com.

GRADWEB FEATURES

GradWeb has made six modules available to the University community:

- Application for admission online
- Application for graduation (master degree candidates and doctoral degree candidates)
- Surveys and exit questionnaires

Three modules are specific to doctoral education:

- Advancement to Candidacy
- Doctoral Committee construction
- Oral Defense of the dissertation

SOURCE: Assistant Graduate School Dean Toby Deemer

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"The University and the organizations that make up the University is, as far as I'm concerned, frankly, just another set of neighborhoods," he said. "We'll sit down together. We'll talk about what the priorities are and what we need to do about them."



Robert M. Lehner
Eugene Police Chief

Lehner said he has a strong desire to communicate not only with University groups but also to form partnerships with all neighborhood groups in Eugene.

The city announced Lehner's appointment Dec. 19, three weeks after introducing him as its top choice in a lengthy selection process involving five other candidates. Lehner was part of a second re-

ruitment process that resulted after the top candidate in the first process in September declined the position, citing family concerns about moving to the West Coast from Minnesota.

The city's community relations director Jan Bohman said the city initially delayed recruiting a new police department head after former Chief Jim Hill retired in Dec. 2001 because management wanted to first fill the then-vacant city manager position.

Although a new city manager was hired in February 2003, the police chief hiring was further delayed when the first candidate pulled out.

City Manager Dennis Taylor said in a press release that Lehner is bright, articulate and excited about joining the city's leadership team.

"He has financial management strengths, outstanding communication skills and is a proven problem-solver," Taylor said. "Mr. Lehner is the right and best fit for our department and our city."

Lehner, 48, joined the Tucson Police Department in 1978 as an officer and climbed through the ranks of detective, sergeant, lieutenant, captain and assistant chief. He has a master's degree

in business administration from the University of Arizona.

Officials said Lehner's experiences will serve him well in working on the big issues facing the Eugene police force such as staff vacancies.

"We've been significantly understaffed for a while," EPD spokeswoman Pam Olshanski said. She added that the understaffing was due to a combination of factors including unanticipated call-ups to active military duty and retirements.

Olshanski said the staff shortages have resulted in multiple stints of overtime and an inability to take active steps to prevent crime before it happens, which has hurt staff morale.

Olshanski said Lehner also arrives at a time when the department's image in the community has been affected by recent unrelated charges against two former officers for inappropriate sexual conduct while on the job.

Lehner will also use his experience in campus-police relations.

While he never directly oversaw policing at the University of Arizona, he said he was "fairly close" to members of the university communi-

ty, sitting down with administrators and students to discuss issues of importance to them.

He said he does have direct experience tackling the problem of large parties and emphasized the need to keep parties small.

"It's the bigger parties that frankly get out of control," he said. "It doesn't mean it's OK to have underage drinking but what it does mean is there is a reasonable balance somewhere between what is the appropriate level of enforcement and what is the appropriate expenditure of police resources."

This is just one of the issues Lehner said he hopes to discuss with students, administrators and neighborhood groups.

"I know that students want a safe environment," Lehner said. "Certainly their parents who send them here want a safe environment, and it's something that we will work on together to ensure that you'll have a safe educational experience while you're here."

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