Dear Members of the College Community,

As you are aware, during the Memorial Day holiday, the College’s website database failed. IITS is working with other campus offices to assess the extent to which both web page content and business transactional data has been lost.

I cannot make up for the hours that have been lost or the loss of web page content, and I know that the time it will take to make ourselves whole again is time taken away from countless other priorities. What I can do is explain the strategies we put in place following the failure, and assure you that we have already taken aggressive steps to ensure that this situation does not occur again.

The database failure was discovered at approximately 6:30 p.m. on Monday, May 27. The first step after the discovery was to attempt a database recovery. During this recovery attempt, we discovered that the back-up database, designed to be a real-time redundant database, had experienced a different type of failure: On January 18, 2013, a network configuration change caused one of the database’s nodes to go offline, which in turn caused the failure of automated backups. Unfortunately, at the time, there were no processes in place that would have alerted us that the failure had occurred; back-ups were verified periodically, but not with regularity. Thus, there were no saved backups after the January 18 date.

After several hours of attempts at restoration, we determined that the only viable option was to restore the website database from our last effective full database back-up, which was on January 18, 2013.

It is important to recognize that the Content Management System (CMS) on which UC’s website resides serves both as a traditional CMS and as the primary platform for many web-based administrative business applications. The dual nature of our CMS platform explains why the data
loss includes both web page content and business transactional data, such as inquiries from prospective students, event registrations, and donations to the Annual Fund.

Following the restoration from the January 18 back-up, the next step was to identify the likely content and transactional data loss. A list of applications was compiled and the offices affected by those applications were engaged. We then attempted to prioritize efforts to recover data that might be stored elsewhere on campus in other formats or databases. While we knew many departments and users had lost content from their web pages, transactional and business data losses are particularly critical to the College's operations. Since the event first occurred, we have been able to retrieve some data related to inquiries and applications from prospective students, orientation registrations, housing contracts, donations, and data related to the Student Financial Services operation, to name a few.

For data not stored elsewhere on campus, steps to reacquire the lost data from its original sources were identified. For example, administrators have been asked to send inquiries to current students, prospective students, donors, and other constituents in an effort to reacquire lost data and rebuild our records.

In providing this information, I do not wish to imply that the missing content from other pages is not important; to the contrary, we fully understand how much work has been lost. However, without reengaging the constituents who were the source of much of the transactional data, many Utica College offices simply could not effectively continue daily operations.

As time permits, Joe Perry, UC’s Director of Creative Services, is compiling a record of lost pages and data. Once we have addressed the mission-critical issues noted above, staff from the Office of Marketing and Communications and IITS will make every effort to assist individual users as well academic and administrative offices in rebuilding their pages.
Without question, this will take time – and it is likely that it will take more time than people care to wait. For that I apologize.

In the meantime, we have now implemented additional procedures to monitor all nodes/database services and perform checks of automated backups. We also copy the databases to our offsite disaster recovery site on a daily basis.

It goes without saying that this situation goes far beyond simple inconvenience. This was a major problem, and it will take major resources to fix it. More importantly, we are, with equal diligence, taking the steps needed to ensure it never happens again.

Sincerely,

Vijay Sonty
Vice President for Technology and Chief Information Officer