M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Ronald Sudol, Associate Provost

FROM: Yang Xia, Chair of the Senate Academic Computing Committee

DATE: April 24, 2006

Subject: 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Academic Computing Committee

Members of the Academic Computing Committee (ACC): Catheryn Cheal, James Dow, Subramaniam Ganesan, John Halpin, Anne Hitt, Mark Iskden, Marshall Kitchens, Elysa Koppelman, Jennifer Law-Sullivan, Gary Moore, George Preisinger, Theresa Rowe, Ron Srodawa, Ishwar Sethi, Robert Slater, Yang Xia (Chair). (Gary Moore was the Acting Chair for the Fall 05 semester when I was on sabbatical.)

During the 2005-2006 academic year, the Committee accomplished a number of activities. These included the recommendation of transition Oakland University's Learning Management System from WebCT to an open-source product, Moodle. In addition, we discussed the faculty survey that was completed by this Committee during its last year concerning classroom technology available at OU. The Committee recognized that the survey has brought some important actions on the part of the university - namely the recognition that the classroom technology needs frequent updating. We also saw a trend for faculty to be more willing to use and explore the use of newer technologies to enhance classroom teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the Committee received a network update from Brian Paige in IT. He discussed the current network diagnostic programs that were available as well as future plans for potential restructuring of the network.

There was some discussion about various university web pages from individual departments and offices at OU. At the present time, these web pages are designed by whoever available to the individual academic unit. While some of the web pages are well designed and easy to use, some others are cumbersome to use (from the end user's point of view). In addition, since these web pages were developed on various software packages, keeping the web pages supported could be an issue when the system/server upgrade is necessary or when a security loophole is discovered. Although the Committee reached no final resolution on this issue, we saw the benefits of selecting a small set of web-developing software packages at our campus and seeking a wider input from the

end-users before the web pages go public. Perhaps the next committee can further pursue this issue.

The major activity of this committee during this academic year was the in-depth discussion of WebCT and its possible replacement, which led to the final recommendation of Moodle for Oakland University. As we know, WebCT announced in October 2005 that it was being bought out by Blackboard. In January 2006, WebCT reported that our current version (4.1) would no longer be fully supported by the company past June 2007. This is in spite of the fact that the new combined Blackboard / WebCT product will not be out for 3 to 5 years. If we were to upgrade to the enterprise version of WebCT Vista for the intervening 3 years -- a complete change necessitating Oracle servers, new Oracle personnel, more licenses -- there would be no guarantee that the new combined product would continue in that direction or that it would suit our needs.

Due to the wide-ranging effect of this decision (Currently, 527 courses and 268 faculty use WebCT at OU), the Committee started a preliminary discussion at our October / November 2005 meetings as we knew the news, and examined several possible strategies and replacements including an open-source product, Moodle, from December 2005 through February 2006. Several members of the Committee and some faculty piloted the Moodle accounts and used it in their classes (we had 21 faculty trying out Moodle as of January 2006). After Cathy Cheal gave a final analysis of various options and budget projection, the Committee voted and unanimously passed a recommendation on February 17, 2006, to transition Oakland University's Learning Management System from WebCT 4.1 to Moodle, possibly implementing Moodle starting from the summer of 2006.

If the University endorses our recommendation, we will gain freedom to alter the (open-source) program's code to suit our own campus, campus control over when and what versions to upgrade, lack of license restrictions about use, and lower cost (*the potential saving over a five-year period could be over one million dollars*).

The Committee had a productive year. As the Chair of this Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of the 2005-2006 members of the Committee for their outstanding contributions to these important tasks, in particular to thank Gary Moore for his willingness to serve as the Acting Chair during my sabbatical. I look forward to working with all of the members of the Committee again in the near future.