Notes from Computing Advisory Committee Meeting
April 23, 2009

Attendees: Howard Carter (for David Carlson), Patty Cosgrove, Garth Crosby, Don Lind, Don Laur, Namdar Mogharraban, Jason Phillips, and Frank Scobby, Jay Spolarich

Agenda Items:

Google Apps Transition: F.Scobby explained that the campus email system would be transitioning to Google mail on May 29, 2009. The transition will largely be transparent to the users. The primary service involved will be email, but other capabilities also come with the system, such as calendaring. The change was brought on because Send-Mail will no longer be supported after June 30, 2009. Several systems were looked at and Google was chosen. Google is the only service that is free to the University. The projected savings in license fees alone is $150K. each user will have 7 GB of storage space available, so mailboxes should not fill up. Information on the transition is available on the Dawg Bytes web site. Concern was expressed that if the new email service is free, there will be advertising. F. Scobby said there will be no advertising. There was also concern that existing mail folders would not be carried over to the Google system. Gmail, the public version, uses labels rather than folders which is a different model entirely. G. Crosby said that his previous institution had switched to Google mail. It was suggested that he contact his former colleagues and ask what issues they faced during the transition. F. Scobby said that all reports he had seen from institutions who had switched to Google indicated that the users love the new system. It was urged that anyone seeking information about the transition go to the Dawg Bytes web site.

Network ID/Identity Management: F. Scobby reported that the new Network ID will be implemented in June. The new ID will consist of SIU+Dawgtag number—12 digits in all. It will be issued when a person becomes affiliated with SIUC, such as when they are accepted for admission, and will stay with the user forever. The Network ID will be separated from the email address, and email users will be able to choose their own email identifier. Concern was expressed about students picking meaningless or inappropriate email identifiers.

Bandwidth Update and Status: F. Scobby reported that IT is seeking more bandwidth between SIUC and Chicago. Talks with AT&T and Verizon have not been productive. IT is hoping to partner with Illinois Century Network and use currently unused fiber for the backbone. The issue is getting the funding to pay for the system.

Blackboard and Classroom Management Software Issues: H. Carter reported that the library is looking for ways to improve Blackboard (Bb) reliability and sustainability. The current Bb system is Campus Edition 8 (CE8). It is saturated, consistently over the recommended ceiling for simultaneous users, causing the system to slow down dramatically or stop entirely. Also there is not enough storage space on the system to do sufficient backups of the database in case catastrophic failure results in the need to reinstall a previous version. A meeting was held in March that was attended by the Bb

representative, library Bb support staff and the Dean, IT staff, and the Provost, to discuss the issues and possible solutions. The Provost was told that it would take $150K to purchase the equipment needed to stabilize the CE8 system and insure proper backups. The library has been working with both Sun Systems and Dell to design hardware configurations that will solve the immediate needs and create stability over the next 3-4 years, and give us time to pursue long-term solutions, such as open source learning management systems. The system being designed will have sufficient storage for backing up the current database and build in enough space to handle projected growth over the next few years. The system will also be designed to run in a clustered environment with built-in redundancy and load balancing for stability and reliability. The cost the new system will not include the increased license fee associated with the clustered system (an increase from the current license fee of approximately $44K to $77K per year). Blackboard, Inc. offered to host our entire Bb installation for approximately $200K per year (not including license fee). Concern was expressed that we should not encourage more use of the Bb system if it is saturated. Some felt we should encourage departments to limit their use of the system or seek alternative systems they can use. It was pointed out that nothing can be done at this point to prevent the likely outages that will occur during finals week due to high system use. The solution being sought by the library is targeted to be in place in time for the Fall Semester. Usage should be lower during the Summer terms, so outages should be minimized. F. Scobby stated that IT is currently paying half the license fee for Bb and will continue to do so. H. Carter pointed out that a $1.00 per credit hour fee for all students would just about pay for sustaining the Bb system at SIUC or paying Blackboard to host the service for us. N. Mogharraban recommended that the CAC as a body send a note to the Administration stating that Bb is an essential system; and that failure of the system creates problems for students and instructors as well as poor opinions of the university's services; and therefore, the system should be funded immediately to the level required to maintain and sustain the system. There was general agreement with this recommendation.

Banner Update: F. Scobby reported that Banner is moving into production. Students entering the SOAR programs are being entered into the system. Financial Aid is on the system now, and the Bursar will be fully installed in July. The entire system will be fully implemented in the Fall, with all academic history records on the system by October 2009. Some expressed that there have been complaints by people using the beta version of Banner that they were having problems accessing information in the system or they had difficulty navigating through the many screens required to get to the information they need. It was pointed out that many of the complaints are normal growing pains that go with any new system. Training is being offered to data input staff members on a "just in time" basis. Eventually, everyone will be offered training in the procedures they will need for their jobs.

Tuition Surcharge Issues: F. Scobby reported that the Undergraduate Tuition Surcharge, which is not a "fee," is currently $2.00 per credit hour. This has not changed in 10 years. In the most recent period, approximately $1.7 million in proposals for this money were received, many of them outside the criteria for the funds. The amount of funds available this year was $760K, less than half what was proposed. P. Cosgrove pointed out that the

technology surcharge was requested by the students originally and had been used to fund several computer labs around campus, but was explicitly restricted from funding departmental labs that were limited in their availability. It was also pointed out that the scope of campus technology usage has grown exponentially since the surcharge was originally implemented, but the surcharge has not increased. J. Spolarich stated that when new computers are bought with technology funds, older ones have been "bumped down" to areas in the most need of "newer" computers. It was suggested that the application for these technology funds include the question of whether bumped down computers would be acceptable if brand new computers are not available.

Other Issues: It was suggested that the CAC should meet more than once a semester (the minimum required), and that it become more aggressive in advocating for support of technology issues on campus, such as Blackboard support, Tuition Surcharge, etc. There was general agreement with this suggestion. It was also requested that members share their notes since no secretary was present at the meeting.