

Notre Dame receives national award for excellence in communications technology

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The Association for Communications Technology Professionals in Higher Education (ACUTA) has selected the University of Notre Dame as the sole recipient of the prestigious Institutional Excellence in Communications Technology award for 2007.

ACUTA, an association made up of 825 colleges and universities in all 50 states, bases the highly competitive annual award on the recipient's success at making optimal or groundbreaking use of communications technologies.

"A decisive factor for Notre Dame's win was the University's innovative business case for removing standard telephones from residence hall rooms while partnering with wireless operators to significantly increase cellular coverage across campus," said Gordon Wishon, Notre Dame's associate vice president, associate provost and chief information officer. "It became very clear to us that students seldom used the in-room phones the University provided, and that continuing to provide them did not track with the habits of our students. Most students rely on cell phones and text messaging as their primary mode of telephone communications, and we really needed to focus our long-term efforts toward enabling that technology."

But the challenge of providing strong cellular signals across campus, indoors and out, to thousands of students, faculty and staff was another matter.

"Notre Dame has had a history of keeping cell towers from encroaching on its beautiful campus," said Dewitt Latimer, the University's chief technology officer.

Pressed with the problem of cell coverage without towers, Latimer and his engineers elected to pursue a carrier-neutral distributed cellular antenna system — a network of small antennae that installers could hide on buildings and other campus structures.

"After investigating our options, we decided to partner with NextG Networks," Latimer said. "Their distributed antenna system gave us what we needed in performance, carrier neutrality and aesthetics. The antennae are difficult to spot unless someone shows you exactly where they are."

"We have heard very positive remarks from students," said William Kirk, Notre Dame's associate vice president for residence life. "We have gone from students virtually hanging out of residence hall windows trying to get decent reception to five-bar coverage throughout most of campus."

The project's widespread success in maintaining University aesthetics while serving the rapidly changing and growing technological needs of the campus community caught ACUTA's attention.

"We are proud to honor Notre Dame as winner of the Institutional Excellence Award for 2006-07," ACUTA Executive Director Jeri Semer said. "The University's ambitious project to transform campus communications clearly reflects the University's commitment not only to its faculty, staff, and students but also to its heritage as it provides 21st century technology to enable the accomplishment of its timeless mission."