

Charges to the Ad-Hoc Computing Services Committee for 2003-2004

Membership

	Term Expires
1. Joe Reinhardt, BME	May 2004
2. Ashgar Bhatti, CEE	May 2004
3. Geb Thomas, MIE	May 2004
4. Gary Christensen, ECE (Chair)	May 2004
5. Julie Jessop, CBE	May 2004

Standing Charge

The Computing Services Committee (CSC) shall be responsible for gathering faculty input on policies and budget issues governing hardware, software and computing services provided by Engineering Computer Services and Support (ECSS) service unit and making appropriate recommendations to the faculty and the dean.

Standing charges to the Computing Services Committee:

1. Maintain minutes of their meetings and distribute them regularly to the EFC.
2. Gather input from faculty and all other important constituencies on computing services issues by any effective means it deems appropriate, including surveys, forums, etc.
3. Make recommendations to the Engineering Faculty Council for matters requiring faculty approval.
4. Make recommendations to the faculty and dean on the budget for the College of Engineering Computing Services and Infrastructure.

Specific Charges

1. *Develop a working structure for the committee that is consistent with the standing charges.*
2. *Review CSS equivalents at peer institutions.*
3. *Act on specific items forwarded to the committee by EFC as needed.*
4. *Assess appropriate use of student computer fees.*
5. *Identify and propose resolutions for pressing College issues consistent with standing Charge 2. For example, EFC has identified the following issues as potential areas to be addressed: choice of operating system on CSS hardware; support of faculty allocated hardware and software (e.g. back-up storage space, memory, software support); and the wireless network in Seamans Center.*
6. *Submit an interim report on April 15, 2003, another interim report on January 15, 2004 and a final report on April 15, 2004. The final report should offer recommendations on the continuing status of this committee: i.e. whether it should become a standing EFC committee, remain an Ad-Hoc committee of EFC, or other.*

Final Report of the Ad-Hoc Computing Services Committee for 2003-2004

Executive Summary

The Computing Services Committee (CSC) was charged to gather faculty input on policies and budget issues governing hardware, software and computing services provided by Engineering Computer Services and Support (CSS) service unit and making appropriate recommendations to the faculty and the dean. The CSC met 13 times from February 2003 through April 2004. During this time, the Committee members solicited input relating to college computer services from faculty members in their own departments and discussed this input during the committee meetings. Input from college faculty and staff were gathered from personal conversations, email, and brown bag lunches. The Committee reviewed computer related budgetary issues relating to student computer fees and college licensed software policies. The Committee reviewed and gave recommendations for the current college computer replacement policy. The Committee also surveyed computer support units at other peer institutions.

The Committee makes the following recommendations:

- CSC should continue to exist after April 2004 as a standing committee of the EFC.
- CSC should continue to solicit input from the faculty regarding college computer services and provide a point of contact for CSS.
- CSC should work with CSS to develop a long term vision for the computer services in the college and integrate it with the strategic plan of the college.
- A member of CSS should serve on the Committee or at least attend the meetings.
- The college should consider having a full time webmaster and provide software web tools to students, staff, and faculty.

Introduction

The CSC committee was formed in February of 2003 as an Ad-Hoc committee that reports to the EFC. The CSC committee was charged to perform its duties through April 2004. The CSC committee was comprised of the following members: Asghar Bhatti (CEE), Gary Christensen (ECE, chair), Julie Jessop (CBE), Joe Reinhardt (BME), and Geb Thomas (MIE). In October 2003, Doug Eltoft joined the committee as a representative of CSS. The CSC held 13 meetings during this time and 3 brown bag lunches. The committee members also communicated outside these meetings in person and via email. Gary Christensen, Doug Eltoft (second meeting only), and Barry Butler met twice in the Spring of 2003 to discuss the state of computer support in the college.

Standing charges to the Computing Services Committee:

1. Maintain minutes of their meetings and distribute them regularly to the EFC.

The Computer Services Committee met 13 times from February 2003 through April 2004. The minutes for each meeting are attached as an appendix to this report. The minutes of the meetings were distributed to the EFC at the end of the Spring and Fall 2003 semesters and in this report at the end of the Spring 2004 semester.

2. Gather input from faculty and all other important constituencies on computing services issues by any effective means it deems appropriate, including surveys, forums, etc.

The Committee members continuously gathered input from the faculty in their respective departments during their time of service on the committee. Input was solicited via email, personal communications, and announcements at faculty meetings. Feedback was also solicited from faculty and staff by holding three brown bag lunches during the 2003-2004 academic year. Gary Christensen met with Barry Butler multiple times to gather input from the Dean's office.

Doug Eltoft was invited to attend the Committee meetings starting in the Fall 2003 semester as a CSS representative. The conversations between the Committee members and Doug provided the best source of feedback for CSC and CSS. Many computer service issues were solved quickly and efficiently by bringing up the issue to Doug. Doug also provided the Committee with immediate answers to many of the questions that arose during discussions.

3. Make recommendations to the Engineering Faculty Council for matters requiring faculty approval.

The Committee examined the College policy for replacing faculty and staff desktop computers during the Spring and Fall semesters of 2003. Comments from the COE faculty were solicited from all five departments by the representatives of the Computer Support Committee (CSC). The following recommendations were drafted as a result of CSC meetings on March 25, April 10 and May 8, 2003 and submitted to the EFC in the Committee's Spring 2003 report.

1. Recommend that each faculty member receives computer allocation money to purchase a computer of their choice once every three years. The faculty member is free to purchase the hardware of their choice (e.g., a college-recommended configuration, laptop, Macintosh, Linux computer, or monitor). Any underspending would be returned to the college.
2. Recommend that the CSS and college develop a plan to improve communication with the faculty. For example when CSS makes a security update to their computers, CSS should inform self administrators of these changes so they can update their computers. In this way self-administered computers could be as safe as college-administered computers.
3. Recommend that the CSS and college develop educational programs for faculty and students to teach self administration and best practices. The support burden to CSS for self-administered computers will be reduced by having well educated and informed self administrators.

In the Fall of 2003, the Committee revisited the computer replacement policy. Over the summer CSS had revised the replacement policy and had implemented some of the recommended policy changes. The new policy provides for both college- administered and self-administered faculty computers. Shared administration was removed from the proposal. More flexibility was provided for user purchases. The issue of whether faculty can purchase any machine of their choice or use other operating systems has not yet been resolved. If faculty members were free to choose the operating system, they would lose the benefit of economy of scale.

As a result of this new policy, nearly all faculty in the college are now participating in the program compared to about 85% participation previously.

4. Make recommendations to the faculty and dean on the budget for the College of Engineering Computing Services and Infrastructure.

The Committee examined the way student fees in the College were spent and discussed this with Doug Eltoft the Director of CSS. There have been several changes in the student fee process over the years, however, at present all full time engineering students must pay \$240 per semester. The fee paid by TAs and RAs is reduced based on their employment level. The non-engineering students taking engineering classes are eligible to get accounts on the CSS computers without having to pay any extra fee. Since students in the Liberal Arts College typically pay only \$60 per semester, the Dean's office is working on a mechanism to charge these students a pro-rated fee.

All student computer fee dollars are spent on three items; computer hardware purchase, computer software purchase, and software maintenance contracts. The CSS staff salaries are funded by the college and from the income generated by the staff. Currently out of 8 staff members 5-1/2 are fully funded by the college. Salaries for other staff members must come from income generated by the services they provide to research center, both within and outside of the college. CSS staff routinely provides services to the College of Public Health, FUS, IIHR, and CGRER.

The Committee did not have any recommendations to the faculty or dean regarding how student fees are being spent.

The Committee examined the College policy for funding recurring licensing fees for COE software in the March 10, 2004 meeting in the document entitled "Software Funding spreadsheet for FY 2005". Currently the spreadsheet is sent to the DEOs for review, but CSS would like to get feedback from the CSC and the faculty on the policy. Issues that require feedback include: Are faculty happy with the current way funds are distributed? Are there any concerns? Is there adequate funding for software license maintenance? Is there a need to reallocate funds?

The committee discussed other paradigms for funding allocation, such as basing it on contact hours, student hours, etc. Also, departments could put their leftover funds in a pot to help other departments who went over their yearly allocation, rather than holding it over for the next year.

The policy for software funding in the college requires further study before the Committee has any recommendations.

The Committee had no recommendations for the faculty or dean after the Fall 2003 semester.

Specific Charges to the Computer Services Committee:

1. Develop a working structure for the committee that is consistent with the standing charges.

The Committee meets once a month to discuss during the academic year. This schedule can be increased as in the current semester to once every two weeks if there is need. Minutes of each meeting are kept and distributed via email before the next meeting. The minutes from the previous meeting are approved at each meeting. Issues that require immediate attention are distributed to the Committee members via email.

Doug Eltoft, head of CSS, was invited to attend all CSC committee meetings starting in the Fall of 2003. This had several positive benefits including getting immediate clarification on college computing issues, providing CSS will direct feedback regarding faculty concerns, and access to college computer information such as student computing fee expenditures and college computing budgets. Many issues such as reducing the delay in forwarding email from the University mail servers to the college mail servers were resolved quickly and efficiently through the direct communication between the committee members and Doug.

We recommend that a member of CSS should serve on the Committee or at least attend the meetings.

2. Review CSS equivalents at peer institutions.

The Committee developed a survey to review CSS equivalents at peer institutions to gather information regarding their set up and administrative procedures. The surveys were sent to a mail server list that Doug Eltoft participates in that consists of Engineering Information Technology (IT) departments of Big Ten and other selected schools. Doug Eltoft sent out the survey to the mail server list and followed up with phone calls. Unfortunately due to busy schedules only three responses were received. We hope to collect more responses after the Spring 2004 semester is completed.

The responses were from the college of engineering at Penn State, Michigan, and the University of Iowa. These responses are attached in the appendix of this report. The size of the college of engineering for Penn State and Michigan are both approximately 4 times larger than Iowa.

The surveys revealed that faculty provide oversight of computer services at both Penn State and Michigan.

Both Penn State and Michigan have full time staff devoted to web site administration compared to no staff at Iowa. Penn State had 3 staff and Michigan had 2 staff members devoted to college web administration. At both institutions, these staff members provide programming and help with web page creation. There is no charge for the web administration services at Michigan. At Penn State, there is a charge to funded research based on hourly salary and no charge to administrative departments.

The surveys also revealed that Penn State funds computer hardware purchases from revenues generated from its electronic design shop and Michigan charges a fee for researchers to access site licenses.

3. Act on specific items forwarded to the committee by EFC as needed.

See comments above regarding the College desktop computer replacement policy.

4. Assess appropriate use of student computer fees.

See comments for standing charge 4.

5. Identify and propose resolutions for pressing College issues consistent with standing Charge 2. For example, EFC has identified the following issues as potential areas to be addressed: choice of operating system on CSS hardware; support of faculty allocated hardware and software (e.g. back-up storage space, memory, software support); and the wireless network in Seamans Center.

The Committee solicited input from the faculty regarding operating systems on CSS hardware, support for faculty allocated hardware and software and the wireless network in the Seamans Center.

The Committee did not receive very much feedback from the faculty regarding choice of operating system on CSS hardware. The main feedback was related to providing support for the Linux operating system. The college has provided some support for Red Hat Linux which can be found at <http://www.linux.engineering.uiowa.edu>. This web site is not currently being updated by the college any more and points to the Fedora project. The University has support for the Enterprise version of Red Hat Linux which can be found at <http://helpdesk.its.uiowa.edu/linux/>. The University is now paying for the Enterprise version of Red Hat Linux now that Red Hat no longer provides free support. There are no plans for CSS to switch to Linux based operating systems from HP-UX for the computers running HP-UX. This may change in the future due to cost considerations. Over the past year, all PC computers in the college were updated to the Windows XP operating system. The committee only received positive feedback for this change.

The Committee received a lot of feedback from faculty wanting more disk space and backups for this disk space. CSS has increased the amount of faculty disk space by 1/3 from 600 MBytes to 800 MBytes over the last 1.5 years. The cost of backing up faculty computer files has decreased from \$5 to \$0.5 per GB to tape per month. CSS has also recommended buying a USB disk drive (approx. \$300) to back up personal files on PC computers.

Regarding wireless access in the college, CSS is committed to providing secure wireless infrastructure in the Seamans Center. The original equipment had some problems. However it is slowly being upgraded. The plan is to migrate to the new g standard as soon as it is ratified. CSS pays all equipment costs for coverage in the common areas. For areas near faculty office CSS typically pays about 55% of the cost with the remainder being charged to the department requesting service.

In March 2003, Doug Eltoft informed the committee that the only portion of the college that did not have wireless access was part of MIE. The reason that MIE did not have full coverage of the wireless network was that MIE had decided not to pay the cost sharing amount for two wireless access points. Geb Thomas said that he would pay approximately \$1000 for these access points from one of his grants to give MIE full wireless network coverage. Earlier in the year, Joe Reinhardt paid a similar amount for two wireless access points to provide wireless access to his research lab and the rest of BME. The college should now have full wireless coverage.

6. Submit an interim report on April 15, 2003, another interim report on January 15, 2004 and a final report on April 15, 2004. The final report should offer recommendations on the continuing status of this committee: i.e. whether it should become a standing EFC committee, remain an Ad-Hoc committee of EFC, or other.

The Committee submitted the interim reports as requested. These reports are attached to this document as appendices.

The Committee recommends that it continue its service and become a standing EFC committee. The Committee provides a mechanism for collecting input from faculty and staff which would not exist otherwise. It is a difficult task to gather input from faculty due to busy schedules. We found that it was most useful to be proactive in gathering input. The Committee provides a convenient method for faculty and staff comments relating to computer services to go straight to CSS to get fixed if possible, to be discussed by people with different perspectives on computing, and to provide recommendations to the faculty and dean.

The Committee provides a way to disseminate information from CSS directly to the departments. There are often times that CSS would like to get input from faculty on computer software, hardware, and budgetary issues. These issues can be discussed in the CSC meetings or via email and then presented to the faculty by the Committee members such as personal conversations or faculty meeting announcements.

The Committee can also play a role in planning the long term computer services for the college. Working with CSS and the Dean, the Committee can provide faculty input relating to the strategic plan of the college.

The Committee will be able to provide faculty input regarding budgetary issues and cost savings measures that may arise in the future due to shrinking state funding.

Conclusion

The Committee felt that it had a positive influence in the College over the last 1.5 years. The Computer Services Committee provided a means for gathering feedback from the faculty and staff and provided a point of contact for CSS. Many computer service issues were discussed and resolved through closer communication with CSS. Issues that require faculty approval were forwarded to the EFC. We feel that there exists a better relationship between the faculty and CSS now than when the Committee was first formed. We therefore recommend that the CSC continued operating as a standing committee of the EFC.