Getting up to speed with Grouper at Georgia Tech

At Georgia Tech, I am part of the Identity and Access Management team and we chose to implement Grouper in Docker as part of the Campus Success Program. It was a natural fit for us as we were already in the middle of a project that was our first foray into making Grouper available to campus. Our Campus Services IT department needed an easy way to manage groups for a Door Access project. Grouper handles this nicely and is easily extensible using Grouper Web Services. As an added twist to our first real Grouper project, we decided to run Grouper in Docker as a way to facilitate development and testing as well as make Grouper as cloud-ready as possible in case we decide to migrate to AWS in the future.

As part of the Door Management project, in addition to granting some admin Grouper access to the Campus Services team for the Grouper UI, we wanted to make it easy for them to be able to build their own custom web ui for interacting with Grouper since their functional end-users may not want to use Grouper directly. At Georgia Tech, we have a custom API framework called BuzzAPI that we use to give developers limited access to internal data. We wrote BuzzAPI wrappers on top of Grouper's Web Services in order to take advantage of the security features and load balancing built in to Buzzapi. With these API's, Campus Services was able to build their own UI to visualize and manipulate their Door Access groups in Grouper.

As we continued to work with Campus Services, they came up with additional uses of Grouper that would help them in other projects. We are using the Grouper Loader to bring in groups from our PeopleSoft system which are then used as reference groups for Grouper groups maintained by Campus Services. Membership in these groups determine which employees are required to take certain training courses in our Learning Management system. The groups in Grouper are provisioned to entitlements in LDAP which can be easily read by the LMS. Campus Services has also started using Grouper to centrally manage groups for their own internal applications that don't have good grouping built in like a Git based wiki system for their documentation.

So far, I feel that our initial exploration into what Grouper has to offer has provided fruit in the form of useful features that fit the needs of our customers from other IT areas on campus. As we learn more about Grouper and continue to improve our Docker architecture, we will expand the use of Grouper to the wider campus. It is my hope that the Campus Success Program will help with that as well as be a good arena to gain feedback and share successes.