



The web he weaves

by Marly Robertson

Tucked away in a small office in the Student Publications Building, amid an array of printing equipment, is the office of James “Jess” Planck, the university’s web manager. His office is as humble and unassuming as the man himself.

As one of the few remaining “old school” webmasters in the Louisiana university setting, Planck provides an invaluable service to Nicholls. He describes his job very simply as the “management and production of the public website and some of the applications associated with the website” – but this description oversimplifies the many facets of his position. Planck is the system’s administrator, database administrator, designer, programmer and occasional content editor for the entire Nicholls website.

Planck grew up in rural Louisiana “hunting, fishing and playing with computers.” He discovered a passion and propensity for art at a relatively young age and went into graphic design after serving in the U.S. Army. “I literally fell into the web after graduating from Louisiana Tech in 1995,” Planck says. “I was working for a small design studio where I built a website for the first time, and I discovered that I had an aptitude for art and computers,” he says modestly. Planck worked for a couple of regional Internet service providers before accepting a job at Nicholls in 2003.

When he first came to Nicholls, the university

was operating a simplistic “static” website, composed of individual files. He has since worked to create a website that allows for a tremendous amount of collaboration. Before this transition, Planck had piles of papers bearing copyediting marks that required page-by-page modification. Updates allow for a more collaborative experience, giving Planck more time to focus on major issues. The willingness of other members of the university community to help him is something for which he is extremely thankful.

“I’ve got some people helping me out, and without them I’d be lost,” Planck says. “If I didn’t have the users that I’ve got doing as much as they can to change the content, I’d probably be completely buried under work.”

The creative part of the job is the most enjoyable for Planck, and he is heartened to discover that his work has made someone else’s life a little easier.

“Making sure the interfaces I’ve put together have gotten people what they needed without a problem or a fuss” is what makes his job so rewarding, he says.

From day-to-day web maintenance and web design to fending off hackers in the midst of Hurricane Katrina (yes, really), Planck literally does it all. And while he says he just “fell into” his job here at Nicholls, it is fair to say that the university community would be lost without him. ■

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