Minutes of the University Communications Resources Committee

Meeting held: Tuesday, January 25, 1994 - 3:00-5:00 pm
Location: Conference Room, Graduate School
206 Sandy Hall

Present: Marc Abrams (for Ed Fox), David Bevan, Erv Blythe, Tom Caceci, George Crofts (Chairman), Jamie Evans, Nigel Hatton, Mark Hunter, Jo Johnson, Bernard LaBerge, Buddy Litchfield, Lance Matheson, Tom McAnge, Mark Sanders, John Schorger

Guests: Matt Swift

1. Approval of Minutes

The December minutes were approved.

2. Subcommittee Reports

The subcommittee on mail will meet January 26 to discuss the mail regulations prepared by University Mail Services.

The subcommittee on network education is gathering information. CNS and LRC have sent information on opportunities for instruction. The subcommittee's effort may evolve to the task of increasing publicity of the educational opportunities that exist.

3. Presentation on Information Systems Plans

Erv Blythe reported on plans of information systems to move to open computing structures and issues connected with that action.

Administrative use of computing at Tech was developed in the 1970's, and the techniques reflect the technology and software available then. Noticeable advances are not possible without new equipment and software. Given the number of people using the systems (2,000 regular users, 8,000 casual users, plus many more infrequent users such as students adjusting schedules) and the volume of programs and files (the equivalent in stored bytes of five million, 500-page books), administrative systems are important to the functioning of the university. New approaches will increase connections between operations (e.g., between financial aid and admissions), should allow greater capabilities to customize operations, and reduce people approvals of forms by creating system checks.

The financial cost of the change (likely $2,000,000 per year) is less of a concern than overcoming the inertia of current activities. Upward to 200 people will have to become literate in new programs and approaches, up to 80% of the current maintenance and development will have to be suspended, units would have to alter work processes and organizational structures, and users will have to receive training. Some "untouchable" processes must be dashed.

The question and answer period following the presentation included:

Q. How will the planned changes be communicated to the faculty and staff?

A. It is hoped that deans and others hearing the presentation will

spread the word. Erv is willing to meet with other groups to give presentations.

Q. From where will support to units come?

A. Now, there is no support. Erv and others are aware of the concern and give it attention, but no full solution has been found. Information systems hopes to find fool-proof software. It does expect to support items it distributes.

Q. Which other universities have tried this shift?

A. Few have gone this way. Some have hired groups to come in and make the change. In those cases, many campus people end up working for the contractor.

Q. Why so many "unix" boxes?

A. Unix is the way we will go on central machines. Either mac's or intel machines will accommodate users.

Q. Who is funding the "conversion to mac's?"

A. It is part of the $2,000,000 per year cost.

Q. What are the implications to faculty?

A. It is hoped faculty can access a host of information on students, find purchasing easier, and access information through the network more easily.

Q. Will systems development people move physically?

A. Likely, certainly during the training phase.

Q. Who sets the parameters for the new systems?

A. Often there are few choices. Just shifting to the new technology will give users choices for making changes.

Q. How will it help Vet. Med. with its system?

A. The new approach should allow migration of the current Vet. Med. system.

Q. What is a peripheral system?

A. The library acquisition system is an example.

Q. What are some examples of integration?

A. Alumni could have access to placement information. We should think of the new approach as providing open systems. The real payback is to allow basic change.

Q. What is the time-frame for risk on the 3090?

A. It will be 3 or 4 years before the transition, which is too long for it to be at risk.

Q. What lifetime will the new system have? The current system lasted 20 years.

A. Some parts will last only 3 to 4 years; e.g., interaction on central machines (connected processing). The core data approach

will last 5 to 10 years.

Q. Why compress the transition time?

A. That is necessary to get some action.

Q. How will you get "buy-in" from the faculty?

A. The attempt is through the deans and committees, such as this.

4. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be February 22, 3:00 - 5:00, in 206 Sandy.