Mason is among seventeen other educational institutions invited to participate in the newly created IBM Cloud Academy. This prestigious honor was awarded to Mason mainly because of its tireless efforts in making the Virginia Virtual Computing Lab a reality. Other charter members of the Cloud Academy, including North Carolina State University, Georgia State University, and the University of Maryland, were also asked to participate based on their success in state-wide virtual computing efforts.

So, what is a ‘cloud?’ Sharon Pitt explains that, ‘once you pass your own private network, such as Mason’s network, you go into an Internet ‘cloud’ -- you’re passing over places outside of your network to get to the services you need!’ Essentially, it allows you to access the things you need regardless of where they are hosted.

Thanks to Sharon Pitt, John Savage, and the other members of the Advanced Academic Computing team, Mason will reap numerous benefits from participating in the IBM Cloud Academy. “The Academy will offer the benefits of any consortium,” said Pitt. “It allows us to access IBM resources for collaboration, to work with other universities to expand our knowledge of what cloud computing can do, and to deepen Mason’s global relationships with institutions like the Beijing University of Technology.” The Academy will enable this collaboration using an IBM-managed cloud available via the Internet.

Pitt is excited to move forward. She believes that the charter institutions will get together soon to discuss the next steps, including talking about software licensing challenges and research efforts to establish cloud standards and protocols. For now, the seventeen charter institutions will serve as the only members within the Academy, but Pitt believes that others will be asked to join in the future. Mason is fortunate for the opportunity to be part of such a select group of innovative institutions.
Focus on Founders Hall

One of the major capital projects taking place at Mason is the construction of the 256,000 square foot Founders Hall at Arlington Campus. This building will contain classrooms, computer labs, an auditorium, a library, and faculty offices. Founders Hall is expected to be completed for occupancy by fall 2010 and ready for scheduling classes in spring 2011. DoIT has been working very closely with Facilities, Office of Space Management, and the Construction Project Team to make sure the appropriate infrastructure is in place to support the technology in the classrooms.

Videoconferencing Has Gone High-Def

Videoconferencing has gone high-definition in the new Engineering Building at Fairfax. Room #1605 features dual 52” monitors on a stand that is eye level when seated so that it gives you the feeling that you are in the far end of the room that you have been connected with. High definition cameras and a state-of-the-art codec create picture perfect clarity.

In addition to being a great space, this is a Videoconference controlled room. Having “reservable” space has long been a DoIT goal because it gives professors and staff the technology they need for ad hoc classes or meetings. While the room is used as the main room for Commonwealth Graduate Engineering Program (CGEP) courses, plenty of bookable times are available.

VCL Wins Governor’s Technology Award

George Mason University has been selected as the winner of the 2009 Governor’s Technology Award for the Innovative Use of Technology in Higher Education. This award was received for Mason’s work in establishing the Virtual Computing Lab (VCL) program in Virginia.

The VCL is a computer lab that never closes and is available to our students anywhere in the world. This is of special importance to the Virginia government to better reach outlying parts of the State with critical services. The financial benefits of the VCL initiative are of great interest to the Commonwealth of Virginia as well. These include a reduction in annual maintenance costs and power usage compared to physical labs. Such benefits are more important than ever in this difficult budget climate.

Mason has worked this past year with private colleges and universities throughout Virginia in the establishment of the Virginia Virtual Computing Collaborative (V2C2). Members of this consortium have committed to working with the VCL service and have begun experiencing success. Since this program has the proven ability to produce both instructional and financial benefits, the VCL has an obvious place within Virginia higher education.

The Arlington Classroom Support office will be moved to Founders Hall and Learning Support Services will also be represented in the new building. The following schools and colleges will be the main occupants of the building: Public Policy, Education, Arts & Sciences, IT & Engineering, Management, Nursing & Health Sciences, Conflict Analysis & Resolution, Visual & Performing Arts, Instructional Facilities, and Economic Sciences. For more information about Founders Hall visit: http://facilities.gmu.edu/projects/arlingtonII/index.htm.

Wikis Now Available

Last year marked a collaboration between the Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) program and the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, providing a forum for two cohorts of faculty to explore teaching with technologies. Faculty in all disciplines found using wikis to be helpful in teaching and learning. As a result, the Director of Technology and Learning Initiatives approached the Division of Instructional Technology, hoping the resource could be made available more widely at the University.

The timing was fortuitous. PBWorks, the vendor who had supplied wikis for the TAC/WAC cohorts, was considering how to launch multiple wiki workspaces across educational institutions. They completed that work near the middle of August, which now allows DoIT to offer premium wiki sites to the Mason community. Mason joins the ranks of DePaul University and others in offering this resource.

The University’s premium license offers features that a basic wiki does not, including a training wiki to help support those new to using wikis. We currently have 74 individual wikis in use at the University, with roughly 900 individual users. To request information about creating your own wiki for academic or institutional purposes, contact Jennifer Korjus, Director, Learning Support Services, at jkorjus@gmu.edu, 703.993.9648.