

Academic computer users are being crowded out

Editor's note: This is the third of a five-part series on the university's computer system.

By Mike Schmoldt

"Although some additional equipment has been added in the last decade, inadequate funding has caused the University-wide Computer Network to slip from a top level, nationally competitive and innovative center for academic computing to a rather outdated supplier of data processing services for the administrative users."

from the Report of the Chancellor's Task Force on Academic Computing

Lack of money is the ultimate reason for the problems academic users experience with the University of Nebraska's computer network, but it is not the only one.

Administrative use of the network has been crowding out academic use for several years, much to the dissatisfaction of UNL faculty members. UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale's task force on the problem reported that "when the City Campus Computing Center was established, almost 100 percent of the resources were devoted to academic needs, whereas recent estimates have been made that only 20 percent are devoted presently to academic comput-

ing."

That percentage may decrease further this year when two new administrative systems come on line. One system will store information on students and registrations and the other will store payroll figures and information on personnel. Both will require new equipment purchases and higher maintenance costs.

Earl Freise, assistant vice chancellor for research and a member of the chancellor's task force, said he is not sure that the academic share is down to the 20 percent figure that was estimated by a group of outside consultants.

"But, yes, the impression that academic uses have been crowded out is correct," Freise said. "It has to do with where the network is located - in Central Administration."

"There has been no mechanism that allowed expression of the needs of academic users," Freise said.

John Strong, vice chancellor for academic affairs, said some administrative demands come first because they are under a stricter schedule than academic demands. Strong said the payroll for the university is an example of an administrative function that uses the computers and must be carried out on time.

"But that is not an overall justification," he said. "Administrative demands

come first and capture the computer resources because the people assigning priorities are administrators themselves. You have to protect the academic component from encroachment from the administrative side."

Both Friese and Strong said the problem is a strong argument for separating academic and administrative uses of the network, a recommendation contained in a memorandum signed by NU President Ronald Roskens.

Some faculty members are familiar with the problems brought on by the system's split between the two groups.

Harry Hennessey, assistant professor of management, said part of the problem is that administrative uses are typically assigned a priority of 13 on a scale of zero to 15. Academic uses have a lower priority number, usually between zero and six, he said.

The problem has been building for years, but finally it is being looked at, said Richard Schonberger, a management professor in the College of Business Administration.

The network is deteriorating, Schonberger said. The system needs more terminals, he said, especially since all business administration majors are required to take at least one computer science course.

Computer science professor George Nagy agreed that more machines would alleviate the drain on resources caused by a tripling of computer science enrollment in recent years.

"We have not kept pace with very rapid changes in technology," Nagy said. "Students are using very old-fashioned machines that were made 20 years ago for business uses."

The present system is not useful for research either, he said. The situation in the computer science department this semester is "a disaster," he said.

The computer consultant for the agricultural economics department, Duane Jewell, said he does not use the system unless he is forced to.

The agricultural computer network uses a computer system at the Capitol rather than the university's system. Jewell said the Capitol's system is easier and more reliable.

"AGNET's users want the computer system to be up when they come in to use it," Jewell said. AGNET comprises users in several states who share agricultural information.

Jewell said it can be frustrating to use the university's NUROS system, which is used by students and researchers.

"It just seems like whenever I want to use NUROS, it's down," Jewell said.

Agriculture director Raun: UNL research important

"Farmers can expect tough times for at least another year," the new director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Robert Raun said. Raun, who took office in mid-January, was a member of the NU Board of Regents from 1966 to 1980.

"It (Nebraska's depressed agricultural economy) is affecting the whole state," Raun said. "When farming in Nebraska becomes prosperous, Nebraska will be prosperous."

While on the board, Raun was chairman of its subcommittee on agriculture in the mid-70s.

"My practical experience and experience with the regents fit in nicely with this (job)," he said.

Raun left his position as a regent because he said he thought he had been there long enough.

"I enjoyed it," he said, "but I sort of lost enthusiasm." Since then, he has been farming in Kearney and Sherman counties.

Development, management and preservation of water and natural resources "in the best interest of the state of Nebraska" are Raun's priorities as agricultural department director. He will work primarily as an agricultural adviser to Gov. Kerrey.

Raun emphasized UNL's role in Nebraska's agricultural development. He said farmers rely on research (generated by UNL) to keep up with technology in all aspects of farming, from production and management to marketing.

"I'd like to see all students be made more aware of what goes on on East Campus. There's a lack of information and understanding (between rural and urban students)," he said.

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