Academic Senate Committee on Computing and Communications

Minutes of March 7, 2005 meeting

The Committee on Computing & Communications (COMP) met on Monday, March 7, 2005, at 3:00 p.m. in 3401 Dwinelle Hall. Co-Chairs Dave Messerschmitt and Arthur Ogus presided.

IN ATTENDANCE:
Dave Messerschmitt, IEOR, EECS, Co-chair
Arthur Ogus, Math, Co-chair
Robin Einhorn, History
Richard Kern, French
Ethan Ligon, ARE
Merrill Shanks, Political Science
Thomas Wickens, Psychology
Aaron Brick, Graduate Student

Moderators: David Messerschmitt and Arthur Ogus

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Approval of COMP Minutes

Dave outlined the concept of the "vanilla" standard and COMP's position on the new IT policies for the new member, Robin Einhorn. Introductions were made around the table and the new member was welcomed. Dave asked for review of the minutes from the December 16, 2004 meeting, and they were approved as submitted.

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Continuation of COMP service next year

Dave said the Senate asked for a statement from each member as to whether they would be willing to serve on the committee for the next semester, fall 2005.

Results were:
Richard Kern - unable to do so, due to being on leave.
Aaron Brick - graduates this spring
Arthur Ogus - sabbatical in the spring, will continue afterward
Dave Messerschmitt - will take on responsibility of chair in Arthur's absence
Ethan Ligon - yes Tom Wickens - yes Robin Einhorn - yes Merrill Shanks - yes, but will be gone part of the fall

Absent members will be asked via e-mail whether they are able to continue.

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Volunteer to serve on a new "IT governance, funding, and structure" committee

Dave said that two new campus committees have been formed recently; (1) the CIO search committee, to find a replacement for Jack McCredie who will retire this summer, and (2) the committee on IT governance,
which will take a look at structure and funding on campus.

He said that the IT governance committee would be chaired by Jud King, former UCB Provost, who was at UCOP for a number of years and now is back on campus as head of CSHE (Center for Studies in Higher Education). Dave said that Arthur and he agree it would be good to have a COMP member on committee. Ethan Ligon volunteered, and Merrill Shanks offered to serve as resource. Dave said he would now lobby to have COMP represented.

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Report on computer security (DM)

Dave was asked to present COMP's view on security measures to ITAC (Information Technology Architecture Committee), and he stressed in his presentation that many users don't want to be technicians - but just want to get their job done. He was also asked to give the same message at the e-Berkeley Steering Committee, chaired by Paul Gray. Bill Webster, Acting CFO, after hearing the "wish list" (software, secure server, key recovery for encryption, training, etc.), asked how much budget this would need. Dave replied that the budget had not been part of the picture at this stage, and it was agreed that several members of EBSC would put together an estimate and a budget request.

Arthur noted that at the CAPRA meeting Bill Webster reported that the biggest cut in the budget last year was in IT structure. It will be a high priority to recover from this. Tom Wickens added that it is important to get across that this is not a one-time project, and will need to be maintained. Dave agreed that this is a general dysfunctional way to fund IT on campus - there is no ongoing support for replacing or maintaining equipment.

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Committee response to "Proposed Policy on Use of Recordings of Course Presentations" (DM)

Dave sent out the draft policy to COMP members via email, and received several replies. Dave sits on the ITTP (systemwide IT policy committee) where this policy was discussed, and he pointed out at their meeting that the statement regarding "exceptions will be approved by the Chancellor" seemed to be prohibitive. Dave also thought that the phrase "faculty may use recordings" was ambiguous, and that "it may be necessary to secure rights from...third parties" too vague.

Merrill commented that he thought the policy intent was to curtail the rights of students and to preserve the rights of faculty to do whatever they wish with their material. Ethan was asked to express his objection to the policy, and he said he thinks the UC policy on copyright applies, and that paragraph B.(1) takes away rights from faculty to determine how course materials are used, and the rights of students to use their materials. After discussion, it seemed that the committee recommended the words "and the Chancellor" be removed from the policy, and that the policy needs more work. The privacy issue was raised as well, with Arthur pointing out that students are captured on classroom video and that it "may be necessary" to secure
permission from those participants.

Dave and Arthur agreed to work on a statement. Dave took a vote from COMP members on a scale with one end being that the policy is "flawed and should be abolished" and on the other that it is acceptable with "and the Chancellor" removed. Four members voted for "flawed" and four for striking "and the Chancellor" from paragraph B.

Review of proposed changes to the "Electronic Communications Policy"

Dave said the proposed changes are technical in nature, and he listed them as follows:
a) anything done in the conduct of university business is public information, and may be disclosed. For example, an attachment to an email related to his role as Professor is public record;
b) when students communicate as students their communication is not public information, but when they become student employees they work under the same conditions as staff or faculty;
c) previously the university prohibited encryption, because information could be lost through loss of the encryption key, but now are encouraging encryption for communications and data storage "where appropriate".

Arthur asked whether the university would want the encryption codes available through a "back door". Dave added that this should apply to communication that the university "owns" rather than a staff/faculty personal communication.

Dave said he is concerned about the possibility of criminal intent in encrypting data, and also the practical problems with secure transmission of shared encryption keys. Dave said there are no encryption procedures on campus, and that data can be lost through loss of the encryption key. The campus should provide a secure means of encryption and storing encryption keys.

It was generally concluded that this was an update of the ECP with regard to the first two changes, and that the only substantive change was with regard to encryption.

Finalize statement of committee position on desired "vanilla desktop environment for faculty and GSIs" (AO)

Arthur handed out a paper he prepared on "Centralized Computing Support". Dave gave some background on this issue from the December meeting, where there was some enthusiasm for the idea that the university should provide every faculty member and GSI with a reasonable desktop environment in order to fulfill their teaching responsibilities.

Dave believes that the justification for the idea lies in the instructional mission, which is being paid for by the state, whereas Arthur feels that the need for a good desktop environment for research is equally important. Arthur said he tried to bring out both positive aspects and some doubts on the subject, mainly in the area of releasing control of computing decisions. There was some
discussion about individual preferences for computing platforms, and it was generally agreed that the offer didn't have to be accepted (department could buy its own computer), and that there should be at least three vanilla platforms available.

Dave said he could see two main issues (1) the digital divide - there needs to be more equity across campus with regard to computing environment, and (2) reducing administrative costs and improving security by moving toward more homogeneity. Robin asked whether there was information on the state of IT in academic departments, and Merrill explained the survey that was initiated last spring to collect data on departmental computing. Robin replied that it is very difficult to get things done in her department due to equipment/software problems. Rick Kern said that research money is used for upgrades, but this money can't be used for instructional purposes. There needs to be a definition of who is eligible for vanilla, and each department needs to have a computer.

Ethan recalled a program where a certain amount of money was given to faculty to spend on computing as they wish. Dave brought up the idea that there could be more use of servers rather than equipment on the desktop - and the vanilla desktop environment could be more acceptable for research use in that case.

Merrill summarized the points under discussion as follows:
1) How many environments - 3 rather than 1
2) Dollars provided for computing or centrally provided computing environment
3) If not centralized, how can we gain homogeneity?
4) Server-side computing vs fat computer on desktop
5) How big is big?

Robin asked whether a welfare program or entitlement was being discussed. Would this program only be for those who need help, or would the support be provided equally across all departments? Tom answered that the discussion up to this point has been to define how the "vanilla" standard should look, not how the money would be divided among departments. Ethan made the point that some departments could provide more system administration and handle more powerful machines, thereby equalizing the situation.

Dave said there needs to be some consensus on the objectives of the discussion. Is the goal to achieve more homogeneity, or to address the digital divide, for example. Dave asked what members think is the top priority among all the issues under consideration. Several think it is the desktop environment. Arthur asked whether there are major problems with the document he prepared, and there were some comments about the definition of platforms. Dave suggested that a menu of choice be included: minimal level of vanilla would be free, and two higher options would be offered as well. He thinks this would combine the issue of homogeneity with the digital divide.

Merrill said that initiatives for this year's budget would be proposed by IST in the near future, and he proposed that he put this issue on the list to get it on the table. He would recommend a pilot program to test the viability of the program.

Dave added that COMP could come up with a statement regarding this
that would be influential. Ethan said he would add the option to provide money instead of the basic vanilla standard to ensure that those who don't want it aren't discriminated against. Further points were made regarding research vs instructional computing support and alternate models of centralized support.

Dave concluded that there was enough material under discussion to support another version of Arthur's paper.

The meeting was adjourned at 5 p.m.

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Recorder: spress@berkeley.edu
Committee Web Page: http://www.eecs.berkeley.edu/~messer/Campus/COMP/