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UPC

# Management of UNL's computers may be a job for private firm

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

By Mike Schmoltdt

Someday a private firm may manage UNL's computers, but that possibility is only one of several being considered by administrators who are planning for the future of UNL computing.

An executive memorandum signed last fall by NU President Ronald Roskens detailed plans for separating academic and administrative computing.

Don Leuenberger, special assistant for computing in the Office of Academic Affairs, was hired to help carry out the plans. He has been studying the overall NU computer system since he began work three weeks ago.

Howard Ottoson, executive vice president for academic affairs, said part of Leuenberger's job will be to see how much the university can improve the network without having a private firm take over the operation.

The option of hiring a private firm is "on the back burner," Ottoson said, but has not been discarded. Administrators last fall explored the possibility of a private firm helping to carry out the executive memorandum.

A Pennsylvania firm offered last fall to look at the

university's administrative computing.

UNL officials never agreed on the alternatives identified by the firm, Ottoson said, including whether to hire management before or after the split between academic and administrative uses takes place.

Alan Seagren, vice president for administration, said an advantage of hiring a private firm is that the firm could start immediately and possibly make improvements faster. One disadvantage is that an outside firm would not be familiar with the system, or its history - the local conditions that shaped the system.

Another disadvantage, Seagren said, is the possibility that some people in computing services would lose their jobs.

William Hemann, assistant vice president for administration, said the firm, if hired, would probably give current employees two to four months to "prove their worth."

Officials agree that the private firm option is in limbo, and it may stay there, if UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale takes the advice of his task force on academic computing.

Contracting with a private firm for management would probably involve a "significant increase in total cost," according to the task force's report.

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