

Solutions to computer issues sought

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

By Mike Schmoldt

"For a number of reasons, both real and perceived, the credibility of the network is very low. The simplest example is that users do not believe the network can improve its services."

— from a report to NU President Ronald Roskens on computing services at the University of Nebraska.

UNL faculty and administrators are trying to find ways to improve a computer system that does not seem to satisfy anyone's needs completely.

A task force's report to UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale makes it clear how far behind the times UNL has fallen with

respect to computer uses in the classroom, and how expensive it will be to catch up.

"It should be recognized at the outset that providing state-of-the-art academic computing at UNL is not an immediately realizable goal and that even a modest goal of providing a nationally competitive level of computer literacy will require an investment of at least \$15 million in equipment and an annual operating budget of \$3.5 million to \$4 million," the report said.

Five different suggestions at the end of the report show how money might be spent on computer equipment according to five different funding levels, ranging from "the \$500,000 plan" to the "\$15 million plan."

Purchases suggested according to the former plan are limited to 135 computer terminals or microcomputers. According to

the latter plan, UNL might be able to buy 1,500 microcomputers costing \$4.8 million, eight minicomputers costing \$3.7 million, mainframe computers costing \$6 million and equipment for special computer users costing \$500,000.

Which plan is more realistic? The answer depends strictly on how successful UNL is in coming up with cash or a suitable substitute like debt financing.

Colorado State University has been successful in this area, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research, Earl Freise, said. UNL could get the computers it needs by asking the NU Foundation to sell either industrial or municipal bonds to raise money. The foundation would then lease the computer equipment to UNL, which would pay back under the lease agreement.

This kind of creative financing is one

way to raise the money that will be the key to success in updating the computer network, Freise said.

The other way is to increase the size of the computer services budget. That money would have to come from the Nebraska Legislature, a budget reallocation or grants, Freise said.

The more money obtained, the closer UNL will be to a goal identified by the chancellor's task force.

"The goal is for faculty and professional staff members on the Lincoln campus to have access to microcomputers or terminals in their offices," the report said. Students should have access to clusters of terminals in dormitories and classroom buildings so that they also will become familiar with computers, the report said.

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