Computing Advisory Committee Meeting

December 4, 1997

 Present: Al Allen, Duke Koch, John Eynon, Dennis Leitner, Susan Logue, John Hamman, Chris Svec, David Shinn,
Michael Wainer

The primary focus of discussion was the draft report posted on the Web page last month.

On the question of a Departmental triage system, David suggested that each department or unit designate a single contact person for connection to the computer infrastructure outside of the unit, and that that person would be the designated contact to and from the help facility. A further suggestion was that different sized units might require a different size and shape of help triage. A college consisting of only a few, relatively small departments might be able to make do with a single contact person, while the College of Liberal Arts, for example, with over 300 faculty and almost twenty departments might require a more elaborate hierarchical structure within the department.

On the question of keeping Computer labs updated, Al pointed out that some comparable institutions are using a technology fee to pay for keeping desktops current. Carolyn agreed that that should be a possibility, but stressed the crucial importance of involving students in the planning and implementation of any such fee.

On a related matter, Duke suggested that we somehow change our accounting procedures to permit some kind of depreciation, which might make re-equipping labs more economical. John Eynon suggested that there might be some support among students for a technology fee if there were a good and understandable plan for how the money was to be spent. Jackie agreed, but added that it needed to be made clear that the technology fee money needed to be clearly earmarked for upgrading of student computer facilities, and if the money was understood to be in addition to money already being spent on computers, and not simply to replace current funding from other sources.

Al pointed out that other institutions IT has looked at have strong, clear plans, and that the fees resulted in obvious, tangible effects. Jackie suggested an analogy to the Campus Safety Fee board, which heavily involves students in dispensing its funds.

Mike raised the issue of worrying about upgrading software as well, and noted that current paperwork requirements make it very difficult to upgrade software because of the interaction between state requirements and documentation rules.

Carolyn suggested that a temporary fix for some existing computer labs would be to invest in memory, which is currently very cheap.

David wondered about the status of the labs in some of the residence halls, thinking that they may need upgrading as well.

Carolyn inquired about the status of a rental plan for laptops, and Al replied that there seems to be a problem with liability for the machines at the end of the lease, as well as problems dealing with purchasing and the selection of an authorized vender. He offered to have some of his staff come and talk to the committee about some other similar universities are dealing with this problem.

John Eynon pointed out that graduate students have different needs from those of undergraduates, and many of them may well have computers at home. He suggested that the plan talk about computer `facilities' rather than simply `laboratories', and that we put in requests for upgraded connection infrastructure as well.

Under item 8, dealing with support for multimedia and INTERNET course development, Susan suggested aping a request for increased instructional support, as demand for help with developing these kinds of courses is likely to grow. Chris pointed out that over 300 classes now use the WEB in some way for some of their course materials. This, however, raises the issue of access to the WEB, because the more we put courses on the WEB, the more students will

need quick and easy access to the web.

Geoff suggested possibly aping an item 9, dealing with an optional centralized purchasing system--a system whereby the school would contract with one (or two) providers for particular brands and configurations that could be had for a very good price. It was emphasized that this needed to be an optional plan, but, as was pointed out, having equipment from a fewer number of suppliers lowers the overall cost of ownership because of the need to maintain a smaller inventory of parts, and the lower cost involved in figuring out what is wrong. Duke wondered about aping a similar system for software (something like a site license plan), and Chris wondered whether the plan could be extended to include private faculty, staff and student purchases.

Geoff also suggested aping an item recommending the establishment of an all-campus INTERNET directory (`phone book'). Al replied that IT is experimenting with such a system, based on a Netscape brand program, that will also have a calendaring facility. This has been requested by the President's office, and the directory is well into the test stage, but the calendar facility is not yet as far along. IT is also testing a more or less automated e-mail account-assigning facility. The phone book system is targeted to be online in the Spring.

Carolyn wanted to formally thank Charlie Campbell for his assistance during some problems with the new ISP.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for 10 A.M. on Friday the 19th of December in the Balcony Conference Room.

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