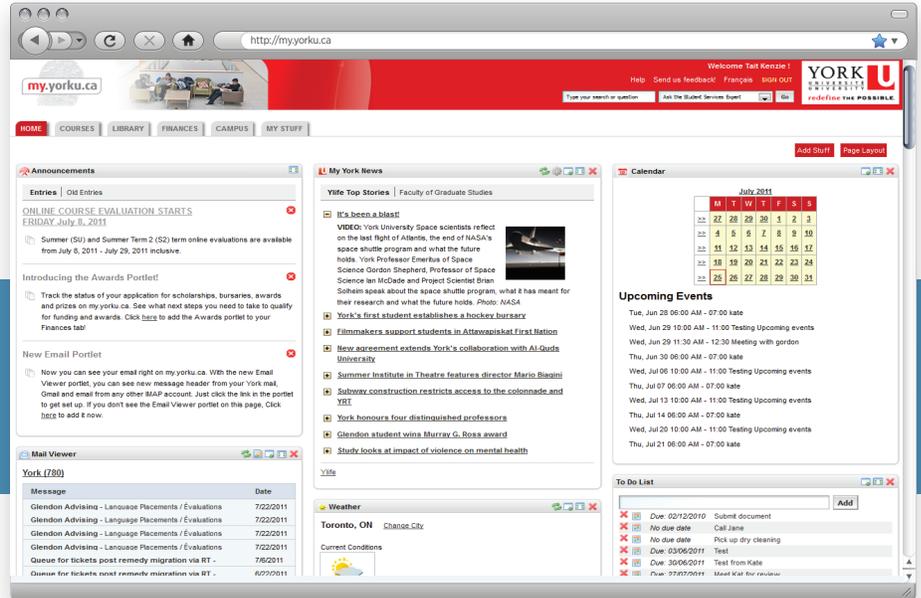# York University
My.Yorku.ca

> "Liferay Portal is a solid base on which to build to realize our goals with the required degree of flexibility and control over how we needed everything to work."

PETER ROWLEY,
Director of Applications and Integration in University Information Technology

Founded in 1959, York University is now Canada's third largest university, and world renowned for attracting students who forge their own unique paths to success. York offers full and part-time graduate and undergraduate degree programs to almost 55,000 students through ten faculties. From a sprawling campus uptown, to an intimate east-side campus, to downtown business centres, York resides where students need it most. For general information about York University please visit www.yorku.ca.

CHALLENGE

For an institution of York University's size, keeping its 55,000 students engaged and involved in their education and their overall experience is crucial to retention. So when students began to voice their frustration about making sense of all the content and tools available to them on York's website, York set for itself new technological goals to remedy their pains. The school was particularly keen on offering a personalized user experience.

It was decided that a portal would be the best functional and technological fit. As an aggregator of knowledge resources, a portal would, essentially, help ease the pains of navigating university life. Course schedules, grades, financial information, library account status and campus news would all be pulled together in one centralized hub.

RESOLUTION

In order to do this, York needed a high degree of flexibility in the portal framework that it would choose. Issues like standards compliance and the need for extensive application integration drove their eventual selection of Liferay Portal for its SOA design and adherence to open standards.

LIFERAY

"We found that we were better served by an open source solution as it allowed us to understand it thoroughly before we made a full commitment," said Peter Rowley, Director of Applications and Integration in University Information Technology, York's central IT organization. "Liferay Portal is a solid base on which to build to realize our goals with the required degree of flexibility and control over how we needed everything to work."

With the portal presenting a wide variety of content and tools, ease of use was paramount.

"Liferay's simple user interface was key to the portal being adopted by a large audience of students who didn't have time to be trained," said Kate Stewart, an independent consultant working for York on the portal project. "It was also important that it was straightforward to adapt the portal to reflect York's brand and to support a French language interface for Glendon, our bilingual campus."

In the first phase of implementation, York focused primarily on the integration of its many data sources (grades, student records, repositories of course and financial information) with Liferay's framework, employing XSLT in many of its portlets to present student data retrieved via REST calls from its Student Information System.
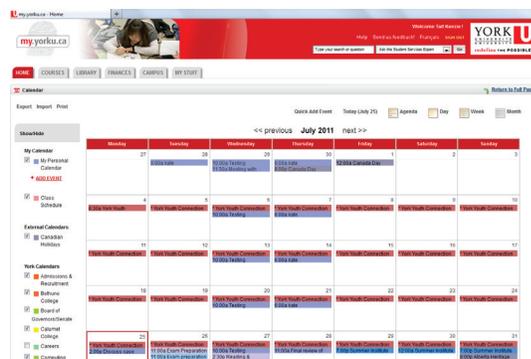
Today, My.Yorku.ca is the central information source for 55,000 students and supports up to 18,000 visits per day. The site offers a convenient one-stop shop on the Web with access to both internal resources and external data, including personal course information (i.e., instructor, times, course websites), grades, student account information, balances on students' payment cards, information on financial assistance (i.e., status of applications for financial awards, alerts to fill out financial need statements), subscriptions to York newsfeeds and external newsfeeds and more. York invested in the construction of a sophisticated calendar portlet tailored to the needs of higher education: each student's portal calendar is automatically loaded with their class times and locations while other campus events can be added as desired along with personal appointments. Incoming students will have advising appointments automatically loaded.

Students access their university email and other personal IMAP email accounts from within the portal.

"It works much like other portals such as iGoogle™ and MyYahoo!™, but it contains York-specific information," said Rowley.

In subsequent phases of development, York University rolled out a convenient portal for prospective students (myfuture.yorku.ca) to inform and attract students interested in learning more about the school's programs and campus life. For current students, integration of the learning management system Moodle into the Liferay Portal gave students easy access to online course content posted by professors and other course information such as news and announcements.

My.Yorku.ca has also gone mobile with its layout of portlets and tabs transformed into a hierarchical menu that is compatible for viewing and navigation on users' smartphones. Integration with IntelliResponse, a Q&A platform that answers questions posed in conversational language, has also improved the user experience.

"When students understand the resources available to help them succeed at York, they are more likely to graduate, which is of course one of York's primary goals," Rowley said.

Students can access a number of other features including:

- Financial account information showing what they owe and when payments are due
- Library account information
- A personalized exam schedule
- Research guides published by the York University Libraries for the courses in which they are registered
- To-do lists and bookmarks
- News from the York University Career Centre including workshops and special events
- Information from the York University Bookstore including sales and new arrivals
- News from the Excalibur student newspaper

To manage this diverse assortment of data coming from multiple sources, a distributed publishing model was used with each group or department assigned responsibility for maintaining its own content. At the end-user level, Liferay Portal's granular system of role-based authorizations grants each individual user the ability to move, add or delete the tools in his/her own view to suit their needs.

Looking forward, York University will explore Liferay's new collaboration tools for use in portals to be built for York's staff and instructors.