Introducing Altiris: A New IT Asset Management System for University-Owned Computers

In 2004, the University adopted its Information Technology Strategic Plan (http://www.muohio.edu/itplan). Two of the goals of this plan committed us to:

- Providing faculty, staff, and students with the support they need, and
- Planning and managing information technology as a strategic asset.

Accordingly, Miami recently acquired a university-wide site license for a hardware and software asset management system called Altiris Total Management Suite. This system will eventually allow the university to:

- Improve the quality and simplicity of support for desktop computers, by requiring less "hands on" effort to deploy, support and decommission computers, servers, personal devices and software products,
- Better plan the purchase of new computers and "retiring" of older computers, by maintaining an inventory of computers and software and allowing data-driven decisions,
- Be more cost effective in purchasing hardware and software, thereby producing savings for departments,
- Reach better informed decisions about needed software site licenses, resulting in cost savings for the university as a whole.

Altiris Total Management Suite Implementation Approach

A project titled "Life Cycle Management of Computers" has been initiated to put the Altiris infrastructure in place at Miami and roll out the product to university-owned computers and servers. The roll-out will occur through close coordination with Deans/Directors/Heads of Offices and local technology support staff. Implementation schedules and a more comprehensive outline of the functionality of this system will be distributed by the project team as work proceeds.

John Reid Christenberry
Vice President for Information Technology

Update from the Life Cycle Management Project Team, November 2005

The Altiris agent is a small software application that will be installed on university-owned computers and servers. Initially it will be used to perform the following functions on desktop/laptop computers:

- gather an inventory of the computers attached to Miami's network and the software installed on those computers
- distribute operating system and software patches (for example, Microsoft Windows updates)
- provide "push-button" installation of operating system and other software to assist technology support representatives with managing lab computers, setting up newly acquired faculty/staff computers, and distributing new software applications.

Additional capabilities will be reviewed and deployed over time in close coordination with Deans/Directors/Heads of Offices and local technology support staff.
Introducing Altiris (continued)

Current Project Status

October was a month of intensive learning for the Life Cycle Management project team. During that month, the team worked closely with Dell Professional Services consultants to establish the core Altiris infrastructure and deploy the Altiris agent on a pilot collection of computers. The pilot computers include all IT Services staff computers, select lab computers in other departments/divisions, and computers in classrooms managed by IT Services Classroom Services.

The Information Security Office has been heavily engaged in the work performed to date and will continue to be actively involved throughout the entire Life Cycle Management project to ensure that every aspect of the Altiris deployment undergoes a thorough security audit before being placed into "production status”.

Outline of Next Steps

As this article is written, the Altiris deployment team is just returning from a week-long intensive training session provided by the vendor. With the knowledge gained from this training, the project team is turning its attention to evaluating the information gained from the pilot and will be creating a proposed roll-out approach to share with the university community.

A Note About Communication

Effective communication is key to the success of this (and every) project. Because the Altiris agent will reside on every computer, the project team wants to hear every question and concern. Regular project updates will be published in the university IT newsletter, Miami TechTalk, and the Miami Report. A project web site is under development; an announcement will be posted on myMiami as soon as the web site is available. In addition to a high-level project overview, project updates, and basic project documentation (like the project scope document, team organization chart, and timeline), the web site will also include “Q&A” and “Issues” sections with forms for submitting those items. Should you have questions or concerns before the web site becomes available, please forward them to the IT Services Support Desk at supportdesk@muohio.edu.
MU Wireless Enhancements Continue

MU Wireless, the wireless service offered on all Miami campuses, continues to improve as the technology matures and IT Services learns better methods to support this new technology. Following are recent developments in the MU Wireless arena.

- **New method for secure access to checking e-mail**

  In early October, MU Wireless Lite was enhanced to offer secure access to e-mail, FTP, and SSH. Before this change, you were required to use the Cisco VPN client to check e-mail with an e-mail program like Outlook, Eudora, or Mail.App. Some devices, like PDAs, have no VPN client available and therefore could not check e-mail. Now, a secure method of checking e-mail without the hassle of logging into the Cisco VPN client is available. For instructions, read the Miami Knowledge Base article #90039, “Configuring your e-mail application to use a secure socket layer (SSL)”.

  Unfortunately, Miami does not yet offer a secure method of sending mail. So, to be able to both send and receive e-mail, you must still use the Cisco VPN client. A secure method of sending e-mail is under development and will be available in the coming months.

- **Resolution of wireless service issues identified by wireless users**

  Wireless service also improved through the identification and correction of several problem areas, including addressing a problem for people roaming from one wireless access point to another in the same building. Specifically, engineers identified multiple configuration issues that were causing wireless problems in King Library and, potentially, in other buildings on campus. These configuration issues are now resolved.

  **If you experience locations with poor or no signal strength, a highly fluctuating signal, or frequent disconnects**, please contact the IT Services Support Desk so that someone can investigate the problem. While every effort has been made to engineer the wireless service to provide 100% coverage of every building and some outdoor locations, the nature of radio signals requires constant management and your input is a vital part of that process.

- **Residence hall wireless satisfaction survey underway**

  The MU Wireless team is actively engaged in surveying the residence halls in search of problem areas and overall satisfaction with wireless. This process is expected to take several months to complete. In the end, collaboration among the engineers and the wireless user community will result in a continually improving service for all to enjoy.

  If you have questions about MU Wireless, please contact the IT Support Desk at (513) 529-7900 or supportdesk@muohio.edu or visit the Knowledge Base, http://kb.muohio.edu/.
New E-mail Server Process Verifies Miami E-mail Addresses Before Sending Messages

You may notice a slight change in e-mail behavior due to a new process implemented in Miami’s e-mail environment on Nov. 14. When you send an e-mail that includes one or more individuals with an "@muohio.edu" address in the TO:, CC: or BCC: lines, the address(es) will be checked against Miami’s user directory to ensure that the e-mail address is valid. If a recipient with an @muohio.edu address does not exist in Miami’s user directory, the mail server will respond with a "550 5.0.0...user unknown" error. Most e-mail applications will not send the e-mail until the invalid recipient name has either been fixed or removed.

Note: The e-mail validation process only applies to messages sent using mailfwd.muohio.edu as the Outgoing E-mail Server, and myMiami e-mail. Only e-mail addresses ending with "@muohio.edu" will be validated; e-mail addresses for Miami division-specific e-mail systems (ie. "@lib.muohio.edu" or "@gw.cas.muohio.edu") will not be validated. The e-mail validation process will not change the behavior of listserv.muohio.edu.

The purpose of this new e-mail address validation process is to:

- reduce the instances where individuals receive “undeliverable mail” messages for invalid e-mail addresses for e-mails they didn't really send (as happens when viruses send out messages with spoofed "FROM" addresses to invalid Miami e-mail addresses).
- remove the overhead of accepting mail for non-existent recipients and then having to send a “undeliverable mail” message to the sender, thus improving the performance of our e-mail server.

On Nov. 14, the first day the e-mail address validation process was in place, more than 75,000 e-mails were rejected as "user unknown". The vast majority of these messages were virus-infected or spam.

Please contact the IT Services Support Desk by e-mail at supportdesk@muohio.edu or by phone at (513) 529-7900 if you have any questions about this new e-mail process.

Are You Broadcasting Your MUnet Password?

If you use a desktop e-mail application (like Eudora, Outlook, Outlook Express, Mac OS X Mail, etc.) or PDA device (like a Palm, Treo, Blackberry, etc.) to check e-mail and haven’t adjusted it to use SSL, you could be broadcasting your MUnet password!

Because of the importance of protecting your MUnet password, beginning February 1, 2006, Miami’s incoming e-mail server (po.muohio.edu) will begin denying connections from desktop e-mail applications that have not been configured to use SSL. Please adjust your e-mail settings now to ensure that your ability to check e-mail is not disrupted.

To use SSL, you must adjust the settings in your desktop e-mail application and/or other devices. This is for machines used both on- and off-campus. Detailed instructions on configuring Eudora and Outlook to use SSL can be found in the Knowledge Base just search on "SSL".

If you have any questions, please contact the IT Services Support Desk via phone at (513) 529-7900 or via e-mail at supportdesk@muohio.edu.

Note: No action is required if you only check e-mail via myMiami, since myMiami uses a secure connection to transmit the MUnet password.
UNIXGen Upgrade Planned for December 29 - 31

UNIXGen, Miami’s general purpose instructional and research computing platform for students, faculty and staff, will be moved to new, more powerful hardware over winter break. The upgrade is scheduled to occur from December 29 at 7:00 pm to December 31 at 8:00 am. UNIXGen will be unavailable during this time.

IT Services anticipates having the new UNIXGen hardware ready for testing on December 12.

If you would like to have access to the test environment, or if you have questions about the upgrade, please contact the IT Services Support Desk at 513-529-7900 or supportdesk@muohio.edu

New Student Computing Initiatives

One of the strategic goals in the Miami IT Strategic Plan adopted in 2004 is to "Empower Learning and Research". To this end, Miami is exploring a number of new student computing initiatives to better support student learning, namely a student technology fee (which would be used to fund additional student computing initiatives) and a student laptop program. Following are updates on these initiatives.

Proposed Student Technology Fee:

Reid Christenberry, Vice President for Information Technology, will be presenting a proposal for a student technology fee for approval at the Board of Trustees’ meeting in February. Open forums discussing this topic have been held on the Hamilton, Middletown, and Oxford campuses, and feedback has been and will be incorporated into the proposal going forward to the Board.

Student Laptop Offering:

There will be a voluntary Miami University student laptop offering for next school year (August 2006). Many universities have laptop programs in place; however, Miami is tailoring its offering to be unique in two main ways:

- first and foremost, we want great service and support to be available to the participants and,
- secondly, we want to consider and accommodate the lifestyle aspects of student computing in conjunction with the academic computing needs.

Details of this offering are still being finalized; however, information will be communicated as it becomes available. There will be offerings from Dell and Apple to meet the academic and personal computing needs of Miami students. Please send comments or questions about either of these initiatives to itplanning@muohio.edu

A note to those currently using UNIXGen

All the applications, accounts, and data on the current UNIXGen server will be moved to the new server. Except for faster processing speeds, UNIXGen will appear virtually unchanged with one critical exception - the new UNIXGen server will not accept telnet or FTP connections, it will only accept secure connections (SFTP, SCP, SSH). Information about creating a secure connection will be available in the Miami Knowledge Base before the upgrade occurs.
New Senior Director of Computing & Communication Services

IT Services is pleased to announce that, effective January 1, 2006, Mr. Timothy Pierson will be assuming the position of Senior Director of Computing and Communications Services. He joins IT Services from The Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he has been serving as Assistant Director of Information Technology. He has led re-engineering efforts of the IT department while building a team of professionals supporting infrastructure security, systems administration, network operations, database operations, warehouse design and development, web and business systems development, and desktop call center support.

Tim has 30 years experience in information technology, including positions with the U.S. Army, Control Data Corporation, Grumman Systems Support Corporation, and Seacoast Laboratory Data Systems. He holds an Associate's Degree in Digital Electronics and a Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Studies from Southern New Hampshire University. He is currently working on a master's degree. He also holds several professional certifications, including CISSP, MCSE, MCSA and CCNA (Cisco Certified Network Associate).

New Director of IT Customer Relations and Communications

Cathy McVey has been appointed Director of IT Customer Relations and Communications. Currently holding the position of Senior Manager, IT Communications, Cathy brings to her new position experience in graphic design/development, arts administration, college-level teaching, audience analysis, marketing and personnel management.

As Director, Cathy will be handling customer advocacy duties, marketing of IT Services and communication initiatives for the division. She will also continue to oversee the management of IT Communications, which includes web and graphics design, photography, videography, media consultation and print services. Cathy assumed her new duties on November 14, taking over for John Vaughn, who is retiring from the university on December 31.

New Assistant Director for Campus Partnerships

Support Services and Campus Partnerships (SSCP) is pleased to announce that the position of Assistant Director for Campus Partnerships has been filled by Micah Cooper, effective November 28th. Micah brings with him a unique blend of business acumen and technical expertise, all of which will add to the ability of SSCP to support IT on campus.

Micah's prior position was with the school of Engineering and Applied Sciences at Miami University where he was Director of IT. Micah will complete his MBA in December 2005, and IT Services and Miami University will most assuredly benefit from his knowledge, skill, and strong customer support ethic.

Upgrade to Banner 7 scheduled for May 2006

A project is underway to upgrade Miami's SCT Banner system to Banner 7 in May 2006. The Banner 7 upgrade utilizes web page technology for ease of navigation with a more up-to-date look and feel. With the Banner 7 upgrade, BannerWeb will also have a new, more colorful appearance.

Because of the anticipated changes to Banner, IT Services is encouraging all native Banner clients to log in to the Banner 7 test environment and view the changes. If you are a faculty or staff member who uses native Banner, go to http://www.muohio.edu/banner, click the "Sneak Preview: Banner 7 test instance now available!" link, and follow the instructions to log in. At this time, the Banner 7 test environment is only available from computers on campus.

While you are checking out Banner 7, why not go to the SCT Banner 7 Fundamentals CBT and use the computer-based tutorial to learn more about Banner's new bells, whistles, buttons and tabs? Instructor-led Banner 7 training sessions will be offered in the spring.
Annual Renewal of the IT Strategic Plan Continues...

Lively discussions about the current state of technology at Miami took place in open forums held with faculty, staff, and students during October. Participants also shared their views on future technologies and potential new technology programs, such as a voluntary laptop program and a technology fee.

The open forums were conducted as part of the annual renewal of the IT Strategic Plan (ITSP). An online survey was also made available to Miami faculty, staff, and students. Four hundred and thirty-one participants, including students, faculty and staff from all four Miami campuses, responded to the survey.

Preliminary survey highlights:

- almost 66% of the students surveyed said they owned a laptop computer
- over 53% of the students surveyed said they use the campus computer labs at least once a week
- almost 85% of students surveyed gave a Good or Excellent rating when asked about the ease with which they can access technology resources on campus
- over 90% of all respondents rated their computer literacy either Good or Excellent

Once all the survey results are compiled, they will be available online at [www.muohio.edu/itsurveyfall2005](http://www.muohio.edu/itsurveyfall2005).

In addition to the open forums and online survey, an external environmental analysis will also be completed. This analysis will be based on research from various sources including EDUCAUSE and The Campus Computing Project.

The feedback gathered from the forums and the online survey, as well as the results of the external environmental analysis, will be used to refresh the ITSP and to ensure the plan supports the overall University vision and mission.

IT Services would like to thank everyone who participated in the open forums and online survey. Your input is greatly appreciated. For more information about Miami's ITSP, please visit [www.muohio/itplan](http://www.muohio/itplan).

**Winners of the Survey Prize Drawing:** The winners of the three $50 gift certificates were students Michelle Cheek and Krystal Dill from the Oxford campus and faculty member Dr. Richard Munson from the Hamilton campus.
Security Q&A on MU Wireless and MUnet Password Changes

Why can’t I . . .? Why do I have to . . .? Sometimes the reason why a specific network rule is in place, and the fact that security concerns are behind it, is not readily obvious. Below, IT Services presents answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the new MU Wireless service and MUnet password changes.

**MU Wireless**

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<th>Q.</th>
<th>Why can’t I play games or send e-mail on wireless?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>With a little bit of extra set-up, you can play games or send e-mail on MU Wireless. You just need to install and use the VPN client that Miami provides. Because wireless transmits data using radio signals, it presents security risks that are not a concern with traditional, wired networks. Malicious eavesdroppers can easily capture communications as they pass through the air without anyone noticing. Using VPN encrypts the data sent over the airwaves, so even if your communications are intercepted, they cannot be read.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>But I can browse the web and use IM on wireless without VPN...</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Reputable web sites use encryption any time they collect sensitive information like passwords, personal information, and credit card numbers. So while hackers can tell which web sites you are going to, they cannot obtain the information you enter online as long as the web site you are visiting uses encryption. IT Services urges you to be cautious whenever you provide information over the web and make sure you are dealing with reputable web sites. Instant Messaging is another story. Messages sent via IM are sent in easily read plain-text across the airwaves if VPN is not used. During the testing of wireless last year, many, many users encouraged us to allow it despite that fact. We listened to that feedback, and allowed IM without VPN. However, we caution you to remember that people may be listening in on your conversations.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>How can I use VPN to keep my data private as it travels the airwaves?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>You can get started by downloading the VPN client from <a href="https://software.muohio.edu">https://software.muohio.edu</a>, installing it, and logging in with your Miami UniqueID and MUnet Password. This software will make an eavesdropping-proof tunnel from your computer straight to our locked-down machine room. With VPN, you will be allowed to do anything you can do with a wired connection, including playing online games and sending e-mail. Please keep in mind that VPN protects your traffic only while it travels the airwaves; once it goes out to the Internet, it is sent without encryption, just as it would be if you were using a wired connection.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>I just had to change my MUnet password again. Why do I have to change it so frequently?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Passwords must be changed every 180 days. Miami’s auditor requires this schedule, as it is a best practice to keep your accounts more secure. Remember, your MUnet password protects access to your confidential information and allows you to do things like add and drop classes, and even change options to your financial aid package.</td>
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Technology Tips From Students For Students
aka “If only I’d known then . . .”

With the time for finals and end of semester projects fast approaching, the last thing you want is an unexpected computer glitch to threaten your work. Below are a few more tips from students who’ve learned the hard way what to do and what not to do to protect their computers and their work!

FYI - The first two tips were in the Sept. ‘05 issue of TechTalk. If you missed them, make sure to check out the article at http://www.muohio.edu/techtalk/Articles/0905/Iwish.shtml. Students say these two tips alone can save you a lot of pain!

Tip: Use your Universal Disk Space (aka "UDS", "M drive", "netDisk")

Miami provides 100MB of personal storage space on centrally-maintained network file servers. Students say use it!

"There is nothing more secure and safe [than UDS] when guarding against losing a paper."  
B.B., Senior, Zoology

"netDisk!! Store important files, send your papers, transfer Mp3's, etc. Very Helpful."  
J.L., Sophomore, Zoology

"Take advantage of your M: drive, you can do more than dump files on it - it’s webspace and much more."  
S.S., Senior, Interdisciplinary Studies

There are lots of ways to connect to your Universal Disk Space; the netDisk tool in myMiami is just one. Check the Universal Disk Space information in the Knowledge Base to learn more about how to use your UDS.

Tip: Fight Back Against Spyware!

Spyware is really nasty stuff that can slow your computer to a crawl. According to TechWeb.com, spyware is "software that sends information about your Web surfing habits to its Web site. Often quickly installed in your computer in combination with a free download you selected from the Web, spyware is occasionally installed just by visiting a Web site."

"Be careful when downloading music. If you download whatever pops up, you’re going to get hundreds of spyware that slows your computer down. Ad-Aware is a lifesaver; run it regularly. Be careful, if you treat your computer like crap, it’s more likely to crash."  
B.S., Junior, Computer Engineering

"Be careful what sites you visit, Spyware is everywhere and will kill your computer."  
B.B., Senior, Zoology

To protect your computer from spyware:

• Do not use Internet Explorer as your primary web browser. Other browsers, such as Mozilla Firefox or Safari, offer security features that help prevent the installation of spyware.

• Only download files from trusted sources.

• Install and regularly run a spyware removal tool (like Ad-Aware, Spybot, etc.)

If your efforts fail and you believe your computer has been compromised by spyware, contact the IT Services Support Desk at 513-529-7900 for a phone consultation. The Support Desk may recommend that you make an appointment to bring your computer in to the Remediation & Repair Center. The center provides free virus/spyware removal services on an appointment-only basis.

Check out the next issue of TechTalk for more tips!

Have some advice you’d like to share? Please send it to techtalk@muohio.edu
Customizing myMiami to Make it Yours

You probably keep your winter coat pretty close to your door once cold weather hits so you can grab it on your way out. Why not take a few minutes to make sure the things you use in myMiami are right where you want them?

One of the benefits of the new myMiami, powered by the Blackboard community system, is the ability to customize it to provide ready access to the items you use most frequently. Last issue, we talked about customizing the “My Favorite Links” module; this issue, we’ll present how you can customize the “My Tab” page to contain the myMiami modules of greatest interest to you. (And change the color scheme too!)

Overview of My Tab

The My Tab page appears once you log into myMiami. It will be the first page you see.

Each box on the My Tab page is referred to as a content module.

You can customize the My Tab page by:

- Adding and removing content modules
- Minimizing and expanding modules
- Changing the placement of the content modules
- Choosing a different color theme

Removing a Module

To remove a module, click the button in the upper-right corner of the module. If a module does not have this button, for instance the My Announcements module, it cannot be removed.

“The customization option on the My Tab section of myMiami allows me to very quickly and efficiently organize and find information that is most relevant to me.” -- Sabrina M. Neeley, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Marketing
Customizing myMiami to Make it Yours (continued)

Adding a Module
1. Click the Contents button in the top right corner of the page to view the list of available content modules. This will display the “My Tab Content” screen which lists all the content modules available.
2. To add a module, click in the checkbox next to a title.
   
   Note: If a green checkmark already exists, that module is already on your My Tab. If a box contains a red checkmark, that module cannot be removed from My Tab.
3. Once you have selected all of the modules you would like to add, scroll to the bottom of the screen and click the Submit button. A confirmation screen will display.
4. Click the OK button and the My Tab page will display showing your changes.

Minimizing and Expanding Modules
Modules can be minimized by clicking the , or expanded by clicking the button.

Changing the Placement of Modules
1. Click the Layout button on the top right corner of the page. The "My Tab Layout" page displays.
2. In the “Personalize Page Layout” section, click on a module title and use the arrow buttons to move modules up and down within a column, or move them between columns.
3. When you are finished, scroll to the bottom of the page and click the Submit button. Then, click the OK button on the confirmation screen to view your changes.

Changing the Color Theme
1. Click the Layout button in the top right corner of the screen. The “My Tab Layout” screen displays.
2. Scroll down to the “Personalize Theme” section.
3. Review the pre-defined color themes and choose one by clicking the radio button next to the title.
4. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the Submit button. Then click OK on the confirmation screen. You will see your My Tab page displaying the new colors.

“Customizing My Tab” Demo
For a demonstration of how to customize My Tab, click the How to Customize My Tab link in the myMiami Tutorials module.
Web-based Training Open Sessions to Continue through June, 2006

IT Services will continue to offer Open Sessions for Miami’s web-based training options through June, 2006.

These sessions allow faculty, staff and students the opportunity to get basic training on using the two web-based training tools available at Miami. The sessions also give members of the university a place to complete web-based training courses, using either Macintosh or Windows machines.

Through SkillPort, Miami faculty, staff and students have access to 300 self-paced, web-based training courses on computer applications, advanced technical topics, and business skills. Currently, SkillPort is only accessible from a Windows computer. Miami also offers VTC web-based training courses for faculty, staff and students. VTC courses focus primarily on computer applications and operating systems and can be accessed from both Windows and Macintosh computers. VTC and SkillPort can both be accessed through Miami’s training page – go to myMiami.muohio.edu and click “Training” from the Web Page Index.

Open sessions are currently scheduled twice a month through June 2006 in 362 Gaskill. To register for a session, or to see the complete list of dates and times, view the SkillPort/VTC Open Session listing by first accessing the TRAIN registration system at http://www.muohio.edu/train. Select “Learning Opportunities”, click “View Topics” and then select “SkillPort/VTC Open Sessions Web-Based Training”. Click on “SkillPort or VTC Open Sessions” to expand the list.

Need to Learn a Software Application? Web-based Training May Be For You

Here is the scenario: You have a final project due in a few weeks that involves a class presentation. You want to use Microsoft PowerPoint, but don’t have a clue how to use it. What do you do?

Miami provides a great way for students to learn a variety of software products free of charge, from the comfort of your own computer. It is called web-based training, and Miami uses two different products to deliver this training: SkillPort and VTC.

Through SkillPort, Miami students, faculty and staff have access to 300 self-paced training courses on computer applications, advanced technical topics, and business skills. Please note that SkillPort can only be accessed from a Windows computer.

Miami also offers VTC web-based training courses for students, faculty and staff. VTC courses focus primarily on computer applications and operating systems and can be accessed from both Windows and Macintosh computers. VTC and SkillPort can both be accessed through Miami’s training page – go to myMiami.muohio.edu and click “Training” from the Web Page Index.

Now that you are aware of where you can get web-based training at Miami, hopefully you’ll use it to learn more about different computer applications.