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Information Services Annual Report, 1997-98

Bates College

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**Annual Report
1997-1998
Information Services**

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Initial Goals:

- Upgrades:
 - Mithras, Abacus (second set of upgrades)
 - Public computer labs (keeping labs consistent across campus)
 - Electronic classrooms (upgrade capabilities in selected rooms)
 - Faculty and staff computers (replace lowest level equipment)
- Support for collaborative grants with Bowdoin and Colby Mellon I and II
- Expansion of training options for curricular support and administrative Improved access to Help information using the WWW
- Development of the HelpDesk's process for tracking calls
- Improvement of the support process for HelpDesk calls
- Continued improvement of the software user interface
- Upgrades to productivity software (new Meeting Maker, R&D on e-mail and collaboration applications)
- Implement secure Web server
- Plan for back-ups (increase automation, capacity and speed of back-ups on Unix & network servers)
- Upgrade Internet connection speed to full T1 (1.54Mbps) from 384kbps
- Plan for year 2000
- Support for and production of BatesCard
- Continued implementation of Banner product
- Planning for new Academic Building
- CWIS Team
- Expand and reassign staff within IS
- Assist in strengthening AV program
- Improve communication within IS
- Development and revision of policies
- Evaluate and strengthen budgeting process
- Design and develop a Project management process

Major Accomplishments:

- Abacus' memory and disk capacity were increased due to the increased demand for personal storage, additional email traffic and more web pages being published on campus.
- The instruction room in Ladd has become a highly used room for teaching and student work. A new high resolution projector was installed in order to accommodate more complex presentations. Treat, Carnegie, Libbey, and Coram have been completely upgraded to pentiums and higher powered Macs.
- The Language lab continues to be a highly used teaching room in addition to a student work area.
- The effort to bring faculty to a level of machine which can utilize the network resources is making good progress. This year, 42 faculty computers were upgraded and 20+ were added for new faculty. Many staff computers have been upgraded to meet increased data, software, and network demands.
- In conjunction with Library faculty liaisons, training staff have continued offering more individual faculty training as well as curricular support for technology and the concepts needed by students. More classes have been offered to administrative offices to meet specific needs and new staff orientation training is underway. We have reorganized the help information on the WWW and are increasing the self help options. A group with representatives from all IS groups has been working on the IS web area. The group is now in the process of defining what help pages to maintain on the web, and how they should be organized. The group also hopes to make the pages key word searchable. The reorganized pages should be available by the time the students return to campus in the fall.
Training has held approximately 200 classes, some by faculty request and during class time. About 2000 students, faculty, and staff have participated in the IS training sessions.
- The HelpDesk has worked closely with repair and support to make response time better and more responsive to users' needs. Since late Fall, we have averaged less than ten open HelpDesk calls at any given time. The total number of logged calls (questions that are answered immediately are not logged) for the period between September 1997 and June 1998 was 1,678, up about 25 percent from the previous year. Phone calls coming into the HelpDesk for the same period totaled 11,976, up about 10 percent from the previous year.
Of the 1,678 logged calls:
 - 523 were classified under the main heading of hardware
 - 524 were classified under the main heading of software
 - 229 were classified under the main heading of network
 - 402 were classified under the miscellaneous headings
- The software integration group has made more improvements to the installation process for and access to network software. This is making it much easier to maintain labs, and offer new versions and new software to faculty, staff, and students.
- A secure Web server has been implemented in order to meet a wide variety of application needs. This server is a core requirement of the future deployment of the Web Banner products and other secure transactions.
- Additional backup automation procedures were implemented in order to ease the personnel time needed to run the backups.
- Access to the Internet for the network is provided by BBN Planet in Cambridge, Mass. A T-1 line running at full speed has become fully used. BBN has removed their internet access from Portland, ME. Due to this increased cost of service we evaluated alternative vendors for Internet access and selected AT&T (which is also the College long distance telephone provider) Additional Internet bandwidth is being explored as a result of some of the work being done for the Mellon II project.

- Information Services has taken a preliminary look at major hardware and software in use by the College and at this time sees little or no impact for year 2000 issues. Many individually owned products exist on campus and IS urges owners to investigate their potential problems themselves. IS also urges anyone dealing with software and data from off campus sources to investigate whether those sources will create problems. IS has recommended that the facilities management personnel investigate all chip related control systems at the College for potential year 2000 problems. A more rigorous discussion or project may need to occur during fiscal '99 to ensure that all effects on the College have been reviewed. ISMT has met with the VP for Finance, outlining these issues.
- BatesCard production continued to operate successfully in accordance with specifications for the first phase of implementation. Additionally, IS worked with Dining Services and the Housing Office to define and implement an effective process for tracking students who are legitimately on campus for the Short Term.
- During fiscal '98, fully implemented systems of Banner (Student, Alumni, Finance, Financial Aid) are effectively operational. Cyclical processes for Student and Financial Aid systems that ran for the first time required some support from IS but were essentially successful. Work on the implementation of the Human Resources module has continued through the year with establishment of the project team, associated working groups, and Personnel staff training.
- Banner was successfully upgraded to version 2.1.x in November of '97 with concerted involvement from both IS and the end user community.
- A Banner Users Group was established to act as an advisory group to IS. The group advises IS in assigning priorities to projects and individual task assignments associated with Banner. The group is comprised of the major administrative offices using Banner and allows each of the offices to voice their project concerns, listen to the concerns of others, and make recommendations for implementation based on the relative importance to the College as a whole.
- IS has spent significant time participating in the planning group for the New Academic Building. This effort has expanded into the building phase of the project. IS involvement extends to many areas of the project in addition to the voice and data network infrastructure.
- A new staff member was hired for the HelpDesk. Relocation of current staff to new positions within IS, particularly in systems and sales has been a positive change aiding our ability to accomplish goals and provide good service. The Management Team reallocated management responsibility of the sales and service area twice--assigning it first to John, and on his departure from the College, to Linda. We are now in a position to integrate sales, service and support functions in a closely coordinated way.
- We have been having facilitated, biweekly staff meetings to focus on major impact and trouble areas for software, support, etc. Members of the Library have also participated. These meetings have been extremely productive and have greatly aided internal communication about complex issues.
- ISMT has been working on existing issues for AV support. A plan for hiring two staff has been approved and is being implemented this summer.
- A User Support policy has been developed to meet changing needs. The policy clarifies IS's role for support of home computers.
- ISMT has met with the new VP for Finance as a first step in continuing to improve our budgeting process.
- ISMT is working on implementing a project management methodology. Information Services, working with its customers, has developed a requirements list for the process. The logical design has been developed and reviewed. Future steps include physically designing the process, reviewing the design, constructing, implementing and testing the process. This process will be integrated with the strategic planning process we will undertake in the coming year.
- Renovations to the 110 Russell facility were completed this spring. The new design provides a professional and effective sales and service area, better security for sales inventory, and improved meeting space within the building.

- IS investigated and is ready to implement the outsourcing the repair of personal computers in order to better utilize our staff resources in other areas.
- Major rework was required to the voice and data cable plant in order to allow for the construction of the New Academic Building. Virtually 80% of the trunk cables had to be replaced or relocated out of the old maintenance center.
- Bates was listed at #89 in the “Yahoo Internet Life” rating of the top 100 wired campuses in the US. Though this report uses dubious or unclear survey methodology, it is nice to be noticed.
- IS continues to attempt to be involved early in the planning of facility changes. This is not always accomplished but continues to improve.
- Major work was done for voice and data in the new coffee house and Ladd Library.
- Major effort is being put in by various IS staff members in support of the Mellon II project.

Issues in Progress:

IS continues to work towards becoming an organization with low hierarchy and increased individual and collaborative participation in decision making.

The Bates culture is being transformed by changes that cause us to live and breathe in an internally and externally connected environment. We continue to rethink ourselves in these new terms. Many issues have now been elevated to the institutional level (security of information, access to data, freedom of speech in electronic form). Although this debate is not easy, the institution has engaged in many important and continuing discussions that are leading to change.

IS has been involved in the visioning process that the college is going through. The setting of consistent priorities with those of the college is critical to our wise use of resources and meaningful ongoing planning.

Obstacles:

- Staff turnover, especially within the Management Team, has affected the entire department.
- The obstacle of dispersed physical locations for the IS groups continues to have significant negative consequences for the IS organization. The kind of creative thinking that results from continuous, casual contact among staff with different skills does not naturally occur. ISMT attempts to promote opportunities, like the biweekly staff meetings and the IS-Forum listserv, that foster free flow of information, but they are no substitute for face-to-face regular contact. Collocation of the staff would help communicate the concept that IS is one organization, and would help us build the flexibility we need to meet the College’s needs.
- Significant demands are being placed on the organization to provide more and more support for a growing world of diverse products and conflicting needs. There are also requests to provide extended hours of direct coverage, including an operations function. We have not been able to allocate staff to accommodate these requests without serious degradation of service during business hours.
- Although the movement of staff from Integrated Applications to positions in Infrastructure and Sales and Services filled critical needs in the Russell Street offices, it has put a significant load on the staff left to support the growing demands associated with Banner operations. Efforts are being made to identify and accommodate the highest priority items, but the solicitations for work increase daily and current staffing levels cannot accommodate all needed requests.
- IS has a number of employees with back, carpal tunnel, and other health issues that make moving heavy equipment and/or doing repetitive tasks difficult to impossible. We are working with Eric

and Judy in Personnel to make accommodations. We are in a position of having to hire temporary employees to get the needed jobs done.

Plans for 1998-1999:

- Banner

There will be several items of focus with the Banner product for the 98-99 year. 1. Continued implementation of the Human Resource module scheduled to be brought into production July '99. 2. Conversion to the next major release of Banner. 3. Implementation of the new WEB modules for Banner. 4. Reiterative visits to each major module for tweaking, training, report writing required during subsequent years of operation. 5. Planning for a data warehousing strategy. 6. Planning for an imaging solution. 7. Planning for the "GUI" release of Banner scheduled for Fiscal 2000.

- Upgrades

Upgrades to servers and networks to support WEB enabled products from Banner will be needed. By the end of summer, all members of the Faculty will have machines that can take advantage of network resources. The network will need to be redesigned to take into account increased use as well as new technologies such as video conferencing.

- Staff Training

Introduction to programming and design tools for a WEB enabled version of the Banner product (eg. HTML, JAVA, DEV2k, etc.). Training of the staff in Oracle database administration, Oracle version 8, Unix, report writing tools, Perl scripting, and Oracle to third party interfaces. Training for staff to be able to lead projects and work more collaboratively.

- Strategic Planning and Operational Plan

ISMT created a plan about two years ago and now we need to link operations and project management in a logical way. We expect the President to initiate a planning effort to revise the plan and integrate it with Goals 2005 planning. Operational planning will be linked to the new strategic plan.

- CBB Collaboration and Video Conferencing

IS will be working with Bowdoin and Colby to take advantage of grant opportunities for collaborative work in the languages as well as video conferencing options for each of the campuses.

- Improved Communication with Users

IS will be working to involve more faculty, staff, and students in our strategic planning as well as in how we provide day to day operations and services. A new advisory committee structure has been proposed to the Faculty which will help meet these needs.

- Planning for New Academic Building

Additional planning efforts for the NAB will continue to require IS resources. The efforts will include voice & data wiring system design, classroom technology design, and video conferencing possibilities.

- Planning for Year 2000

ISMT will make a determination about Year 2000 planning as a project.

- Banner Upgrades

Oracle 7.3.3.x, Banner 3.0, and Web are all on the slate for the next year. Planning for GUI implementation and Oracle 8 upgrades for Fiscal 2000 implementation will occur. The use of Banner will change with the possibilities the updated versions bring.

- Ladd Phase II implementation will be completed.
- Additional internet access bandwidth will be needed.
- Redesign and implement new network dial-up facilities.
- Redesign network structure to support the additional demands for service and for support of NAB.
- Implement Mellon II facilities and workshops.
- Redesign and implement HelpDesk and AV operational merger.
- Revise student worker positions within IS.