distribution of computer software and introduce virtualization technologies within our academic facilities. All of this will provide improved access to computing resources for our faculty and students.”

Another key benefit to these newly re-designed computer labs is the ability for students to access virtual systems, configured with their choice of software and operating system, on demand. The university will be able to meter software use and thus match tools and resources to need. Disaster recovery, in the event of failed workstations, can be accomplished in a matter of minutes as opposed to many hours or even days. It will also be possible for different software packages, as well as entire operating systems, to be made available within specific labs or classrooms automatically, according to a set schedule, maximizing the usefulness of vital but limited resources. According to Sharon Pitt, executive director of the division of Instructional Technology at Mason, “We want to be able to support learning needs in our classrooms and labs in a proactive, highly responsive way. IT should serve learning — not act as a barrier. These improvements within our computing facilities ensure that technology improves opportunities for learning.”

To support these goals, a sound and secure, high-performance network infrastructure was critical. It
was decided to establish gigabit Ethernet connectivity to each lab and classroom computer, joining them to a dedicated 10-gigabit backbone. In addition, an inexpensive stacking solution was to be used to provide network redundancy in a highly distributed fashion.

The Solution
A combination of D-Link 3400 and 3600 series network switches were ultimately selected for the Mason academic labs initiative. The solution not only provided the needed stacking and redundancy capabilities, but also offered an economical 10-gigabit capacity. According to Savage, “The D-Link switches have no problem in moving large volumes of data from point to point, without any noticeable performance degradation. Without the ability to routinely move terabytes of data throughout the classrooms and labs, our ability to meet future goals for academic computing would have been seriously impaired. Now, however, many important initiatives are proceeding in record time. Our responsiveness to faculty and students in providing a variety of services has improved dramatically.”

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