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IRM Strategic Plan - USF St. Petersburg

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IRM Strategic Plan - USF St. Petersburg

Academic Services

The use of hardware, software and communication technologies in higher education is growing at an unprecedented pace. The demand for general, non-discipline-specific computer laboratories has exploded as Internet services and user friendly application software have become more popular. Several different methods of computer service delivery will be required in an attempt to keep pace with the general, non-discipline-specific demand for computer laboratories. Computer laboratories will transcend the walls that house traditional laboratories today. The past measurement of computers per student will now be based on many different methods of delivering computer services. These new deployment methods will rely on a solid communication infrastructure that will include the delivery of services to homes, dormitories, offices, classrooms, mobile commuters using wireless communications, ISDN, on-campus USFnet, University provided dial-in access and/or third-party Internet providers. New methods of delivery will require that some resources be redirected from traditional brick and mortar facilities to high speed file and compute servers, to recruiting and training "new age" technical staff and to massive communications infrastructure improvements.

Discipline-specific computing will be able to build on the infrastructure improvements described for the general, non-discipline-specific computer laboratories. However, there will be a few software applications that will not be suitable for wide area distribution due to high end client requirements or licensing restrictions. Computing laboratory facilities should be widely available on campus for the convenience of both faculty and students. The design criteria for the discipline-specific computing facilities must meet stringent guidelines for functionality and reliability. System integrity within instructional laboratory facilities is a key factor as there is only a minimal break between classes. If students in this environment disable equipment by attempting operations beyond the norm, the machines in this environment must be able to return to their original reliable state after a simple reboot. This level of equipment reliability will allow faculty members to focus on teaching rather than spending limited class time on trouble shooting equipment malfunctions.

As the campus network infrastructure expands, software licensing and methods of distribution will continue to evolve from manual installations on individual machines to server based distribution. The primary software distribution channel will be through file server technology. This will all but eliminate the need for staff to travel to user sites to install software on desktop devices. Server based distribution will help reduce the growth requirements for support staff and allow the University to keep pace with requests for the installation of new software. By reducing the cost of distributing software through the use of file servers and pooled licenses, the University will be able to make existing software available to a wider audience. University of South Florida currently has volume purchase agreements with several vendors. Additional commercial agreements will be consummated as they are determined to be economically feasible for the institution. Public domain software is at the other end of the licensing spectrum. It continues to be a major presence in the UNIX area, but its importance in the current Windows and MacOS desktop computing environment is growing. Since public domain software plays an important role in research and instruction, it must be stored and managed on University servers.

The key to successful instructional computing will depend on the implementation of culturally diverse processors. The term culture is used as a reference for a preferred operating system environment like MacOS or Solaris. Now more than ever before, technology dictates that specific hardware and software be purchased to meet predefined instructional goals. In the future this conventional wisdom will change as culturally diverse processors provide USF with the flexibility to adapt more rapidly to changes in the instructional computing arena. While many computer users embrace faster hardware without hesitation, they are reluctant to educate themselves in the use of a new operating system. Culturally diverse processors will furnish a solution to this problem by allowing a single desktop station to run numerous operating systems and associated applications. Faculty and students will be able to choose the operating environment that best fits their specific task without having to switch or replace equipment.

The USF St. Petersburg Computer Depot will play a key role in the delivery of information and communication technologies

for personal use by students, faculty and staff. Theoretically, students will purchase their own computers and this will relieve some of exponentially expanding demands placed by our growing student body on University open lab hardware facilities. As the cost of laptops declines, Campus Computer Services (CCS) will make additional docking stations in CCS laboratory facilities that will provide software, printing and enhanced video. As the speed of dial-in facilities increase, home-based CPUs will be able to access to commonly-used desktop software from University servers. All new residential structures will be equipped with the telecommunications infrastructure to connect commonly used computing devices with University servers.

Internet access and acceptance will continue to dominate information technology in the next five years. It offers unparalleled potential as a method to deliver interactive education at a lower cost. CCS, in collaboration with several academic departments, will be evaluating techniques to utilize Internet services to improve productivity in teaching (FTE). A series of objectives will be defined prior to full implementation of on-line courses. These objectives will include: security, availability and access, procedures, prerequisite requirements and the development of University policy regarding faculty workload effort for designing and teaching an on-line course. In addition, there is a growing interest among more faculty to integrate Internet access and use in their traditional course curriculum. As incorporation becomes more widely accepted, more faculty will want to integrate Internet skills in their course offerings which will result in a commensurable demand for training in this area.

Self-paced and distance learning programs at the University will grow rapidly as easy-to-use, inexpensive technology and information appliances are introduced. Traditional instruction will begin to evolve as class lecture notes are converted to electronic formats complete with audio-visual aids. Students will be able to access this information from home or office. In addition, cable TV providers will play a key role in the delivery of interactive lectures to an individual students home or dorm room. CD, BBS, listserv and web technology will provide all of the technical software documentation and traditional reference works previously available only in hard copy form.

Staff Development and Training

Staff development and end user training will become a vital part of CCS operations. The Faculty/Staff Training Center will start to build a core of scheduled courses as well as offering custom training for departments. Major vendors have released new versions of software packages compatible with Windows 9x, MacOS and Windows NT Operating systems. As a result, the demand for software applications training will continue to grow. The introduction of desktop SQL access to local datamarts and remote administrative databases for purposes of departmental and ad hoc reporting will necessitate extensive end-user training. Academic and administrative departments will require HTML and design courses to ensure that information on the Internet reflects the intellectual, professional and creative nature of the University.