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As mainstream collaboration modes evolve, the way schools are tackling online information sharing is changing, and it's changing fast. By Matt Villano

Building Programs Together

Not every higher education institution has turned to synchronous collaboration tools to help students directly. At Rice University, technologists have deployed a new product from Daptiv (www.daptiv.com) to facilitate collaboration exclusively inside the IT department.

Derek Rabuck, IT planning and project manager, explains that he and his colleagues practically “live” inside the Daptiv system, using its document repository to share spreadsheets, and to brainstorm new ideas. If a staffer is working on a particular project, he will store related documents in the system so others can contribute. During conference calls, technologists use a special markup feature to make notes in the files. Any individual who has access to the project can log in and obtain a status report. Rabuck says he and his colleagues also have written their own financial tracking system in Daptiv; it enables Rice’s IT workers to collaborate to track financials on any given project, in real time.

“With things like wikis or even e-mail, you’ve got to download a document, make a change, then upload it again or send it along,” Rabuck says. “But with this [technology], I can log in at the

exact same time as some of my colleagues, make changes that everybody can see as I’m making them, and work with others to make sure we’re heading exactly where we want to go.”

Another benefit of the Daptiv solution is a series of protocols that allows Rice IT staffers to track projects over

time. Rabuck says the solution includes notification and accountability alerts that create a document approval path on every project. With this feature, rather than having to “pull” notifications or check in constantly, notifications are pushed to the relevant users in real time, so nobody drops the ball.

Perhaps the only downside to the new technology has been the learning curve: Rabuck admits it took a few weeks for his colleagues to embrace the Daptiv system, largely because they had grown accustomed to doing things asynchronously. Today, however, all 51 members of Rice’s IT department use the tool, and university officials are contemplating rolling it out to other departments as well.

“You can’t argue against something that helps people work together,” says Rabuck. “Increased communication, better efficiency—these are things people all over this institution hope to achieve.”

Rice IT staffers practically ‘live’ inside their new synchronous collaboration system, using it to share spreadsheets, brainstorm new ideas, and track project financials.