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### Making IT Innovation Work at Coppin State University

By Ronald Roach  
 Sep 8, 2005, 14:45

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### Making IT Innovation Work at Coppin State University

Maryland HBCU making a name for itself through technical innovation  
 By Ronald Roach



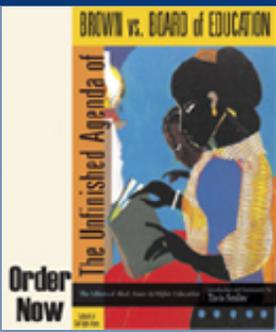
Dr. Ahmed El-Haggan

As a high school student in Trinidad, Ambika Ramsundar could not make much use of information technology tools such as laptops and PDAs in her education. IT products are a heady expense for the small Caribbean nation's education system, and its individual students. Since enrolling at Coppin State University, a small public historically Black institution located in gritty, inner-city west Baltimore, however, Ramsundar has had access to some of the newest IT tools aimed at the higher education market.

Last spring, Ramsundar and dozens of Coppin students tested a device known as the Tegrity digital pen, which allowed her and fellow students to write classroom notes, retrieve the notes electronically over the Internet and then have them synchronized with video and audio recordings of professors' class presentations. Access to the recorded lectures was made possible because campus IT improvements have enabled them to be uploaded to the university's Blackboard course management system. Similar to the WebCT software used at many other schools, Blackboard is the virtual base for the school's online academic programs. Students can replay entire lectures online while reviewing their notes as they were written, or they can select specific notation to replay a corresponding part of the lecture.

"It records the notes as you write them down," says Ramsundar, who used the Tegrity Campus technology in an organic chemistry class. "Organic chemistry is a lot of memory work. I like the fact that you have your professor's lecture online and you can compare your notes to what he or she said in class," she says. "You don't have to be in doubt about anything the professor says."

Nursing professor Denyce Watties-Daniels was among a handful of



Coppin faculty who eagerly volunteered to have students use the Tegrity Campus technology in their courses. Watties-Daniels says the technology is appealing because it works well for the mix of students attending an urban university. Many of Coppin's 4,000 students attend part-time and juggle family and job responsibilities.

"Students have access to my lectures on a 24-hour-a-day basis. This especially helps those who missed class for unexpected reasons and [who] study at odd hours," Watties-Daniels says.

Obtaining and utilizing Tegrity and other IT tools has been the crowning achievement among a range of IT improvements implemented under Dr. Ahmed El-Haggan, Coppin's vice-president for IT and chief information officer. The improvements have impressed the higher education IT community so much that the school recently became the first HBCU and Maryland-based institution to receive the award for Excellence in Networking: Innovation in Network Technology, Services and Management from EDUCAUSE, higher education's leading IT professional association in the United States.

According to the EDUCAUSE award selection committee, the "transformation at Coppin State has been informed by clear awareness of the institution's mission and the unique needs of its urban clientele. In addition to providing a state-of-the-art 24/7 IT infrastructure, the university has boosted student enrollment, energized faculty and enabled expansion of important community activities. It has empowered students and their families by making them active participants in the Net Generation."

Coppin and other winners of the 2005 EDUCAUSE awards will be honored in October before more than 6,000 higher education IT professionals at the association's annual conference in Orlando, Fla. Coppin leaders have praised the school's IT department for its strategic deployment of technologies, such as the Tegrity Campus products and the construction of smart classrooms. "It is encouraging to the Coppin family — especially the leaders of our information technology efforts — to know that our vision for meshing innovative technology and our unique mission is worthy of national recognition," says Dr. Stanley F. Battle, president of the university.

"Tegrity has been a new project for us. We've only been working with the technology for the past year," adds Dr. Sadie Gregory, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

In 2002, Coppin launched a new strategic program, anchoring IT innovation to energize the school's academic mission, say officials. Campus IT improvements include installing new cable plant infrastructure for academic buildings, the library and the student union; establishing Voice over IP (VoIP) enabled phones; having off-site buildings wirelessly connected to the main campus; and building 40 smart classrooms.

By 2003, Coppin's Web site for campus users of wireless technology drew attention from EDUCAUSE officials. The Web site <[www.coppin.edu/mobile](http://www.coppin.edu/mobile)> allows users of wireless devices such as PDAs and cell phone Web browsers to access a user-friendly site developed for that specific medium.

El-Haggan says Coppin State is prepared to move ahead with deployment of the Tegrity Campus technology for the entire school this academic year. Currently, the school is planning to equip all of its

classrooms across campus with microphones and cameras to make the note-taking solution accessible to all students and faculty. At \$89 each, the Tegrity digital pen is considered to be affordable for Coppin students, many of whom receive financial aid.

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