One-Way Federation:
Leveraging Your Local Credentials
Harvard Medical School and Faculty of Arts & Sciences

Harvard has been building application systems and network services for decades. Unfortunately, it has become more and more laborious for users to navigate these systems. HARVie, PeopleSoft HR, CREW, GMAS, iSites/eCommons, Holls — the acronyms and URLs are difficult to remember, much less a separate user ID and password for each service.

That's why the Identity and Access Management program offers an innovative solution for using your native School, department, or affiliated organization's credentials to log in to central University systems and services. Trust negotiation in identity management has been on many vendor and product roadmaps for years, and it's finally becoming a reality between organizations.

The Problem

People at Harvard Medical School (HMS) wanted to use their native credentials to log in to University applications and network services such as PeopleSoft. Elsewhere on campus, Faculty of Arts & Sciences (FAS) users wanted to use their School user ID and password to access GMAS, HARVie, and many other Central Administration systems.

When federated authentication isn't available, people resort to shortcuts to manage all those different credentials — whether that's using too-simple passwords or making up written cheat sheets. This isn't just a convenience; users lose productivity, the experience is frustrating and confusing, and, critically, it becomes easy for security and privacy to be compromised.

The Solution

One-Way Federation (OWF) is an enhancement to Harvard's authentication system. In January 2014, OWF went live for the system's PIN2 protocol. Schools, departments, and affiliates can now integrate with OWF, and the IAM program is staffed and ready to add other native credentials to Harvard's authentication system. (Learn more about additional federation opportunities at http://bit.ly/1opkn5d.)

For HMS, OWF allows users to enter eCommons IDs and passwords to access apps such as PeopleSoft. OWF also allows FAS and Central Admin users to enter username and password credentials for desktop and email access to PIN2-enabled applications. This eliminates the need for users to remember their HUIDs and associated passwords. It's simple for users to choose the authentication method of their choice when faced with a standard Harvard login screen: Just check the radio button for HUID, FAS username, or eCommons login.

Harvard application owners don't need to take any action to enable this new option — PIN2 takes care of this automatically. And users can still continue to log in to their applications using their HUID and password.

The Result

HMS CIO Rainer Fuchs comments: "It's particularly important for us. We have many local applications that need to be accessed by hospital-based individuals without HUIDs, which caused us to create eCommons IDs. At the same time, most people need to access protected applications on a regular basis. With the new one-way federation in place, users can now use the eCommons IDs they are familiar with to log in to all those applications. Not only does it simplify life for many employees, I believe it also improves security — no need any more to have notes with usernames and passwords stuck to your computer!"

Jason Snyder, IAM program director, states, "One-Way Federation is just a beginning. Users want seamless, secure integration of services, and IAM will be an enabler. You'll see innovative solutions that increase productivity, enhance user experience, and reduce administrative overhead."