

Alfred University finds innovative solution to wireless network upgrade

8/18/08

Students arriving at Alfred University this week (first-year students arrive Wednesday, and returning students, Saturday) will find greatly expanded wireless computing access across campus, thanks to an innovative program completed by the Information Technology Services department. "Students want - and expect - wireless access from nearly every point on campus," said Gary Roberts, ITS director. His challenge, and that of his staff, was to find a solution that was affordable, and yet allowed access from nearly every corner of every building on campus. What they did sounds so simple, yet it is so unique a solution it is attracting attention from national IT magazines. "We just used inexpensive over-the-counter wireless access points (AP), 'routers' similar to the ones that people purchase for home use," said Roberts. What they also did, however, was upgrade the "firmware" that runs the devices, using an open-source product. What resulted is a system that is both powerful and cost-effective, says Linda Briggs for [campustechnology.com](http://www.campustechnology.com) (See Linda L Briggs, "Open Source Brings Down Cost of Wireless Rollout," Campus Technology, 8/13/2008, <http://www.campustechnology.com>...) "By replacing the firmware, the university has essentially created access points on steroids, taking consumer-grade APs and beefing them up with free enterprise-level open source firmware," wrote Briggs. "The result: inexpensive 802.11g APs with many of the features and capabilities of a much costlier product. The school's bottom line: Avoiding spending perhaps a quarter of a million dollars on a major wireless upgrade, only to end up with a system that could be obsolete in five years as wireless standards continue to rapidly evolve." Roberts estimates he saved as much as \$90,000 by using the novel solution, rather than a more conventional approach.