MEMORANDUM

TO: Virinder Moudgil
Provost
Chair of the University Senate
Chair of the University Senate Steering Committee

FROM: Gary Moore, Chair, Academic Computing Committee

DATE: April 9, 2004

Subject: 2003-2004 Annual Report of the Academic Computing Committee

Members of the Academic Computing Committee: Gary Moore (Chair), Celina Byers, Cindy Sifonis, George Preisinger, James Dow, Kieran Mathieson, Marshall Kitchens, Megha Nelakonda, Robert Slater, Ronald Srodawa, Theresa Rowe, Zissimos Mourelatos.

During this academic year, the Academic Computing Committee (ACC) accomplished a number of activities. These included discussion of potential solutions for the replacement of the campus-wide test scoring system due to expire on July 1, 2004, further development of a database for the storage and dissemination of research software across the university, and a discussion of centrally maintained site licenses for major statistical software. In addition to these activities, the committee received updates on the state of network and desktop security, as well as receiving additional information on copyright issues of special importance to university faculty, staff, and administration.

The current centralized scanning equipment and test-scoring software is due to be taken off-line on July 1, 2004. The ACC was concerned about the impact this would have on both the availability of test scores to students in a timely manner and the excess burden this would place on faculty to find alternative methods of scoring tests for large undergraduate sections of introductory classes. It was decided that a central solution to this problem would be more cost-effective and efficient than a decentralized approach. The Scantron Corporation was invited to present their products for test-scoring to a group of interested faculty, staff and administration in November, 2003. The other major competitor in this market, NCS Pearson, was also invited to present their product to the university community, but a meeting was unable to be arranged in a timely manner. The outcome of this activity was a proposal for the use of student computer fees for the initial purchase and continuing maintenance of Scantron equipment and software. This proposal was submitted to the Provost on March 26, 2004.

During the 2002-2003 academic year, the ACC, together with the Information Technology (IT) department, developed a web-based database that would allow individuals and departments across the campus to enter software from their area or department specifically used for research activities. System development on this database was completed at the end of the 2002-2003 academic year. However, the system for the introduction and maintenance of the database were undeveloped at that time. The ACC took up the issue related to the further development of this project during the current academic year. The committee populated the database with a number of pieces of software from across a number of campus departments. Once the potential of this database to facilitate information sharing and software inventory management across campus was recognized by the ACC, an email inviting its further use and development was sent to the Provost in January, 2004. It is suggested that the 2004-2005 ACC continue with the development of this program and work with central administration to develop strategies for its deployment.

The issue of central licensing for Statistical software was discussed extensively by the ACC throughout the 2003-2004 academic year. A variety of statistical programs, both proprietary and open-source, were discussed in committee. Although there was no resolution to this issue, consensus was reached that some central solution to this important problem was feasible if funding for the requisite site-licenses could be found. It is important that the ACC continue to work on finding innovative solutions to this problem during the next academic year.

Finally, a number of educational efforts were undertaken that assisted members of the ACC to understand security and legal issues important in the campus environment. The IT department presented information on the state of both network and desktop security. These presentations resulted in valuable exchanges between IT and members of the ACC that were then shared within the various departments and schools represented on the committee. In addition, a webcast of a legal presentation on copyright issues was shared with the committee to bring the members of the group up to date in this increasingly important area.

The committee had a very productive year. As chair of the ACC, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of the members of the 2003-2004 ACC for their outstanding contributions to these important tasks. In addition, I would also recognize the important contribution of the IT department to the overall success of the activities of this committee. I look forward to working with all of the members of the committee again in the near future.