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The SIS-terhood shuffle

The UNESIS implementation project has been around long enough now to have seen a few changes of players in the project team. One change that we're very proud to announce involves our database administrator.

Tim Cross has recently accepted the new ITD position of Data Centre Manager, a role that he will gradually move into over the next few months. His appointment is a result of the amalgamation of ITD's Networks Group, Server Admin Group, and Database Administration Group into a single entity: *the Data Centre*. In his new role, Tim expects to fulfil a combination of leadership and personnel management responsibilities, and to maintain a strong focus on client services. He brings a unique combination of technical knowledge, human resource management skills, and client focus to the role.



Tim Cross



Ross Dobson

Ross Dobson has joined the UNESIS team as Quality Assurance officer, following Simon McMillan's fond farewells to UNE in late August (yes, Simon's was the face peering out from behind a partition in our March newsletter). A senior IT project officer, Ross has most recently been working

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Making it accessible: UNESIS and the WAI

When UNESIS Database Administrator Tim Cross visits a website, he's not impressed by fancy-looking image maps, JavaScript pop-ups, or interactive Flash movies. He does like sites that are clearly structured, images with sensible alt-tags, and links with useful names. That's because Tim is visually impaired, and, like many other staff and students of UNE, he interacts with the World Wide Web via a screen reader – software that works together with a speech synthesizer to read aloud everything contained on a computer screen, including icons, menus, text, punctuation, and control buttons.

In May of this year, Tim highlighted that the latest on-line issue of the 'UNESIS UPdate' was not accessible using his screen reader. His alert allowed us to fix the problem, but it also helped the project team to recognise a bigger issue – that we needed to understand more about accessibility. SIS-ter Rob Hale (whose main UNESIS focus is data migration) started investigating the issue, and prepared a "heads-up" document for the rest of the project team. IT Helpdesk Coordinator Martina Linnemann has since become involved, exploring how to set up practical, hands-on training for the team – and for anyone at UNE who needs to produce accessible documents and web material.

According to UNE's web policy, all content on University web sites should be available to all users, regardless of whether they are viewing the site via a screen or voice reader, text browser, mobile phone, or standard browser. In fact, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, UNE has a legal obligation to ensure that all users have full and independent access to its web content. An initiative is underway to ensure that in future all UNE sites will conform to these standards.

Our policy guidelines are based on the recommendations of the **Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)**, an undertaking of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an independent body responsible for recommending policy and technical standards for the web. If you'd like to know more about the Initiative, take a look at <http://www.w3c.org/WAI>. Keep in mind that the measures suggested are merely recommendations. The most important issue for organisations is to work *within the limits of time and budget* to make the web work for people with disabilities, rather than following the WAI guidelines at all costs.

A related issue for UNESIS is database accessibility, which must rely on our software suppliers. We've flagged the issue with them, and are awaiting advice about how they are enabling accessibility. In the mean time, the project team is working to ensure student access to UNESIS via the web will be compatible with assistive technologies like screen readers, and will cater for people with cognitive disabilities, who may have difficulty with overly complicated language, illustrations, or navigation.

Through intelligent application of web accessibility principles, UNE and UNESIS can not only fulfil our legal obligations, but can also maximise our marketing opportunities and human resources, by ensuring that UNE web services are available to everyone, regardless of disability. ◉

The SIS-terhood shuffle

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on business process improvement projects with BPI Manager, Rick Nelson. (See page 1 of our May UPdate for a BPI primer.) Part of Ross's role in UNESIS will be to monitor the project's progression against plans. Since this project kicks off UNE's use of a new project management methodology, Ross commenced his SIS-terhood in intensive training on PRINCE2 (see page 3 of our July UPdate to learn a bit about it yourself).

Note to hard-copy subscribers of our newsletter: you can print copies of previous newsletters from the project's website. Click on *News* at <http://www.une.edu.au/unesis/>

Steve Campbell is not new to the UNESIS team, but his role in the project has expanded significantly in recent times. He has taken up project management of two key areas that will make up the new SIS: the *Units Database* and the *Distance Education module*. The functions of these two vital components are not offered in any Australian student information system, so will be part of UNESIS that UNE technical staff will build. Steve's role will be to determine system functionality needs, establish how much functionality can be built into the system by the planned September 04 'go live' date, develop a plan for rolling out additional functionality beyond that date, and oversee the development work needed to implement each stage of the roll-out.



Steve Campbell



Max Post

Max Post has been tucked away in the Applications Group area for the past couple of months, mapping current TLC functionality in Banner. The UNESIS office is crowded to overflowing, so Max has no doubt enjoyed the relative quiet to allow him to focus on his role in spec'ing TLC functionality to be provided in

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It's all in the timing

Academic and administrative staff will shortly be asked to confirm a catalog of units and unit combinations produced by the UNESIS Timetabling team in order to produce a clash-free timetable for First Semester 2004. A draft timetable will then be made available for online review, before the final timetable is published mid-October.

In August the Timetabling project team sent mail-outs to each faculty, requesting validation of a list of staff and rooms. Once this and unit data are confirmed, the team will be one step closer to achieving its ultimate goal – a clash-free timetable.

Of course, with about 500 different internal units offered in any given semester, it is impossible to guarantee that every imaginable combination of units will be clash-free, especially given the highly flexible nature of degrees like the Bachelor of Arts. So the concept of clash-free timetabling is really about avoiding conflicting lectures for core units which should be taken together in a normal degree progression, and ensuring that less obvious – but highly popular – unit combinations do not clash. You might be surprised how frequently such clashes have arisen in the past, and how many students have been affected. Under the new system, such inconveniences should be a thing of the past.

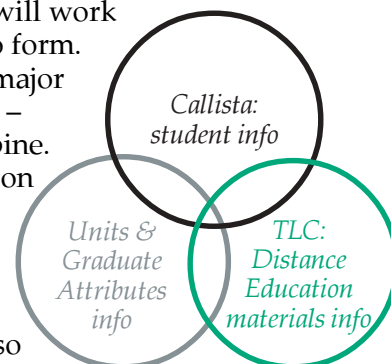
The Timetabling team relies on two sources of information when deciding which combinations to enter into the system. Firstly, they depend on academics and administrative staff to advise them which combinations must be clash-free to allow for normal degree progressions and popular enrolment patterns. Secondly, they have closely analysed timetabling data from First Semester 2003, identifying popular enrolment patterns and flagging possible clashes.

New project member, Steve Gully (see page 3) is currently working with the team to produce the draft timetable, to be made available in mid-September. Keep your eyes open for an email from Timetabling Project Manager, Julie Fookes, later this month, when she will advise the web address you can use to take a look at the draft.

Of course, you can catch up with timetabling info at any time on the UNESIS website. Just go to www.une.edu.au/unesis/timetabling – or click on *Timetabling* while you're exploring the UNESIS site.

Other parts of UNESIS taking shape

With a project manager appointed to oversee the UNESIS development of the Units Database and the TLC component of the system, the view of how they will work together with Callista is starting to form. The project team sees these three major elements overlapping one another – much like the Olympic rings combine. Each system will rely on information stored in the others, and will contribute to building the overall picture of how UNE meets its customers' needs. Combining the various parts of the picture will also ease the task of managing all the info.



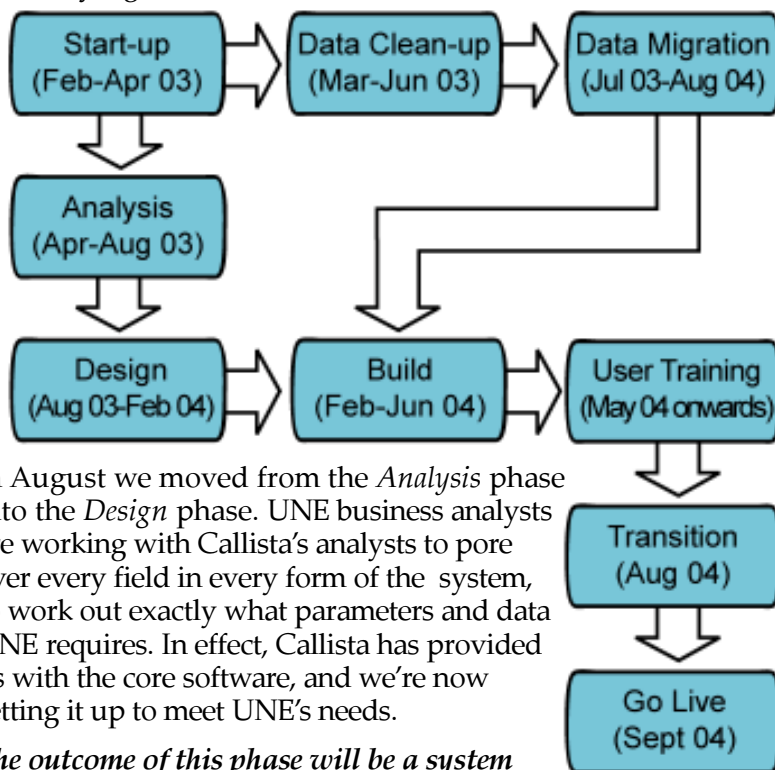
Getting ready for a test drive

Working through such a large and complex system implementation involves breaking the job down into smaller chunks, or phases. We've now worked through two phases that made up the foundation of the whole project – *Start-up* and *Analysis*.

Much of the *Analysis* phase involved reviewing and confirming the findings of the work done during vendor selection last year. Project Director, Peter Edwards took a unique approach to selecting the new Student Information System when he contracted the two short-listed vendors as on-site consultants to participate in last year's SIS Analysis Project. Besides involving system users in the selection process, it saved many months of analysis once the successful vendor, Callista, was chosen.

This approach means the whole process for UNE has been streamlined from the start. Feedback from other universities suggests that we're moving ahead much more efficiently than others have, so dialogue with them has provided good validation of our approach.

Further streamlining has come via Callista's on-site project management. Their senior project manager, Dave Naylor, moved to Armidale to manage the Callista implementation here, with daily interaction with UNESIS project staff. Although Dave is using PRINCE2 methodology to manage the project (see page 3 of our July Update), he highlights that "the heart of what we're doing, regardless of methodology, is the project plan". And according to the plan, the implementation is currently right on schedule:



In August we moved from the *Analysis* phase into the *Design* phase. UNE business analysts are working with Callista's analysts to pore over every field in every form of the system, to work out exactly what parameters and data UNE requires. In effect, Callista has provided us with the core software, and we're now setting it up to meet UNE's needs.

The outcome of this phase will be a system prototype that UNE staff will be able to 'test drive'.

A scale model of the complete system, the prototype won't include all the different data configurations available, but it will provide a working example of each function UNE will receive in the final working version. From there, the project will enter its *Build* phase, when Callista tech staff will build UNE's final production system – what Dave Naylor describes as "getting it ready to drive off the lot".

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UNESIS. Although he'll soon move back into his regular role at TLC, Max will continue to work with Steve Campbell to ensure that TLC will make a smooth transition to UNESIS this time next year.

Max's staff in the TLC Distance Education Unit, by the way, have been absolute champions during his time on the project. They make up one of the best-functioning teams in the University, coordinating learning materials and assignments for external students through an amazing choreography that truly spells out *teamwork*. Your SIS-terhood applaud the DEU staff, and thank you for keeping things working well while Max has focused on UNESIS.

Silvia Danieli has joined the project as a Business Analyst from Finance. With a quality assurance / systems accounting background, Silvia is focusing on procedural issues of how UNESIS and Finance One will work together. Even though UNESIS Business Manager (and our head Business Analyst) Trevor Edgar brings a UNE accounting degree to the team, he's delighted that Silvia is with us to represent Finance in the implementation. Our BA's are 'dancin' as fast as they can' so they're appreciative of all the help they can get. They also make up the heart of our SIS-terhood, so we hope you'll forgive us when we say that Silvia's joining us has made our heart swell! Having joined the team in early August, she'll be with us for 6 to 12 months before she packs up to move back to Finance again.



Silvia Danieli



Steve Gully

Steve Gully has been seconded from Safety and Security to work with the Timetabling project team. If his face looks familiar to you, it might be that you remember him as a student (BA(Hons) in 1995), or you've seen him in the eight years since then on

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the other side of a camera – the one that snapped your UNE ID/access card photo. With the centralisation of student services, ID administration will move into the Lamble building, as part of the Student Administration organisation. Steve's time with the UNESIS project is designed to give him an insight into student admin, to help him back up other areas of student services while maintaining ID/access card administration.

Wendy McKergow & David Sainter are both business analysts from Callista. They've travelled to Armidale several times already to help with UNE's Callista implementation. Besides having led familiarisation training sessions for the UNESIS team, they also participated in the business process ratification workshops, covering various subsystems within the program, like calendars and admissions. (See the *Buzz Rats* article on page 1 of our July newsletter for more about the business process ratification). Most recently, they have been conducting system configuration workshops with the UNESIS Business Analysts. Prior to UNE's implementation, Wendy and David have worked on Callista implementations at a range of other prominent Australian institutions, including Edith Cowan University, the University of Canberra and Deakin University. ☉



Wendy McKergow



David Sainter

Graduate Attributes into UNESIS

For many years, employers have emphasised the importance of generic skills in distinguishing between job applicants. While employers obviously value discipline-specific knowledge, many are more interested in applicants' communication skills, initiative and capacity for teamwork, since these qualities cannot be so easily imparted 'on the job'. To focus attention on the attributes that UNE graduates should demonstrate, in 1998 the University identified **seven key Graduate Attributes**: communication skills, a global perspective, information literacy, life-long learning, problem solving, social responsibility and teamwork.

To date, the Graduate Attributes program has gained wide acceptance within the University. From 1999 to 2001 the Teaching & Learning Centre facilitated several workshops and symposia to promote the Attributes to students and academics, and since 2000, students have been able to enrol in a 'Workready' unit offered at 200 and 300 levels, which emphasises practical application of the attributes in a work-placement setting.

So what does this have to do with UNESIS? Well, an important outcome of the Graduate Attributes Project is the ability to track students' progress against the seven Attributes, and to deliver reports that are of use for planning and quality assurance purposes. Currently, only some of this information is recorded for some units. A more comprehensive tracking and reporting mechanism is therefore an important component of UNESIS.

The UNESIS team is currently collaborating with the UNE-wide Graduate Attributes team to develop a mechanism for tracking students' achievements of each of the Graduate Attributes. After consulting with the Teaching & Learning Centre and the Associate Deans of each faculty to identify academics' needs, the teams considered five different systems for tracking Graduate Attributes, concluding that they would be best accommodated within the new and improved (Oracle-based) Units Database component of UNESIS.

Ultimately, for each unit in the database, a series of fields will record teaching strategies, opportunities for practice, assessment tasks, and learning outcomes related to the achievement of the seven Attributes. An additional, optional field will be included for recording the level of attainment of the Attributes within the context of each unit. Once this information has been recorded, faculty staff will be able to produce reports on Graduate Attributes for whole courses, individual majors, and particular sub-sets of courses. For students, a summary may be available, which they could include with a CV when applying for a job. The UNESIS team is currently determining whether this information may also be made available via the web. ☉

How're we doin'?

Popular New York City mayor, Ed Koch used to walk NYC streets, asking people he would meet, "How'm I doin'?" It was his way of staying in touch, and finding out if he was dealing with the issues that his constituency felt were important.

We're not running for office, but we do want to hear from you – please send us your questions, thoughts or suggestions. You can reach us via email from the 'Contact Us' link on our website at <http://www.une.edu.au/unesis/> or direct at unesis@pobox.une.edu.au.

As always, technology need not be a barrier. If you'd rather phone us, call **extension 3328**. We'll look forward to hearing from you!

~ Your SIS-ers