

Google Mail and Calendar Exploration Pilot

Committee on Information Technology

October 22, 2010

The Committee on Information Technology wishes to bring to your attention an upcoming pilot to explore whether the university should migrate to Google for Mail and Calendar. Rick Matthews, Associate Provost for Technology and Information Systems, reports receiving an increasing number of requests from faculty and staff to move to Google, particularly after students moved to this platform. For most, the interest is driven primarily by the powerful collaboration tools in the Google Apps suite that are integrated with Google Mail. Google also has a superior web interface, more storage, and allows bigger attachments.

Prompted by this interest and cognizant of the looming need for a costly upgrade of our existing e-mail and calendar infrastructure, in July Rick Matthews asked a small group within our Information Systems to test Google Mail and Calendar to see if Google looked worthy of further study for faculty and staff. So far, testers have been pleased with what they have seen. After discussions with the Committee on Information Technology, the Partners Council, the IT Executive Committee (ITEC), and the Future Technologies Group, Information Systems would like to begin a staged pilot to examine whether Google Mail and Calendar would be reasonable successors to POP and Exchange infrastructure for Wake Forest. The IT Executive Committee approved this next step at their October 21 meeting.

What we plan is a multistage pilot, with check points and opportunities for discussion along the way. The Committee on Information Technology will host forums in the coming months to discuss questions and concerns.

Rough Timeline for Pilot

Phase	Approximate dates	Participants	Support model
1: Pre-pilot. Migration of fewer than 20 staff and faculty.	July - October	12 IS-staff 6 faculty Participants are cautioned that they must rely on web resources for support. Discussions with ITEC, Committee on Information Technology, IT Partners Council, and Deans Council.	No local training. The only ongoing support is online resources and peer support among participants via a listserv.

Go – no go decision for phase 2	October 21.	Discussion with CIT, Partners Council, ITEC. Decision by ITEC.	
2. One large staff department (all IS) plus limited participation from other departments.	November - December	All of Information Systems. Limited additional spots for bold individuals willing to learn along with us. CIT-sponsored forums for community: W 11/17 4-5 pm, F 12/3 noon-1 pm. Pugh Aud.	First draft of local training materials. Rough online tutorials by Phase 1 participants. The only support is online resources and peer support among participants via a listserv.
Go – no go decision 2 for phase 3	Approximately December 20.	Discussion with CIT, Partners Council, ITEC. Decision by ITEC.	
3. The above, plus two administrative offices and an academic department.	January – March.	To the groups above, we will add two administrative offices and at least one academic department willing to move together to the Google pilot. Forums for community.	The service desk will provide support similar to Exchange and POP, though support will be less mature.
Go – no go decision for full deployment	March? April?	Discussion with CIT, Partners Council, ITEC. Decision by ITEC.	
4. Rolling deployment or back migration, based on final decision.	April? - ???	If we get this far, we propose moving each staff department as a group.	Training classes offered to coincide with migration. Ongoing support through online resources (including local) and the service desk.

We are collecting questions that will form the basis of each go-no go decision. Any discovered weaknesses in functionality should be balanced against the new functionality the Google Apps suite offers.

A starting list of questions:

- How secure is the system?
- Does Google mine our data?
- Is the system convenient to use?
- Can one still use Outlook/Thunderbird/iPhone/Android/Blackberry/Windows Mobile?
- Can one view free/busy calendar availability?
- Can one share calendars?
- Can one issue calendar invitations in a manner similar to Outlook/Exchange?
- Can one send broadcast e-mails without using a listserv?
- Is there the capability to work on e-mail and calendar without internet connectivity?
- Can one designate e-mail and calendar proxies?
- Is the uptime commitment and track record sufficient for university needs?
- Do we retain ownership of our data?
- Can we extract our e-mail and calendar data from Google if we decide to terminate our relationship? What is the cost?
- What are the key improvements in functionality?
- OTHER?

During each phase, feedback will be gathered and discussed by CIT, the Partners Council, and the ITEC before deciding whether the pilot should continue to the next phase. A word of caution to all potential pilot participants: we are not yet certain that Google will prove appropriate for Wake Forest. **The pilot may be discontinued at the end of any phase, and participants may need to migrate back to Exchange or POP.**

We look forward to a campus dialogue on the future direction of our most central communications tools.

Useful references:

- Google Apps for Education FAQ:
<https://www.google.com/support/a/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=139019>
- Privacy and security:
<http://www.google.com/support/a/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=60762>
- NCSU Task Force Report: <http://oit.ncsu.edu/news-releases/task-force-recommends-google-apps-nc-state-faculty-and-staff-e-mail>