

RSS feeds:

A new way to start your day

For those of you always scouting for the latest updates on San José State University, there's good news. You no longer need to surf multiple Web pages, Google for the information, or even navigate the university's Web site. The university's RSS feeds can now deliver the information you seek right to your desktop.

Really Simple Syndication, or RSS as it is more commonly known, is a technique that allows you to access, and customize, real-time syndicated information without clogging your e-mail inbox. An RSS feed is a file document that updates dynamically as the content on a Web site changes. Originally used only for distributing news headlines, it has evolved to allow sharing of text, audio, and image files as soon as they get updated.

Bringing it all together

"RSS to me is the dial tone of changeable content on the Internet," says **Steve Sloan**, University Help Desk and IT support specialist. "I think it is a great way to keep in touch with our alumni on a real-time basis, and it's also a good way to bring them into a conversation about the university."

The feeds can be read by a Web-based or stand-alone RSS reader that periodically checks for updates on the feeds the user has subscribed to, and displays them in a simple, navigable format.

According to **Paul Nozicka**, university Webmaster, the learning curve for RSS readers is very low. "The Web is for the most part in pull format," says Nozicka. "If I want information on the alumni association, I need to go to the Web site and get that. But this is push technology, so users just need to set up a reader and start monitoring the information they want."



University webmaster Paul Nozicka says that RSS feeds are just one part of an overall commitment to improving communications with the larger SJSU community.

Increasing RSS awareness

Dennis Dunleavy, professor of photojournalism and an avid blogger, believes that in time information exchange using this technology will become the norm. "I use RSS feeds as roadmaps in my class," he says. "I often point to stories which I read on my RSS feeds. It gets the students in the habit of reading the news and makes them inquisitive."

Students like **Ryan Sholin**, mass communications, use RSS feeds for researching and exchanging ideas with a global community. "Using a feed aggregator really speeds up information consumption," says Sholin. "A huge advantage is getting the information in real time. A student who reads three or four pieces of commentary on an issue in his feed-reader just before a class will understand more of the context surrounding the issue than a student who read about it in the newspaper that morning, or saw it on CNN the night before."

A technological revolution

Harish Chakravarthy, Web applications developer, initiated the RSS dialog at the university, and his efforts have re-

sulted in the current RSS feeds for university events and news, with feeds from the *Spartan Daily* going live this fall.

Sloan thinks that in the future faculty will use RSS feeds the way they use products like Web CT right now. "They can upload tutorials, streaming audio lectures, PDF files, and PowerPoint presentations that can be easily accessed by the students," says Sloan. "There's tremendous potential for distance learning, for remediation, for offering advance content for fast learners, for multi-lingual applications, and for those with learning disabilities."

Dunleavy says that with the introduction of departmental RSS feeds, alumni and friends would certainly feel more connected. "They can follow the progress of their departments and colleges with ease and efficiency and support the work of faculty and students."

Nozicka says that implementing RSS feeds is only the first step in keeping with the times. "There's an expectation geographically, because we are in the heart of Silicon Valley, to be at the leading edge of technology," says Nozicka.

"Reading RSS feeds is like my cup of coffee in the morning."

– Dennis Dunleavy

"Implementation of a syndication standard increases the effectiveness of internal and external communication, and sets the base for future use on a portal solution."

It may not replace Web browsing or e-mail updates, but this technology certainly makes it easier to remain abreast of current developments. Says Dunleavy, "Reading RSS feeds is like my cup of coffee in the morning – it's how I start my day." ✦

– Mansi Bhatia

Visit www.sjsu.edu/rss to access the university's RSS feeds.