

PREPARED.

FOCUSED.

RESILIENT.

2020 Annual Report



Division of
Information Technology

PREPARED. FOCUSED. RESILIENT.

Texas A&M University and the Division of Information Technology faced unique challenges as 2020 made history.

Through innovation, determination and a fighting spirit, the health, safety and technology of the campus were protected and secured.

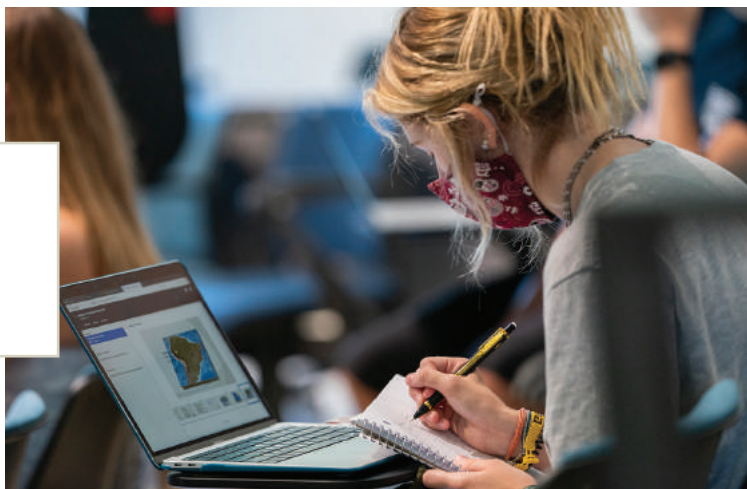
FROM THE CIO

If asked for three words to describe 2020, unprecedented, challenging and uncertain would be at the top of many of our lists. However, the response of Texas A&M University and the Division of Information Technology brings to mind very different descriptors - *prepared, focused and resilient*. Aggies consistently embody these words at the best of times, but during the uncertain and challenging season of an unprecedented pandemic - the effort, ingenuity and determination of the entire A&M community added a new depth to these qualities.

The Division of IT strives to be *prepared* for the unexpected. The university was well positioned for the quick move to virtual learning as we already utilized cloud storage, implemented Zoom, and had a Microsoft 365 contract in place. As the campus moved online, cyber criminals upped their game and changed tactics, focusing more on exploiting passwords and accounts than infecting devices. Our robust cybersecurity program uses a holistic approach combining state-of-the-art software and monitoring tools with security experts, enabling us to quickly adjust and protect campus.

The pandemic created laser *focus* for the entire university as we worked together to tackle COVID-19 in a myriad of ways. In early 2020, the Division of IT launched the Secure Technologies for Aggie Researchers (STAR) initiative, and then used the platform to create a cutting-edge COVID dashboard and reporting tool. The dashboard was essential in giving university leadership real-time data that allowed students and employees to return to campus safely.

“ Higher Education saw more innovation in 12 months than the past several years.”



When Texas A&M announced the return of in-person classes for the fall, the Division of IT worked with university leaders to find and outfit many non-traditional spaces for learning - ensuring adequate social distancing. We *focused* around the clock to install Wi-Fi in meeting rooms, theaters, arenas and parking lots across campus to enable the university to safely continue its mission.

A commitment to *resilience* was displayed by the entire division. When the lockdown began, demands for tech support soared. Help Desk Central quickly converted its in-person call center to a virtual one and then helped train faculty to use Zoom and move classes online. Employees not typically handling support began answering phone calls and providing technical assistance. The Division also instituted monthly “CIO Coffee and Conversation” sessions, allowing all of us to stay connected and informed about key projects and priorities.

When the challenging climate extended outside the pressing health concerns of COVID-19, once again, the division turned a challenge into an opportunity to have important conversations about diversity and inclusion, as well as launching a series of virtual book clubs to help employees stay connected while discussing these incredibly important and timely topics.

Higher Education saw more innovation in 12 months than the past several years. This innovation would not be possible without the incredible team of professionals I am privileged to lead. I have no doubt we will use the lessons learned during this pandemic to emerge stronger and more innovative than ever.



M. Dee Childs

Vice President for Information Technology
& Chief Information Officer

PREPARED

CYBER SECURITY INTEGRATION (CSI) KEEPS TEXAS A&M SAFE DURING PANDEMIC

When the pandemic began, network attacks against Texas A&M University initially plummeted. But, as the crisis continued, attacks increased to almost 10 times pre-lockdown levels as attackers anticipated servers and devices would be difficult to patch and update remotely. Fortunately, the Cyber Security Integration (CSI) tool, a custom tool developed by the Division of IT, made the heightened threat level manageable.

The success of the application was highlighted in a 2020 Educause presentation, “Cyber Security Integration: Automating Toward End-User-Driven Security,” led by security team members Kristen Kubenka and Gil Munoz.

The CSI interface automates security screening processes and allows existing tools to work together. The tool greatly exceeded expectations and now puts security information “at the fingertips” of IT professionals across campus.

CSI helped the security team close 97 percent of campus vulnerabilities by January 2020 - before the pandemic began. After initially plummeting, the risks increased dramatically and CSI identified the most vulnerable systems so concerns could be quickly addressed and alleviated.

Munoz helped develop the tool and shares how it helps information flow effectively between security systems.

“As a result (of CSI) we have seen a major improvement in our security and risk posture across campus.”

Gil Munoz, Security Analyst

“As we developed CSI, it went from being a small web application to a collection of applications and utilities with a powerful library that talks to the systems that have all the information regarding the security of our network,” he explains.

IT admins can log into the web application to generate scans, review results, request firewall openings and closures, and see possible vulnerabilities. The security team also uses CSI to generate a list of systems with critical vulnerabilities so system administrators can be contacted.

“CSI has set up clear lines of communication between our security systems,” says Munoz. “We turn this data into actionable information and make it available to system administrators to act on. As a result we have seen a major improvement in our security and risk posture across campus.”

PLATFORMS OFFER INNOVATION, CLOUD RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

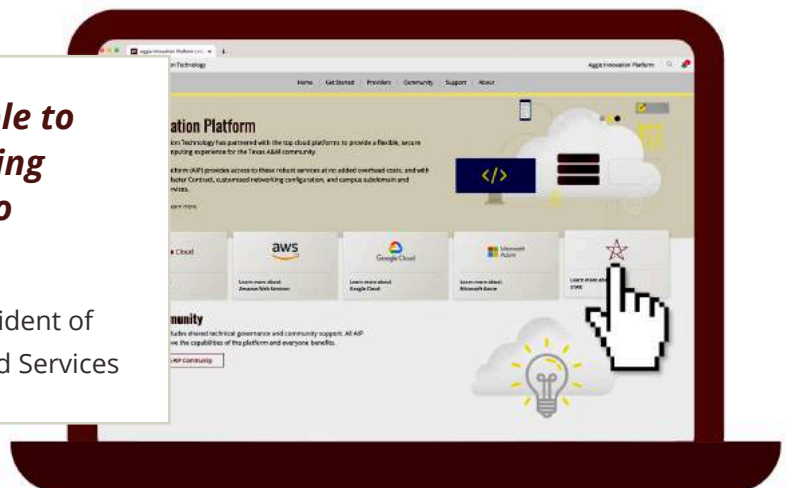
Texas A&M is a world-class research university, conducting over \$900 million of research in 2019. Although the pandemic posed some obstacles for researchers, Texas A&M was ready to meet the challenge with the Secure Technologies for Aggie Researchers (STAR) and Aggie Innovation Platform (AIP), designed to harness the full potential of cloud-based resources.

Texas A&M Health IT designed STAR as a research-focused platform offering robust security for controlled, confidential or restricted data, flexible payment options, and scalable storage. STAR significantly accelerates the time to initiate formal research activities and opened for pilot testing in July with 43 participants from around the university. STAR is scheduled for university-wide, general availability this spring.

STAR shined when Health IT was charged with creating a COVID dashboard for campus. The platform coordinated data from various sources, including self reporting through Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) databases and other inputs. The dashboard was essential in giving university leadership real-time data that allowed students and employees to return to campus safely.

“AIP is less about getting people to the cloud and more about doing things in an innovative way to prepare us for the future.”

William Deigaard, Associate Vice President of Enterprise Platforms, Cloud and Shared Services



“STAR’s secure, cloud-based platform enabled us to deploy the dashboard much faster than before,” said Dr. Joshua Kisse, Director of Research, Academic & Health IT Services. “Thanks to AWS (Amazon Web Services), which STAR utilizes, our code continuously pulls in current data.”

The Division of IT is currently developing the Aggie Innovation Platform (AIP) that will provide expertise, a quickly executable framework and a secure, scalable infrastructure enabling the university to effectively and efficiently build and deliver services in the cloud.

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"AIP is less about getting people to the cloud and more about doing things in an innovative way to prepare us for the future," says William Deigaard, Associate Vice President of Enterprise Platforms, Cloud and Shared Services. "We spend a great deal of time working on ways to automate the cloud, it's all about efficiency. We believe AIP will revolutionize the practice of IT on campus."

To find the correct cloud services that meet specific requirements, campus members can use the new Data Classification and Research Resource tools.

ASSISTANT CIO PROGRAM INCREASES COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPARENCY

Texas A&M's Assistant Chief Information Officer (ACIO) program has not only increased IT communications across the university, but strengthened the pandemic response of participating colleges and divisions. The success of the program was highlighted in a 2020 EDUCAUSE conference breakout session.

Dee Childs, Vice President and CIO for Texas A&M University, established the program after a peer review for the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (CVM) prompted the dean to ask how the units could collaborate more.

"I had the idea of assembling a group of people who reported to their college, business or research unit while simultaneously reporting to the Division of IT," Childs explained. "I believed we could improve engagement, communication and transparency while increasing the trust between the division and participating units."

The initial partnership with Dr. Eleanor M. Green, dean of the CVM and Dr. Jorge A. Vanegas, dean of the College of Architecture, added Kris Guye and Chrissie Cordray as inaugural members of the program. Darvis Griffin joined the program in 2020 from the Division of Student Affairs. Childs and all three ACIOs highlighted the program in the EDUCAUSE session.

“As ACIOs, we work to ensure IT strategies and initiatives are not only in line with the mission of the university, but also meet the unique needs of the departments and colleges we serve.”

Darvis Griffin, ACIO and IT Director, Division of Student Affairs

"When the pandemic began, the College of Architecture used a specialized application to stream virtual desktops and apps to browsers so our students and faculty could work from home," Cordray stated. "The Division of IT helped set up the shibboleth integration, which allowed the College of Architecture students to log into the service with their NetIDs."

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Guye agreed that increased communication allowed a quick response at the onset of the pandemic, as the Division of IT helped CVM establish a full-service outdoor network to check-in animals in less than six hours.

Griffin said he is proud to be a part of the program, since it allows him to be the formal liaison between the Division of Student Affairs and the Division of IT.

"As ACIOs, we work to ensure IT strategies and initiatives are not only in line with the mission of the university, but also meet the unique needs of the departments and colleges we serve," Griffin observed. "I truly believe the ACIO program is already a success at Texas A&M."

Due to its early success, the program continues to grow. In January 2021, Chris Court from the Bush School of Government and Dr. Joshua Kisse of Texas A&M Health joined the ranks of ACIOs.

DATA CLASSIFICATION TOOL HELPS RESEARCHERS PROTECT DATA, FIND SECURE TECHNOLOGY

As research and other key university functions become more reliant on the cloud, security and data regulations are a major concern. Fortunately, when the pandemic began, the Division of Information Technology was developing unique tools to more easily classify data and quickly determine data management - the Data Classification Tool.

The innovative tool is now live and being demonstrated to groups of researchers across campus to rave reviews.

The Data Classification Tool poses a series of straightforward yes/no questions to help users determine the appropriate classification of their data. Once the data is properly identified, researchers are able to view a list of available technologies that meet the compliance standards of their data. This tool allows users to view available technology platforms that will appropriately protect the data while fulfilling specific research needs.

Texas A&M Privacy Director John Pryde says the tools will benefit the entire A&M research structure and the university's reputation.

"These tools will allow not just PIs (principal investigators), but the entire workflow chain, to manage and maintain the data in a much more progressive manner." He points out, "Our ability to use these tools for documenting data classification ensures we are meeting the operational requirements that apply to this data by law."

Associate Director for IT Risk, Policy and Data Management Adam Mikeal had the idea for the tools while working with campus IT pros on various policy changes. Another important tool developed at the same time is the Impact Calculator, which helps determine the impact on the security of a college or division that would result from loss, damage, or the inability to access information resources.

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“These tools will allow not just principal investigators, but the entire workflow chain, to manage and maintain the data in a much more progressive manner.”

John Pryde, Texas A&M Privacy Director

The screenshot shows the 'Data Classification Tool' interface within the Texas A&M University IT portal. The header includes navigation links for Services, Leadership, Security, Policy, Community, and Help. Below the header, a 'TOOLS' section highlights the 'Data Classification Tool' and 'Impact Calculator'. The tool's main heading is 'Data Classification Tool', followed by a sub-heading: 'The Data Classification Tool can help you determine the appropriate classification for data in your care.*'. A link to 'https://it.tamu.edu/policy/' is provided for more information. A sidebar on the left lists various data categories under 'Regulation', including Student Data, Health Data, Research Data, Financial Records, Personally Identifiable Information, Federal Classified Data, Other Data, Public Data, and Results. The main content area asks the question 'Is your data regulated under an existing law or framework?'. It provides instructions: 'If you know your data is regulated by a specific law or, or is controlled by a contract or legal framework, you can select the choice below to learn what Texas A&M University classification level applies.' and 'If you're not sure if your data is regulated by any of these laws, just select "No." This calculator will guide you to the correct classification based on the content of your data.' There are 'No' and 'Yes' buttons, with a hand cursor pointing at the 'No' button. A 'Next ->' button is located at the bottom right of the form.

“I saw how the requirements of the controls catalog are difficult to visualize,” Mikeal said. “I thought a set of calculators that guide a user through a series of questions in a ‘wizard-like’ model would help the campus better understand things like data classification or IT impact level.”

“My initial expectation was that the typical user of the calculators would be IT professionals as they went about their duties, especially annual risk assessment requirements,” he continued. “While this is clearly a common use case, other audiences like faculty and researchers have emerged as an important constituency.”

Mikeal says modifications and improvements will continue to be made to the tools as the user base increases, while the same yes/no approach of the Data Classification Tool and Impact Calculator will be used for other problem spaces.

Pryde says the dynamic nature of the tools will make them indispensable to the university.

“What makes these tools even better is they can be adjusted as feedback is given or as technology and laws change,” Pryde says. “Also, we will have a historical, documented analysis of the data. Even if we were incorrect in the classification, this will help with reviews and outside audits.”

** Special recognition goes to the following for their work on the tools: Lon Berquist, Daniel Janeczek, Joe Mancha, Dion McInnis, Xavier Porter and David Sustaita.*

DIVISION OF IT RESPONDS TO SOLARWINDS HACK

Just as the effects of the pandemic continued beyond the 2020 fiscal year, so did security concerns.

In the early morning hours of December 13, America's Cyber & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued an emergency directive calling for federal civilian agencies to power down servers running SolarWinds Orion products. The tech company's system had been compromised by hackers and was inserting malicious code into software updates, affecting governmental departments such as the US Treasury, and Homeland Security. The breach also hit a number of big tech companies, including Cisco, Intel and VMware.

Fortunately, one Division of IT employee saw the warning in the middle of the night and immediately reached out to his supervisor. To quickly mitigate the security risk, the Division of IT shut down four servers. After a thorough forensics search of Texas A&M's IT infrastructure, the division learned its installations were not affected. Two new servers were built from scratch using the latest version of SolarWinds deemed safe by the CISA.

"Systems administrators Gregory Jones, Robert Cooper, Christopher Thompson and the rest of our team jumped on this immediately and didn't take any chances," said Zac Sanders, associate director of systems engineering. "Their quick and proactive actions ensured the university's data was not compromised."

FOCUSED

DIVISION TAKES COVID FIGHT TO THE CLOUD

Just as COVID was uncharted territory, so were the various areas Texas A&M and the Division of IT entered to fight the pandemic: testing, reporting and contact tracing.

The Division of IT, in partnership with TAMU Health, was charged with developing a COVID-19 dashboard for the campus community. The tool needed to ingest data from a number of sources, including self reporting through Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) databases and Curative testing data from campus walkup locations and other sources.

Joshua Kisse, Director of Research, Academic & Health IT Services, explained that development would have been more difficult had they not been using the Secure Technologies for Aggie Researchers (STAR) cloud environment in Amazon Web Services (AWS).

“ [The dashboard] gave the administration direct visibility into what was happening on campus, so they could adjust for clusters and trends that were going the wrong way.”

Joshua Kisse, Director of Research, Academic & Health IT Services

“We were able to create a cloud-based, serverless application to drive the dashboard thanks to AWS,” he explained. “We already had a developer training on the environment, so we were able to get this running within three weeks.”

The dashboard was also used by the Brazos Valley Health Department, KBTX-TV and other area media.

“This dashboard brought accountability and transparency to Texas A&M University and allowed students to decide if they felt comfortable attending class in person,” Kisse said. “It also gave the administration direct visibility into what was happening on campus, so they could adjust for clusters and trends that were going the wrong way.”

The Division of IT took the dashboard a step further by creating a specialized, internal dashboard using an Amazon business intelligence tool. The internal dashboard provided in-depth, graphical trends for compliance personnel, the provost, president and others.

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Combating the virus through random testing and contact tracing

In June, the Division of IT was asked to create a contact tracing center in partnership with the School of Public Health (SPH). Three large rooms of Clinical Building 1 were converted for use by approximately 50 staff members to call anyone who self reported a positive test result or symptoms and those with whom they made contact. The tracing center became vital when the Provost asked the SPH to begin random testing of the Texas A&M community.

With a goal of testing 5,000 people every three weeks, SPH needed us to build a custom information system to send and track results.

“We worked with the University of Central Florida to modify a tool they already created,” Kisse said. “This enabled us to quickly automate the sending of test results to our dashboard. It was a lot of work, but we were excited to help the campus at such an important time. ”

DIVISION OF IT RETROFITS NON-TRADITIONAL CLASSROOMS, ENABLES SOCIAL DISTANCING

When the university announced the return of in-person classes for the fall, the Division of IT worked with university leaders to find and outfit many non-traditional spaces for learning - ensuring adequate social distancing. The network team met the challenge head on, installing Wi-Fi in meeting rooms, theaters, arenas and parking lots across campus - enabling the university to safely continue its mission.

Rudder Tower - Converted meeting rooms into classroom space. Added wireless coverage and wired internet ports for teaching lecterns.

Rudder Theater - Converted Auditorium, Theater and Forum into classroom spaces. Added wireless coverage and wired internet ports for teaching lecterns.

All Faiths Chapel - Added wireless coverage and wired internet ports for teaching lecterns.

Koldus Career Center - Added internet capabilities and upgraded bandwidth to the building to support remote student job interviews and practice with mentors.

Reed Arena - Added wireless coverage to the entire ‘bowl’ portion of the arena and wired internet ports for teaching lecterns.

College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (CVM) - Outdoor wireless to support patient check-in and triage in Large Animal Hospital parking lot.

A.P. Beutel Health Center - Added outdoor wireless for COVID testing tents.

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Garden Apartments Community Center - Adjusted and upgraded some wireless equipment to add classroom space and support social distancing for residents.

Annenberg Presidential Conference Center - Added wireless coverage and wired internet ports for teaching lecterns.

Student Recreation Center - Added wireless to rooms 2229A and 2229B to support in-person class attendance.

Mechanical Engineering Office Building (0392) - Added wireless to conference rooms to support in-person class attendance.

Memorial Student Center - Added access points to improve wireless coverage in large conference rooms to support in-person class attendance.

Sterling C. Evans Library outdoor area - Added wireless coverage for social distancing stations.



Division of IT retrofits non-traditional classrooms, enables social distancing

In August, the division deployed multiple point to point (PtP) wireless networks at the O. D. Butler, Jr. Animal Science Complex to support the Annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course. The PtP solutions were used to extend and provide network connectivity for live Zoom demonstrations that took place in open fields and cattle pens.

DIVISION HELPS VETMED DRIVE-THROUGH BECOME REALITY

Resilience was illustrated by the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (CVM) and the Division of IT in March when an outdoor network was set up to process and serve patients in a drive-through format. In just a three-month period, over 4,000 patients were served while exposure between pet owners and staff were minimized.

The Veterinary Emergency Team (VET), which provides veterinary care in disaster situations, set up equipment trailers in the parking lot of the Large Animal Hospital to provide triage, vaccinations and other medication delivery. While an ethernet cable was run from the hospital, the amount of equipment required a faster, more robust connection.

“ We are so grateful for the Division of IT’s assistance.”

Dr. Jonathan Levine, head of Small Animal Clinical Department



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Kris Guye, CVM executive director of Information Technology and assistant chief information officer (CIO), said he emailed Dee Childs and asked if some ports could be activated on a Division of IT switch at the hospital and if temporary outdoor Wi-Fi could be provided. In less than six hours, the Division deployed a full-service network.

“The Division would have helped anyone, but I felt comfortable making the request thanks to the Assistant CIO program,” Guye explained. “This program has greatly improved the communication, policy and leadership between ‘central’ IT and the College of Veterinary Medicine.”

The setup was used for approximately three months, during which over 4,000 patients were served.

“Maintaining the best standard of care is our priority,” said Dr. Jonathan Levine, head of the Small Animal Clinical Department. “Excellent patient care relies heavily on technology and our team needs access to their tools. We are so grateful for the Division of IT’s assistance.”

INNOVATION PREPARES TEXAS A&M FOR PANDEMIC, FUTURE

Texas A&M is known for innovation, and this quality allowed us to be one step ahead of the technological challenges posed by the pandemic. In two weeks, Texas A&M moved one of the largest campuses in the nation online, converting over 13,000 classes from in-person to online and moving its workforce off campus.

While many universities raced to purchase a virtual meeting platform to meet the demands of online learning, Texas A&M had already licensed Zoom. In addition, the Division of IT was piloting Microsoft 365, and with the push of a button, provided campus members virtual phones, messaging tools, and cloud-based file storage. Little did we know, these tools would soon be a part of daily life.

In January of 2020, approximately 5,000 Zoom meetings took place. As courses went virtual, Zoom sessions grew to about 130,000 sessions per month by April.



Currently, there are over 1.7 million monthly Zoom sessions at Texas A&M University.

“Many of us read books online now, something we didn’t do 10 or 15 years ago,” she said. “The ‘digital natives’ who are coming to Texas A&M today are accustomed to online books, streaming music, and probably experienced some online learning in K-12. So for many, this was just a natural transition.”

Texas A&M Assistant Provost for Academic Innovation Jocelyn Widmer agrees and says the current transition is positive, since it is preparing the campus for the move to the Canvas Learning Management System.

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Childs and Widmer agree this move to remote instruction will change higher education in many ways. Changes include campus operations extending beyond 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and an expansion of virtual office hours. Another is a shift away from referring to a face-to-face or online course and instead classifying them as synchronous (live) or asynchronous (available to students on demand).

“Some may interpret the statistics as evidence of a new digital transformation. However, Vice President of Information Technology and Texas A&M Chief Information Officer Dee Childs says the transformation has been quietly taking place for some time. This transformation made the transition to online courses less painful.”

“We see these channels engage and captivate different audiences in ways that are not always possible in a face-to-face setting,” Widmer points out. “Hybrid instruction is as much, if not more, about the choice of the learner and how they participate in instruction as it is about the choices made in designing and facilitating the instruction.”

Childs agrees and points out that in-person offerings will always be important at Texas A&M.

“A reason we’re one of the largest universities in the country is that students love the residential experience and want to be part of the Aggie community,” she says. “We want to give students the best of both worlds.”

DIVISION SETS UP CONNECTED “SOCIAL DISTANCING STATIONS” ACROSS CAMPUS

To deter the spread of COVID when students returned to campus, the Division of IT set up “social distancing stations” at 15 sites across campus, with tables and chairs set up under a total of 41 tents.

Provost Carol Fierke requested the help of the division’s Business Relationship Management (BRM) team, which consisted of Jana McDonald and Anthony JG Antonidis. McDonald said they scouted out locations that would serve the most students.

“ Since students could not sit in the hallways between classes, the goal was to provide convenient outdoor study spaces.”

Jana McDonald, Assistant Director, Help Desk
Central & Business Relationship Management



“Since students could not sit in the hallways between classes, the goal was to provide convenient outdoor study spaces,” she said. “We also made sure the areas had at least two bars of Wi-Fi service. Our networking team also installed outdoor Wi-Fi for stations outside Evans Library.”

In all, the Division of IT sourced 425 tables and 650 chairs, including 75 tables compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), on a very tight timeline when supplies for outdoor furniture were in very high demand.

Installation began the first week of the Fall 2021 semester. The tented areas will remain for the spring 2021 semester.

RESILIENT

A&M CIO DISCUSSES “BRINGING TOGETHER THE REMOTE UNIVERSITY”

As the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. The pandemic is not an exception. Beneficial outcomes for higher education operations were recently addressed in a Zoom-based panel discussion joined by Vice President of Information Technology and Texas A&M Chief Information Officer Dee Childs.

Hosted by the Chronicle of Higher Education, “Bringing Together the Remote University” also featured Elizabeth Bejar, Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs for Florida International University and Jean Morrison, Provost of Boston University.

“I think we have expanded the use of remote technologies in a thousand different ways.”

Dee Childs, Vice President of Information Technology and Texas A&M Chief Information Officer

The biggest challenge faced by the panel was research continuity, since “it doesn’t happen in a vacuum, but in a community.” When research activities were allowed to resume, technology was key.

“I think we have expanded the use of remote technologies in a thousand different ways so research and graduate seminars can continue,” Childs said. “Without the technology infrastructure, we wouldn’t be doing as well as we are.”

Microsoft Business Strategy Leader Bradley Tipp also appeared during the event and pointed out higher education has experienced over three years of digital transformation in just a matter of months.

Childs illustrated that point by explaining that in January 2020, there were approximately 5,000 Zoom sessions for that month. That number grew to 130,000 sessions per month by April and is currently averaging 1.7 million sessions per month. With this digital transformation, Childs said Texas A&M is working to optimize the experiences of all students since internet capabilities and speeds vary around the world.

“Texas A&M spent a lot of time on pedagogy, working with faculty to package material in advance so students can download at a more convenient pace,” Childs pointed out. “I don’t think we’re ahead of all those challenges, but we’ve made great strides quickly.”

HELP DESK CENTRAL, DIVISION EMPLOYEES ANSWER THE CALL DURING PANDEMIC

The award-winning Help Desk Central is often recognized for its resilience and preparedness. When the pandemic hit and lockdowns were put into place, HDC became Texas A&M's central call center for all things-COVID, in addition to its normal role as the tech support center. When inquiries to HDC increased exponentially, more than 20 employees from across the division volunteered to lend a hand (or an ear) for three weeks. Volunteers took a crash course on using the HDC system to track issues and the Knowledge Base to quickly provide help and solve problems. Phones were configured and headsets were distributed so calls could be answered from employees' homes.

“I’ve always admired Help Desk Central, but now I have a greater appreciation for what they do every day.”

Bobby Bernshausen, division employee

During the first week of class cancelation (March 15), phone calls and emails to HDC more than tripled from the week prior, while requests for help via online chat more than doubled. Many requests for help were critical to allow employees and students to start working and accessing classes remotely. “I’ve always admired Help Desk Central, but now I have a greater appreciation for what they do every day,” said division employee and HDC volunteer Bobby Bernshausen. “It was a bit intimidating at first, especially not knowing what the next call would be about. But the callers were understanding as they were just trying their best to make it through this situation as well.”

NEW CODE MAROON MOBILE APP INCREASES CAMPUS SAFETY

Aggies now have a “safety toolbox” in the palm of their hand, thanks to the new Code Maroon Mobile App.

The iOS and Android app is available for anyone to download and receives immediate Code Maroon emergency alerts. Previously, anyone outside of the Aggie community had to sign up for alerts through Twitter.

“The app allows Aggies, parents, friends and those coming to campus for sporting and other events to receive alerts if there is an emergency on campus,” said Chris Meyer, Associate Vice President for Safety and Security. “The app also has a number of tools to help prevent or assist in an emergency.”

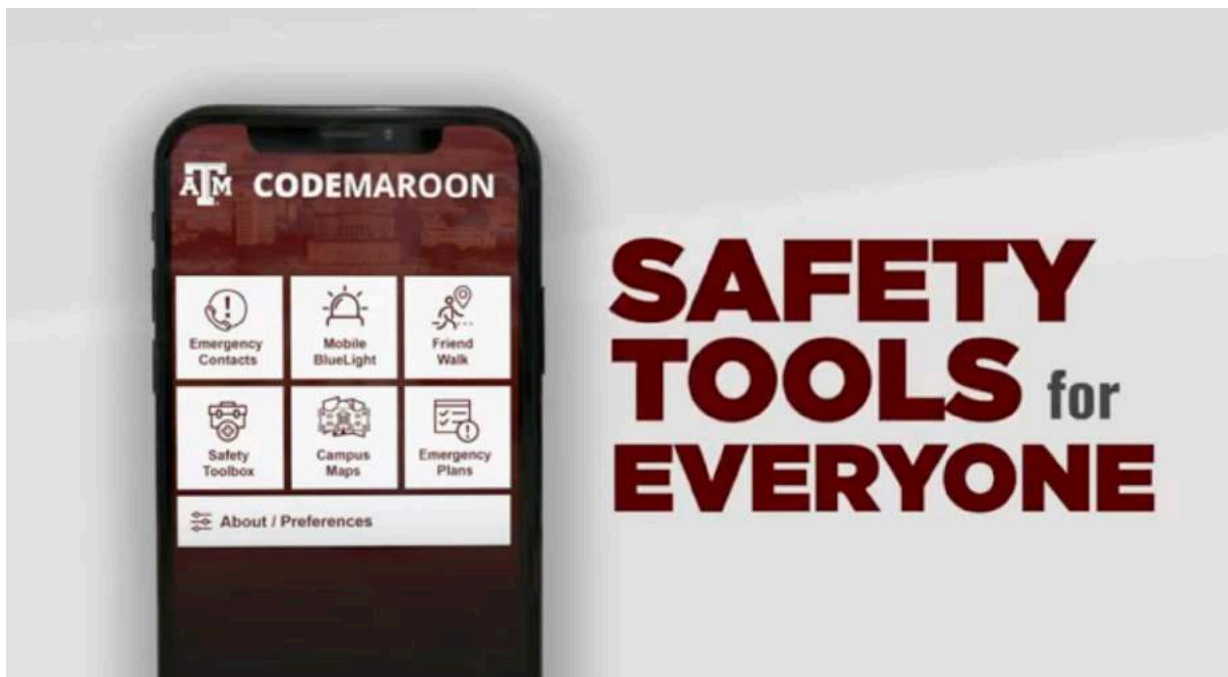
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Meyer said if “anyone feels unsafe having to walk anywhere alone late at night, or anytime, they can use the app’s Friend Walk feature to send their location to someone they trust.” The friend or family member can then monitor the user’s progress until they reach their destination. If an emergency does arise, the user can hit a panic button that alerts their friend or family member and calls emergency services.

“ The app allows Aggies, parents, friends and those coming to campus for sporting and other events to receive alerts if there is an emergency on campus.”

Chris Meyer, Associate Vice President for Safety and Security

Other important features of the Code Maroon App include a Mobile Blue Light, which allows the user to contact the closest 911 dispatch, a library of important campus maps, and a collection of important safety tips and procedures.



Code Maroon Mobile App Overview

The Code Maroon App can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play. More information about Code Maroon emergency text, email and computer alerts, as well as a video overview of the app, can be found at codemaroon.tamu.edu. The app was covered by various media outlets, including KRHD/KXXV News and KBTX-TV.

DIVISION GOES VIRTUAL FOR HOWDY WEEK

Howdy Week helps new and returning students learn about campus activities, organizations and services, such as Help Desk Central (HDC). Since the week took a virtual turn in Fall 2020, the division gave students a video walk-through of HDC.

The presentation discusses the various ways to contact HDC and the common issues they often assist with, including password resets, Duo and Zoom support, and campus Wi-Fi access. Although the in-person experience was absent, the video allows all Texas A&M campus members to refer back to helpful HDC information whenever necessary.



Howdy Week: Help Desk Central Virtual Tour

“Students are using technology more than ever during the pandemic as they work and learn remotely,” said Lacey Baze, Director of Product Strategy & Communications. “It is important that campus members know technical assistance is available to them 24/7, and the virtual tour was a creative way to highlight this service.”

NEW TOOL HELPS CAMPUS ACE ACCESSIBILITY

Texas A&M's Accessibility Conformance Evaluator (ACE) proved invaluable during the pandemic by making it easier for campus members to find and evaluate accessible Electronic Information Resources (EIR).

“ACE saves valuable time, both in filling out unnecessary paperwork and waiting for approvals.”

Cynthia Kauder, EIR Accessibility Coordinator

Introduced in April 2020, ACE has a robust database of electronic resources proven to meet or exceed our accessibility standards. Current Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPATs) are available within the tool, as well as current university exceptions and possible methods of accommodation.

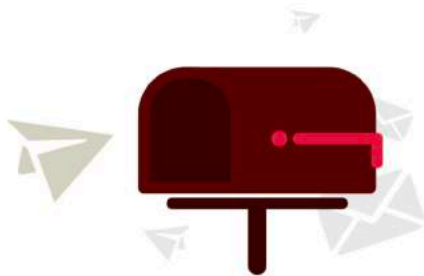
“ACE saves valuable time, both in filling out unnecessary paperwork and waiting for approvals,” says Cynthia Kauder, EIR Accessibility Coordinator. “The form eliminates time-consuming, back-and-forth emails and reduces the wait time for approvals.”

Kauder says data proves ACE is not only expediting the purchase of electronic resources, but ensuring our campus is more accessible.

IT BY THE NUMBERS

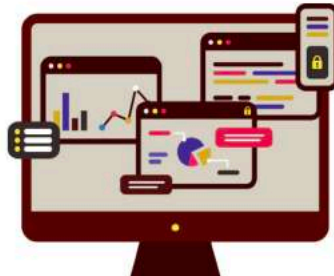
PROTECTING TEXAS A&M

On average, the Division of IT protects:



171,768

Mailboxes



78,000

Unique Devices



237,000

Accounts



705,379

Active Identities

Your Key to A&M Resources

The Division of IT manages and secures identities for Texas A&M employees, current and former students, campus affiliates, parents and guardians, and IT resources.

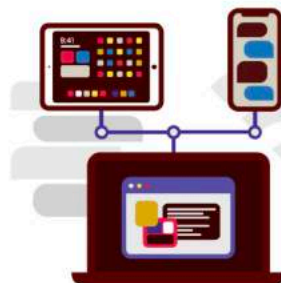
STAYING CONNECTED

Texas A&M University is among the top 10 largest campuses in the nation and needs one of the largest networks to support it.



7,767

Wireless access points on the College Station Campus.



78,000

Devices on the Texas A&M network at any moment in time.



19.3 million

Square feet of wireless coverage on the College Station campus.



115.26TB+

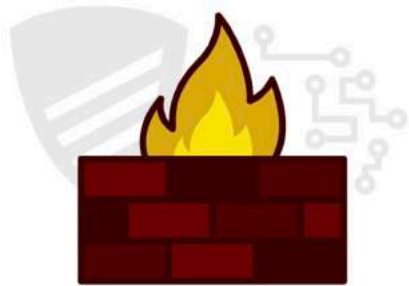
Data transferred over the network each day during the semester.

Securing Data

The Division of IT secures and protects data essential for the teaching and research functions of Texas A&M.

SECURING OUR INFORMATION

The Division of IT secures and protects data essential for the teaching and research functions of Texas A&M.



28 million

Viruses blocked each month by the firewall.



23.5 billion

Cyber and malware attacks blocked each month.



1 million

Wi-Fi sessions secured



240 million

Emails inspected monthly for spam, phishing and viruses.

You've Got Protected Mail

The Division of IT manages and protects Texas A&M Exchange mailboxes for faculty and staff.

TROPHY CASE

Division of IT Awards in 2020



[Yang Receives President's Meritorious Service Award](#)



[2020 Sustainability Champion Awarded](#)



[Division Wins SIGUCCS Best in Category](#)

FY 2020 EXPENDITURES BY SERVICE



- Academic and Student Software \$4.24M
- Cybersecurity \$6.57M
- Data Centers, Email, Identity Management, Code Maroon \$12.7M
- Help Desk Central \$1.85M
- Research & Education Network \$13.4M
- Software/Application Development, Database Support, Custom IT Solutions \$4.12M
- Telecommunications \$9.49M
- Wide Area Research & Education Network, Video Conferencing \$2.92M

TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$55.4 MILLION