

# Essentials

## NEWS

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**CSS Mission:** To provide a secure, reliable, and innovative computer environment that facilitates, supports and enhances the mission of the College of Engineering.

### Hours

Elder and Hering computer labs are open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week except for cleaning. With an access card, you can enter the building and the labs after the Seamans Center closes.

Consulting, 1253 SC,  
M-Th 8am-9pm; F 8am-5pm; Sun 2-9pm

CSS Main Office,  
1256 SC, M-F 8am-noon; 1-5pm

## New College Web Site

*Editor's Note: I asked the college webmaster, Bill Easton, to write about why the new college web site looks and acts the way it does. Sometimes it helps to understand the why when you see the result.*

### Technical Information

The new website is developed to be:

- completely XHTML 1.0 transitional compliant (Extensible HyperText Markup Language, or XHTML, is a markup language that has the same depth of expression as HTML, but also conforms to XML syntax, a markup language for Web pages. With XHTML, coders must conform to the rules, which is not true with HTML, a web markup language),
- section 508 accessible (the section of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act that was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology), and
- built with cascading style sheets instead of tables for layout.

At the time of its launch in mid-July 2007, the College of Engineering web site was one of only two college sites at the University of Iowa that had all these features.

The site is also designed to integrate well with Contribute and Dreamweaver for easier user updates and long-term, site-wide maintenance.

### Why PHP

(PHP is an programming language designed for producing dynamic web pages.) Part of redesign has required the use of the .php extension, which allows us to pull information dynamically from a database. Notice, for example, that the News and Events page never lists events that happened in the past. News and Events information can also be used for a variety of purposes, including department web sites and RSS feeds. (RSS, Real Simple Syndication, is a web feed format for publishing news, podcasts, etc.) Using PHP has also allowed us to use single files for many centrally used files for easier and consistent updating (navbar, header, footer, etc.).

### Design

The focus of the visual update was to give the site a more current look and feel and to give different areas within the college consistency in visual presence and navigation. With the previous site both visitors and internal users had a hard time getting to information for different areas of the college. In addition to the college pages, the Student Development Center site and Chemical and Biochemical Engineering site use the new design. Updating the rest of the academic department sites is high on my to-do list.  
/Bill Easton

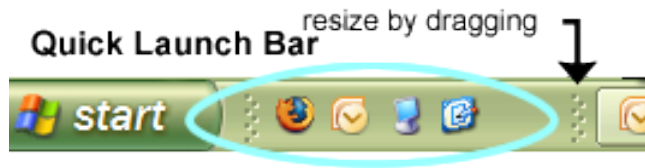
## Quick Launch Bar

### Where

On Windows XP computers near the left side of the taskbar is an area called the Quick Launch bar. If you don't have the Quick Launch bar, get it by right clicking on the taskbar, select Properties, and on the Taskbar tab that opens, check "Show Quick Launch." Or after right clicking on the taskbar, select Toolbars, then Quick Launch.

### How Use

Put icons for files, folder views, or programs you use regularly and want to access with a single click in the Quick Launch bar. Any icon on your desktop or in My Computer or Windows Explorer can be added by dragging it to the Quick Launch area. The area expands, so you can add several icons. Here's my Quick Launch Bar:



### New Software Releases

If you use the Quick Launch bar, you need to replace the icons when CSS installs a new or updated version of a program you launch from that area. Simply delete (right click and select **Delete**) the existing icon, and replace it with the icon for the updated program. Likewise, if you have an icon on your desktop for a program that gets updated, you will need to remove the old icon and create an icon for the new version.

/Diana Harris

## Altiris

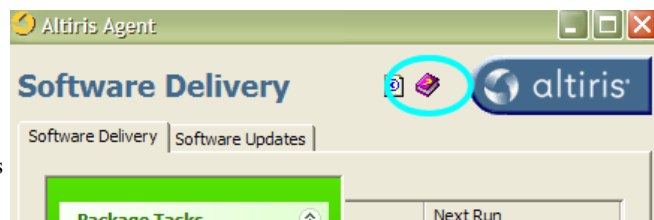
### In Your System Tray

CSS has purchased and installed the Altiris Client Management software to make installing Windows software and OS patches easier. You should notice only that you have a new icon, shown above, in the system tray. (Altiris is installed on CSS-administered Windows computers, except for at CCAD.) Dan, who does most of the Windows installation, should notice that the effort to install updated or patched programs is much easier and so occurs more quickly than before.

If you open the Altiris Agent window, you'll see tabs for Software Delivery and Software Updates. As we get more experience with the package, you'll see additional tabs. In the upper right corner (circled in the illustration) is the Help icon; click on the book with the "?" to read about the Altiris Agent.

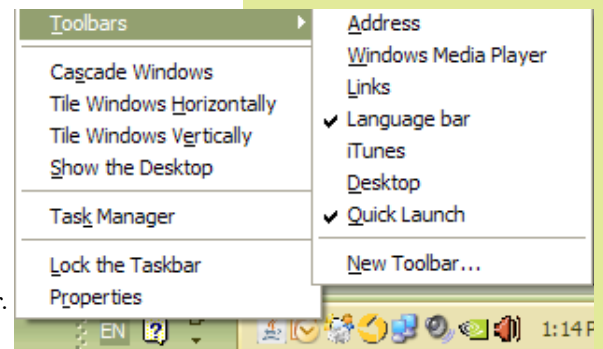
Altiris makes it easy to get reports on computers that have not rebooted, malfunctioning fans, or drives that need to be reorganized. We can generate reports on

kinds of hardware and versions of software installed, and OS patches installed. CSS should then be able to reboot or repair those computers and not wait until they fail to do what is necessary.



Essentials is a publication of Computer Systems Support (CSS) in the College of Engineering at the University of Iowa. Essentials is published during the year whenever there is sufficient news to report to the user community.

Back issues of Essentials are [on-line](#).



## Language Toolbar

If you never use the language toolbar in the lower right corner of your Windows XP screen, you can remove it. Right click the Taskbar, select **Toolbars**, then select **Language bar**. (see illustration above)

## The Speed of Mail

### Late Mail

Recently CSS heard from a client that people in that unit had complained about receiving email messages that left the sender's machine in the early morning but were not received until that afternoon. That inquiry also raised questions about whether email is reliable, quick, and efficient.

### The Problem

In early December our primary incoming email gateway experienced heavy loading due to a network attack. It responded as programmed by limiting incoming transactions until the attack abated. Due to a programming oversight, the email processing did not automatically switch over to the secondary server. Thus incoming email processing was significantly slowed for some time. Once the oversight was corrected and we blocked the network attack, normal mail processing resumed. How long it took for mail to be delivered to the engineering mail address depended in part on the setting of the remote senders' retry interval.

The postmaster's reply went on:

Note that no messages should have been lost, just delayed.

If you have critical communications that are time sensitive, consider using other means of transacting them.

### Effective, Certainly. Reliable, Yes. Quick, Usually but not Always.

Our client responded by asking if the above explanation meant that email is not a reliable medium of communication for time-sensitive materials? "If so, this comes as a surprise to me as I've always thought that e-mail was one of the most effective ways to communicate information in a quick and efficient manner."

This question required the postmaster to choose exactly the right words to respond accurately. He wrote:

"Email is reliable in so far as it will either get to its destination or return an error message, but there is no guarantee of timeliness. It is usually quick but due to things such as floods of spam, congestion and slow-downs are not unheard of. I've seen cases where even large email providers such as Hotmail were clogged for several hours.

"For particular situations where I want "reliable" and "time sensitive," I would not depend upon email. For example, if I needed to summon an ambulance, I would call 911, not use email. If I needed to give my insurance agent information that must be received by the end of the business day to avoid

## Training on Campus

17 January 4CAST2008 Conference on Social Networking and Campus Impact, hosted by ITS, The Center for Teaching, and University Libraries. This year's program will explore the impact of social networking on teaching and learning. [Click](#) for information.

### Second Life

Second Life is an emerging technology that has exciting potential for instruction. Yet there are many instructional and technological issues that still need to be addressed. To sign up for the next training event on virtual worlds or to arrange a demonstration, please contact [Steve Tomblin](#) at or 335-6271.

ITS training opportunities:

[Campus Services training](#)

Check the [Instructional Services](#) home page  
Instructional Services [training](#) page  
[beyond](#) ITS

Other training

[Center for Teaching](#)

Information [Arcade Clinics](#)

UI [Learning and Development](#)

On-line Learning with [SkillSoft](#)

losing coverage, I might use email but would also follow up with a phone call."

Currently 80 to 90 percent of the connections to our mail servers are either spam or network attacks and trends show that increasing. We must devote increasing resources to try to filter out the garbage to make email useful and this filtering tends to slow things down.

So e-mail is reliable and usually quick, but do not bet the rent on it always being fast.

## Kiosks

### How To Add a Slide

If you are part of the College of Engineering's administration, department or officially recognized group, you can request that a slide be added to the welcome display kiosk screens around the Seamans Center. Just go to the [displays URL](#) and complete the form with information which requests your name, email, phone, slide start time, slide end time, slide title, body copy for the slide, a description of any images you would like used, and which displays they should run on. (There are displays at the 1400 entrance off Washington Street near the BME office, the 1500 entrance by 1505 lecture hall, 2000 entrance off Capitol by the Dean's Office, 2100 entrance off Washington Street, and 2500 at the entrance from the John Deere Plaza.)

### Details

I request that slides be submitted at least a week in advance, though usually they go up quicker.

If you don't have an image but have an idea of what you would like, I can usually find something appropriate.

Slides are set up to run in random order, so the content looks less stale. This tends to help with the complaints that it is the same thing over and over again.

The tickers that run on the bottom of the screen are headlines pulled from 6 different RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds. (RSS feeds are used to publish frequently updated content such as news headlines.) They include the CNN main news feed, the CNN science and technology feed, CNET's main news feed, Hawkeye Sports' news feed, the main COE news feed, and a custom feed just for the displays prepared by the COE's external relations group. These feeds are randomly displayed and are refreshed every 20 minutes. I keep hearing requests for a weather feed, but all the weather feeds I've found break when the images are pulled and then don't make any sense.

If you have questions about using the kiosks, send me [email](#) or call me at 4-0754.

/ Bill Easton

## Student Computer Fee. Where Does It Go?

### All Students Pay Them

Students may know that they pay a computing fee that is shown on the U bill. Engineering students have been paying a computer fee since 1986. All UI students began paying a computer fee in 1991. (You can read the [history](#) of the fee.) If you care about how that money was spent, you'll find the answer on-line; keep reading.

Annually several groups recommend how the next year's fees will be allocated. You can read about that [process](#). Colleges report annually on how they used the fees. You can find all student computer fee [reports](#) including the most recent report for 2006.

### The 2006 Report

The 2006 report shows that engineering students paid \$616,000 in fees of which \$518,000 was returned to the college. The \$98,000 difference was spent on IT infrastructure on campus, such as computers for general assignment classrooms (there are 9 such classrooms in the Seamans Center), ITCs, campus licensing agreements (such as the Microsoft agreement which is the reason that Microsoft Office, for example, is so inexpensive when purchased at the IMU Bookstore), and remote access and wireless access. Further into the 2006 report you see how the various units spent the student fees. Engineering spent \$550,000 on hardware and \$147,000 on software licenses and fees. (Because everyone reading this newsletter is above average, I don't have to point out that we spent more than we took in from fees this year. Fortunately the student computer fees can be carried from year to year. Thus this year we could spend more than ITS returned to us.)

from 2006 report

### College of Engineering

#### Allocation bodies

The College of Engineering Computer Systems Support (C for the College of Engineering IT budget which includes the College student computer fees. The Engineering Faculty C Services Committee to provide representative faculty advice on Student Computer Fee (SCF) funds and other operational planning is received from the Engineering Student Council.

# Google Analytics

## What It Is

Google Analytics gathers information on visits, page views, pages per visit, bounce rate percentage (number of people who leave the site as soon as they get there), average time on site, and % of new visits. It also keeps visitor information like what operating system, browser, connection speed, and what pages they went to. And it saves info on what pages are being hit and, because of the report tools included, you can see trends in site usage.

## What It Does

Although I have not done much tinkering with Google Analytics yet, I can use it to see if people are finding the pages we want them to find. For example, we think some prospective students would apply to Iowa if they knew about the option to study the entrepreneurial process as related to technology, and so also receive that certification. By tracking how many times the [Technological Entrepreneurship Certificate](#) pages is viewed when it appears on the Future Students page as compared to putting a link to that on the home page, the web master can make organizational changes in the web site to get different results.

Getting the data requires adding some code to each web page, so it is best to design the web page template including the Analytics code.

Here are some examples of the sort of reports that Google Analytics generates. By the way, the top 3 countries viewing the college web site for November were the US, China, and India.

/Bill Easton



## Technical Profile

Browser	Visits	% visits
<a href="#">Internet Explorer</a>	9,855	57.47%
<a href="#">Firefox</a>	5,848	34.11%
<a href="#">Safari</a>	960	5.60%
<a href="#">Mozilla</a>	281	1.64%
<a href="#">Opera</a>	132	0.77%

[view full report](#)

Connection Speed	Visits	% visits
<a href="#">T1</a>	6,095	35.55%
<a href="#">Cable</a>	4,146	24.18%
<a href="#">Unknown</a>	3,658	21.33%
<a href="#">DSL</a>	2,561	14.94%
<a href="#">Dialup</a>	644	3.76%