



# Gearing up for the information age

The setting of PolyU's Information Technology Services Office (ITS) accessible to visitors does not reveal half the story. There are no giant mainframe computers flashing red and green lights, no lab coated engineers walking about with their clipboards, and most certainly no computer wires running all over the place.

But this department, tucked discreetly in core P of the campus, is the pulse of the entire university. Most students may not deal with this department on a day-to-day basis, and according to **Mr Richard Li**, who heads ITS, this is the beauty of his work. Mr Li and his staff are there to ensure that the entire technology infrastructure of the University runs smoothly and efficiently. And as long as there are no problems, he is happy to remain behind the scenes.

"Service is our name," beamed Mr Li, a computer science expert who joined the University five years ago. "We try to bring in the latest in information technology to make the campus more efficient, for students, staff and faculty."

## "Service is our name"

If you have sent an email to a fellow student, checked your grades or accessed PolyU's website, you have been in touch with the wonders of ITS. In the new millennium, technology is rapidly changing our lives and the way we live, study and work. Mr Li's job is to bring the best of what is available in the market to the University.

*Mr Richard Li, Director of Information Technology Services, always seeks new initiatives to enhance the IT culture of the University.*



“There is no doubt that our entire lifestyle is being reshaped by technology, and it is the same with education,” Mr Li said. “Technology has become an ubiquitous part of our lives, even university operations have changed. Technology is leading the way, our needs have become different, and speed matters a lot these days.”

PolyU has always been a leader among local tertiary institutions in its use of information technology. And the internet has enabled dramatic changes to take place. One of its impacts is changing the university’s computer system from a LAN base to becoming internet-based. This revolutionised the university’s communication systems. “Our faculty can ‘be at work’ thousands of miles away, anywhere in the world,” Mr Li enthused. “Teaching staff can send correspondences, issue grades, prepare a PowerPoint lecture anywhere, any time.” According to Mr Li, technology has brought the PolyU community closer than ever before.

Convenience aside, one of the benefits of using this internet system is the cost control factor. “We are trying to achieve a totally paperless campus,” Mr Li said. Right now, memos are circulated through emails, conference materials are distributed through the internet system. All teaching staff has e-filing capability, which eliminates the need for bulky filing cabinets to contain their teaching and research materials. “We save work time as well as money, and it’s catching on fast,” Mr Li added. “Our President, Prof. Poon Chung-kwong, was among the first to support our system. He corresponds mostly by email. Nowadays, it’s not unusual for a meeting to take place with everyone clutching their notebook computers!” Currently, about 90 per cent of PolyU’s staff, faculty and students use emails.



*The four SUN UE 10000 high performance computers set up in PolyU’s central computer centre in ITS ensure smooth operation and high productivity on campus.*

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Li mused that he cannot imagine going back to the “old days”. “Our University is very committed to using technology,” Mr Li said. “Of course, it’s also a game of money, and we are fortunate to have the resources to back us up.” Several times a year, Mr Li and his associates visit computer and technology trade shows to search for new equipment or systems to incorporate into PolyU’s campus. “We look for proven technology that we can use,” Mr Li said. “We identify our own needs and look at market trends in order to find the right products for us.”

Every year, ITS organises a large-scale event entitled IT Showcase to show off the University’s latest e-learning initiatives as well as applications of information technology in various aspects of its services in an on-campus exhibition and a symposium. With interactive and appealing exhibits and lively demonstrations, the 70 plus exhibition booths set up for IT Showcase 2000 attracted over 10,000 visitors, marking a very encouraging rise from the 7,000 visitors of the first IT Showcase in the previous year.



*A subject website of Department of Nursing and Health Sciences, which opens up more learning opportunities for students.*

**David Chiu**, Senior Computing Officer of ITS, agrees with Mr Li that in many ways PolyU is quite advance in IT development for education. "This is especially true with e-learning. We are among the first schools in Hong Kong to introduce e-learning platform and still offers the most subjects," he said. Currently, there are about 2,000 websites for different academic departments where students can click and learn.

The University has adopted WebCT as the common platform for its web-based teaching since a couple of years ago. Yet individual departments will still enjoy the flexibility of using alternative platforms when needs arise.

Mr Chiu oversees many IT projects within the university that result in greater teaching potential. It is of crucial importance to ensure that web-based teaching is used effectively and efficiently in ways that are pedagogically appropriate, and which help students to learn. "We've just created an entirely new IT architecture for the School of Design," he said. "It will provide the School with stronger IT support, such as quicker access to the internet, better facilitation of administrative tasks, and enhance their multimedia teaching tools," Chiu said. "We have meetings with the staff to find out their needs, then develop IT services suitable for them."



*Mr David Chiu is heavily involved in expanding the use of WebCT in e-learning.*

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*Mr Richard Li (2<sup>nd</sup> from left), together with his dedicated team: (from left) Ms Teresa Chan, Dr Fleming Woo, Mr Jimmy Wong and Mr Kent Leung.*

Regardless of their field of study, Mr Richard Li expressed that most PolyU students are very technology-oriented. "Our students are very familiar with computer systems and their usage," Mr Li said. PolyU has been an active promoter of e-learning initiatives, and is among the first few universities in Hong Kong to adopt the WebCT e-learning platform. He sees that PolyU's IT infrastructure, facilities and services are above the average Hong Kong institutions, and not inferior to world class institutions, thanks to the support of senior management and the devotion of ITS colleagues.

"You can't deny that technology is the way of the future," Li said. "We must grasp the best of what it has to offer to better ourselves, this is especially important for students at tertiary level because this knowledge will help their future careers."

It is clear that ITS will continue to maintain a strong IT infrastructure and culture on campus, bringing in appropriate new services and facilities, particularly in the areas of Internet technologies (Internet2), e-business (e-service) and e-learning. All these will help enhance the communication, administration, teaching, learning, and research of the PolyU community. ❖

# 掌握資訊 與時並進

**從**表面看來，香港理工大學的資訊科技處也許不會給訪客留下特別深刻的印象。辦公室內沒有燈掣閃動不停的大型電腦，也沒有穿著實驗室工作袍拿著文件夾的工程師在踱步。不過，這個位於校園P座的部門，可說是維持整間大學脈動正常的重地，部門主管李景行先生和下屬致力使校內整體科技設施運作暢順。「我們的名聲繫於『服務』二字。」李先生笑稱。這個電腦科學專家於五年前加入理大，「我們盡量引進最新的資訊科技，讓學生和教職員無論學習或工作都更具效率。」

曾經收發電子郵件、查核成績或使用理大的網頁的，就已接觸過這個部門的精心傑作。「毫無疑問，科技正主導著我們整個生活方式，這個現象同樣出現在教育的範疇。」李先生繼續說：「科技在我們日常生活中可說無處不在，即使大學運作亦已作出改變。在科技帶領之下，人們的需求變得不同；今時今日，速度尤其重要。」

理大在使用資訊科技方面，較本地其他專上院校為先，而互聯網亦帶來重大改變。其中一項就是校內的電腦系統由以局域網絡轉為以互聯網運作，使通訊系統面貌一新。李先生表示：「老師即使在學校千里之外，都無礙其工作。他們無論在何時何地也可收發通訊、批改習作、用powerpoint準備教材。」他認為科技把校內人與人間的距離拉近了。

互聯網系統除了帶來方便之外，另一個優點就是支出控制。「我校正朝著『完全無紙』的方向努力。」李先生說。目前，內部備忘錄都以電子郵件寄發，研討會資料透過互聯網系統分發。所有教員都有電子檔案的設備，這可減省大型檔案櫃以儲存教材和科研資料。「我們既可省時，又能省錢；而且越來越多人加入這個無紙行列。校長潘宗光教授就是首批支持這個系統的一員，他的短箋、備忘錄主要以電子郵件形式寄發。今時今日在會議上，看見與會者各自攜帶一台手提電腦是毫不為奇的！」現時理大校內大約九成教職員及學生使用電子郵件。

李先生不能想像回到過去電腦尚未普及的日子。「理大對使用科技非常投入。」不過，他也了解到無錢不行的道理，而可幸的是學校在這方面能提供所需資源。李先生跟他的下屬每年數次參加電腦及科技展銷會，把新產品、系統帶進校園。

每年資訊科技處負責統籌一項名為「資訊校園展繽紛」的大型活動，向各界人士展示大學在推動網上學習的多項新猷，及如何將資訊科技活用於各項服務運作。去年展覽會攤位數目超過七十個，吸引了超過一萬人參觀，較之前一年七千名大幅上升。

高級電算主任周英偉先生也認為理大在教育的資訊科技發展在多方面都相當先進。他說：「這情況在網上學習方面足見一斑。我校是香港引入網上學習平台的學校之一，並且涵蓋大部分科目。」現時校內提供不同學系學生進行學習的網址就有大約二千個。理大於兩年前採用WebCT為網上教學的劃一作業系統，然而個別學系仍可視乎需要選擇其他適當系統。

周先生負責透過資訊科技提升校內教學質素的項目，重點是令網上教學更快捷、更有效以及更能配合教學目標，以幫助學生學習。「我們剛為校內的設計學院辦妥了一個全新的資訊科技系統，學系可獲強大的資訊科技支援，例如上網速度加快，處理行政事務更見效率，多媒體教具表現更為理想。」周先生又補充：「通過開會商討，我們得以了解教員的需要，再為他們『度身訂造』相應的服務。」

李景行先生認為，不論修讀哪個學科，大多數理大的學生都很著重科技。「我們的學生對電腦系統及其使用都相當熟悉。」他說。理大一向積極推動網上學習，是本地少數採用WebCT網上學習平台的先驅大學。在他看來，理大資訊科技的設施和服務超於其他大學的平均水準，即使與世界級的學院比較，也毫不遜色，這實有賴大學管理高層鼎力支持以及資訊科技處同事努力不懈，才有此成果。

「誰都不能否認科技就是將來的路向。」李先生表示：「我們必須掌握它最好的一面，協助自我提升；對專上院校的學生來說尤其重要，因為這種知識對他們未來的事業有莫大的裨益。」

展望未來，資訊科技處將繼續維持校園內強大的資訊科技網絡及文化，引入嶄新的服務和設施以作配合，特別在互聯網科技（互聯網二）、電子商業（電子服務）及網上學習方面。凡此種種將有助校內通訊、行政、教學及科研更進一步。

