Pounce: The Cloud for Cougars

On the heels of cloud storage solutions and virtual desktop interfaces, Pounce is the on-campus solution to storage and security needs. In comparison to the one-size-fits-all cloud solutions like Dropbox, Google Drive, and OneDrive, Pounce is designed by WSU Spokane ITS with the University security requirements and the specific needs of all campus users in mind.

WSU Spokane researchers are fast-moving, detail oriented, and are always working to reach the next milestone in their research fields. They require a storage solution that dynamically provides the tools to share, synchronize, and keep their data secure while having access from anywhere at any time. Faculty and staff have similar access needs, along with the need to share files with their teams. Pounce is the premier solution to meet these needs.

Users no longer have to worry about their storage options not accepting the files necessary for their projects. There are no restrictions on attachment sizes or file types to upload to Pounce—and sharing those files with colleagues is a breeze. Each and every file can be shared using an automatically generated link that can be copied and pasted into an email, IM, text message, and more. This is a vast improvement from other storage solutions because sharing files won’t plug up inboxes with documents. Following these links will allow users to view the documents quickly, and even provide options for web-editing. Pounce also has a version restoration feature, should a user want to revert back to previous versions of a document.

In addition, Pounce works seamlessly across Apple and Android devices, and even on Microsoft phones using Windows 10. This allows users to log in from anywhere on any of their devices at any time, providing access to their work on a moment’s notice. Every researcher, faculty, and staff member will receive an initial 10 GB allotment, but can easily purchase additional space as needed by contacting ITS.

Pounce is fast—quickly connecting and loading documents. This heightened speed and nimbleness can be explained by its on-campus physical location. All files are stored securely and backed-up in our campus data center. This means ITS staff are continually providing support in terms of security, maintenance, user training sessions, and troubleshooting. When an issue arises, users can call people who they know and trust to fix the problem in a timely and friendly fashion.

WSU Spokane users are unique and require an information storage solution that is just as exceptional. Whether travelling or presenting, writing lesson plans or performing genomics research, our researchers, faculty, and staff do it all. Pounce is the perfect solution for our Cougars to “pounce” on.
Campus has New Guest Wireless Process

The WSU Spokane campus guest wireless has been updated. Users will be able to register themselves for a guest account and login using the ‘Campus Visitor’ Wi-Fi. No longer will guests need to be sponsored by a campus department.

Registration and logging in is very easy. After connecting to the Campus Visitor Wi-Fi, guests will be led through the process. Activation is for a 24-hour period and all guest’s devices can use the same log in credentials.

Detailed instructions are posted to the WSU Spokane Information Technology website at https://spokane.wsu.edu/its and can be found in the right-hand column under ‘Resources.’

If you have a large group visiting campus that needs guest wireless access, please contact our Technical Support Center at (509) 358-7748 or spok.it.help@wsu.edu.

Office Communication has Reached a New Milestone with Skype for Business—It’s Become More Convenient and More Collaborative

WSU has replaced MeetingPlace, the Cisco phone bridge tool, with Skype for Business for faculty and staff. Unlike MeetingPlace, Skype for Business does so much more than just phone conferencing. Skype for Business is a web conferencing tool that has a phone bridge feature, in addition to instant messaging. These features make Skype for Business a great solution for ad hoc meetings, meetings with small groups from your own desktop, and quick chats. Meetings can also be recorded and Skype for Business allows non-WSU participants to join a meeting.

Skype for Business is interconnected with Outlook, so importing contacts is a breeze. Users can connect for an ad hoc meeting directly from the Skype for Business app or schedule a future meeting by using the Outlook calendar. Meetings can include audio, video, and/or sharing of PowerPoint presentations, documents, or other content.

Sometimes it can be a struggle to coordinate and set up a meeting in a timely fashion—finding an available room that’s convenient for all attendees, getting it reserved, then checking for adequate technology in the room can be daunting. Skype for Business allows users to attend meetings from their desktops. No longer will they have to scramble to reserve a room or walk across campus to attend a meeting. Meeting planners will also appreciate the ease of getting everyone in the office together virtually. If someone is out of the office that day, they can plug into the meeting from the Skype for Business app on their phone. Since Skype for Business is a Microsoft app, it works across all devices, regardless of operating system.

To users familiar with Skype, the Skype for Business app has been simplified with a user interface crafted with the user in mind. The logical arrangement of menus and controls feels intuitive for users, and allows a large amount of customization for users to make their office system feel more like home.

Technical support is simplified as well. Everyone has attended a meeting (or heard second-hand) when something has gone wrong with the computer, tablet, cell phone, etc. If the attendee can’t find the solution for themselves, they may miss part of the meeting waiting for technical support. But with Skype for Business’s desktop sharing feature, they can show the problem to a technician virtually and get it solved then and there.

WSU continues to use AMS videoconferencing, which is a better solution for large group meetings with participants from other campuses. At this time, Skype for Business and AMS operate independently from one another. But in the future, participants may be able to attend an AMS meeting from their desktop or mobile device via Skype for Business.

To learn more, visit the Innovation Center in SAC 313 on any Friday in October from 10-11 AM to receive a free hour-long training on Skype for Business. Over 90 people have taken advantage of these sessions and have learned special tips and tricks. Or, contact the Technical Support Center to schedule a one-on-one training session at your desktop or to have Skype for Business installed on your computer. Please contact the TSC at 358-7748, visit SAC 309, or email spok.it.help@wsu.edu with any questions or technical issues.

Fall Forum—a Day of Faculty Professional Development

Would you like to learn more about how WSU is using technology to increase access and engagement, reduce student costs, and promote learning?

On November 9th, all day, on all campuses, there will be a videoconference of presentations on topics such as:

- Flipped Classroom Models, presented by Connie Remsberg at 9:00 AM
- Panopto & Voice Threads, presented by Sabine Davis at 10:10 AM
- Using Technology to Engage Students at 1:00 PM

The videoconference location for WSU Spokane is in Nursing 203. Each WSU campus will also hold two open-lab hours at the end of the day to address any specific questions and provide hands-on practice to any interested faculty. The WSU Spokane EdTech staff will host the lab session in Nursing 203. This is a great opportunity for faculty to gain some innovative professional development and learn how to engage students on a deeper level.
What is Flipped Learning?

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed. Also known as Active Learning, this method focuses on pre-recorded mini-lectures in the form of videos, presentations, or readings that are viewed at home prior to class. In-class time is devoted to exercises, collaborative projects, or discussions, as students present their understanding and knowledge about the materials. During in-class sessions, instructors act as coaches or advisors, encouraging students in individual inquiry and collaborative effort. One of the benefits of flipped learning is a better opportunity for faculty to detect and correct errors in thinking.

An effective flip requires careful preparation. The classroom seating configurations are an important aspect of the flipped concept. Rather than a traditional classroom, with a professor lecturing at the front of the room and the students sitting in rows writing notes, a flipped classroom focuses on interaction. With flipped learning, students sit in small circular groups or a large circle where they are engaged in discussions, work on projects, and conduct small presentations to demonstrate a deeper comprehension of the material. Professors lead discussions, answer questions, assist in student projects, and give advice.

To aid this type of setting, classrooms would benefit by having easily moveable furniture, as modeled in the Innovation Center in SAC 313, to allow students and faculty to adjust the room to fit the needs of any lesson, discussion, or project. Everything from meeting in small groups to large presentations would be easily accommodated.

Technology is also central to a more active learning setting. ITS has continued to research new technology and develop plans for new smartboards, improved videoconferencing, laptop HDMI connections, additional display areas, and high definition screens. These will aid students in collaboration, strengthen project research, and enhance presentation on a state-of-the-art level. Faculty will immediately notice more resources available to them to teach the material and students will see more ways to connect their devices and themselves to the lessons.

The ITS Education Technology team is also available to support faculty should they need help with flipped classroom technologies, including lecture capture recordings, instructional design, and other Blackboard questions. Contact the EdTech team through the ITS Technical Support Center at (509) 358-7748 or spok.it.help@wsu.edu.

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Solutions Have Arrived

Business desktop computers are expensive—typically ranging from $1,000 to $1,400, with only a three to five-year lifecycle before becoming obsolete. ITS has a better solution with a variety of benefits—Virtual Desktop Infrastructure, otherwise known as VDI.

VDI does not mean getting rid of desktops completely. With VDI, a user’s desktop resides in the data center rather than in the user’s physical office space. A small device sits behind the monitor and links to the user’s virtual desktop in the data center via the network. It’s essentially like leasing a connection to your desktop. To users, it looks and feels the same as logging into a stand-alone computer, except now users can log in anywhere from any device and have the same desktop settings, look, and feel as would they if they were sitting in their own office. It’s the essential way to make every computer feel like home.

VDI is not only an incredibly green and environmentally friendly option, but it processes data using three major themes: security, resilience, and replication. Data sits on an enterprise solution in the data center—the safest place for data on campus. Immediately upon saving, the data is replicated, so documents will never be lost. Documents will be saved, secured, and replicated.

Users will also find a new degree of quality in supportability. Computer hardware components such as drives, graphic cards, and video cards, are no longer needed. Those components were subject to failure, requiring troubleshooting, repair, and/or replacement. With these components vetted into a virtual desktop, there are fewer opportunities for things to go wrong or fail. If the device fails, it’s simple to replace and no data will be lost.

In the future, VDI will also allow ITS to run virtual applications. This will be especially beneficial to the medical students who will soon be studying on the WSU Spokane campus as well as campus researchers. The greatest benefit of this will be less storage requirements. Users will log onto applications via a URL. The look and feel will be the same as running the application from their own computer, but without having to install it. Virtual applications are part of the virtual desktop environment that ITS has invested in, and will be ready to release by Spring term 2017.

WSU Spokane has 100 VDI units distributed throughout campus in classrooms, library workstations, and the computer lab. Beta testing for individual users will begin November 1, then will be released for general use following that testing. VDI will be a great solution for most users, however, users who rely on high-speed graphics and video cards will want to retain desktop computing systems.

Flipped Learning Statistics

- 71% of flipped learning faculty have seen significant improvements in students’ grades
- 96% of faculty who have tried flipped learning would recommend it to others

Are You Ready to Experience Fewer Dropped Connections and Faster Videoconferencing Solutions?

Our Network Engineering and Audiovisual (AV) Engineering teams have undertaken a complete re-architecture of campus videoconferencing (VC) technology, starting with a network and security overhaul and an effort to upgrade cameras and source switching ports.

The AV team set a goal two years ago to upgrade the remaining 22 analog VC systems out of the 47 on campus. After gathering data on how much every VC system was being used, and collaborating with Student Affairs, they launched a plan to prioritize the classrooms and conference rooms with the most traffic. Fast forwarding to today, that same analog VC technology no longer meets WSU Spokane’s high academic standards.

The future upgrades include Nursing classrooms 005 and 105 and Spokane Academic Center (SAC) classrooms 41, 245, and 249. Most of these will receive new high definition cameras, and all of the rooms will receive source switching to allow HDMI connections for laptops in all rooms. Additionally, SAC 41 will have all VC technology replaced, from the audio mixer and amplification system to connections. The AV team will also be upgrading Nursing conference rooms 119 and 220, which will consist of the aforementioned high definition camera upgrades and source switching.

Other recent campus VC projects include the Spokane Teaching Health Clinic, which has two VC classrooms to better fit the active learning needs of the students in that setting. The first room has a single auto-tracking camera designed for meetings and discussions. An interactive display for hands-on interaction was also installed, which allows the students to learn material in a way that is tailored to the lesson and the students themselves. The second classroom is a traditional 2-camera videoconferencing space with a lectern that can present data from a DVD or computer, or employ a laptop connection.

There have also been some recent changes to desktop conferencing for WSU Spokane faculty and staff. Polycom RealPresence desktop conferencing software has been made available to staff who regularly attend meetings, allowing those employees the flexibility to attend meetings in the midst of travel or from their own office. This capability also frees up conference room space for meetings that only have one attendee from the WSU Spokane campus.

Additionally, MeetingPlace has been replaced with Skype for Business, allowing mobile conferencing to become ubiquitous among staff and faculty. This will be especially helpful in terms of videoconferencing because it will allow more impromptu meetings to be called from staff’s offices. No longer will there be as strong of a need or inconvenience to book conference rooms for small meetings, because conferences can take place in the office with a click of a mouse button.

Along with the efforts from the AV team, the Network Engineering team has been working on making sure our systems match the hardware in the re-architecture effort in videoconferencing and also provide needed network security.

The current VC systems have a fairly large digital surface area, which makes them more susceptible to cyber security attacks. Each network project includes a device that operates as a proxy, which will limit digital surface area. Dan Laughlin, Network Security Engineer, has been especially helpful in the effort to minimize the surface area of campus VC systems, enabling the proxy device to not only limit, but minimize the digital surface area. This prevents people not affiliated with WSU Spokane from logging into a campus VC and vastly improves the overall network security of WSU Spokane.

The Network team is also beta testing a new solution to provide more control over network traffic flows, allowing them to monitor the quality of service every VC receives as a result. Users will no longer see as many drops and disconnects. However, when a problem does arise, an ITS team member will be able to troubleshoot the problem more efficiently and find solutions faster.

Efforts to improve the WSU VC infrastructure is a collaborative effort between all campuses to provide an innovative VC environment and deliver the best possible experience to all participants.