

2009 Department of Linguistics Computer Survey Results

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Introduction

At the end of July 2009 the Computer Committee sent out a survey about computer usage and other issues that have recently arisen. All graduate students (PhD & MA) were sent the survey (Appendix A) through the LGCU mailing list. 33 of the 55 students responded (a 60% return rate).

Additionally, a modified survey (Appendix B) was sent to incoming graduate students (new PhDs not currently in the MA & new MAs). 6 of 10 responded (60% return rate).

The main survey was divided into 6 parts. The first and longest part asked questions about the Triangle Room computers' usage. The second part involved the wireless Rob6 network. The third part asks about printing in the department. The next section asked about what kind of computer related workshops students might be interested in. Section 5 asked students about software and hardware requests. The last section allowed students to write any further comments about computing in the department.

The incoming students' survey was much shorter. Students were asked if they would be using the backroom computers and what OS they would be using. Students were then asked about their software/hardware and workshop requests. Lastly, students were asked to estimate how often they will print in the department, and what proportion of their printing they will do in the department.

The next section of this report will contain the results of all of the questions. Where applicable, the comments left by the students follow the results.

The final section of this report will list the Computer Committee's recommendations that have come from the results of this survey.

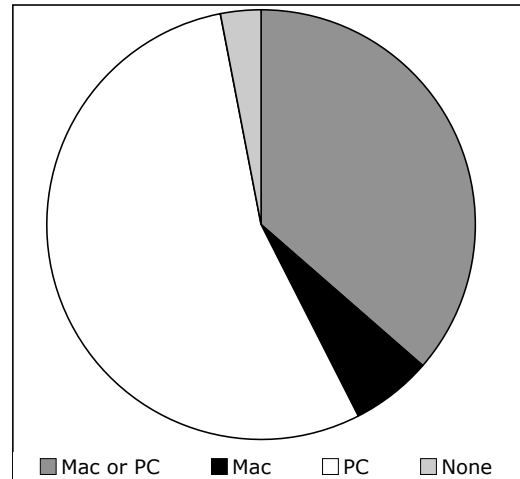
Results

Backroom computers

Question 1a asked students if they use the Triangle Room (TR) computers and, if so, what operating system they tend to use.

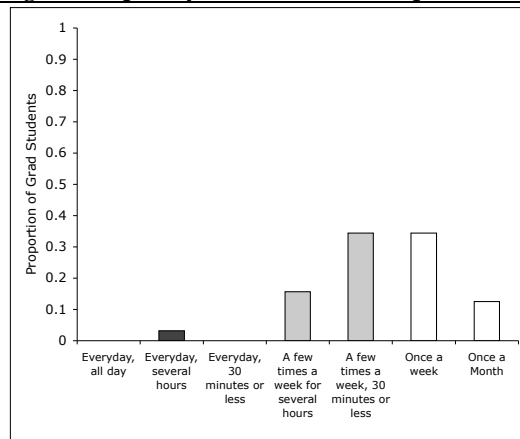
The results are presented in Figure 1. Only one student of the 33 who responded has never used the computers. The majority only use the PCs and some use both Macs and PCs. Only a few only ever use the Macs. (Note that this data does not indicate usage by OS for students' personal laptops or home computers, this is only usage by OS for the Triangle Room computers.)

Fig. 1: TR Computer usage by OS



Question 1b asked students how often they use the TR computers. Fig. 2 presents the results.

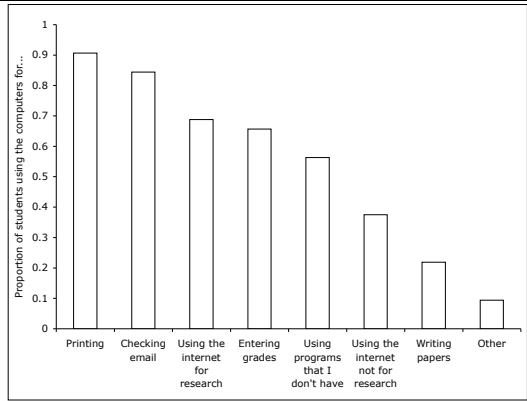
Fig 2: Frequency of use of TR Computers



Only one student uses the computers everyday for several hours at a time. The light grey bars on Figure 2 indicate the students who use the computers a few times a week while the white bars indicate students who use the TR computers less than that.

Question 1c asked students what they use the TR Computers for. Figure 3 presents the results. The top use of the TR computers is for printing (90+% of students print) followed by casually checking email. More than 60% of students use the computers for internet research and entering grades.

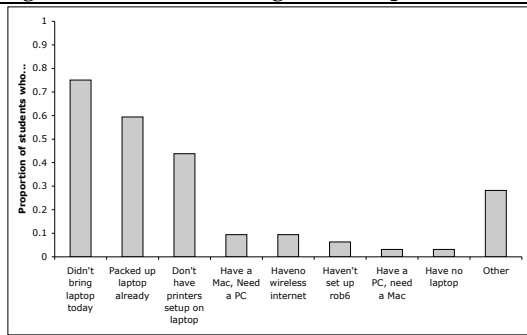
Fig 3: How are the computers being used?



55% use the computers because they have programs that students don't have on their personal computers. Less frequency uses are using the internet for fun and writing papers. The other category here includes department library related issues and the need to use a different OS.

Question 1d asks students why they use the TR computers. Fig 4. presents the results.

Fig 4. Reasons for using TR Computers



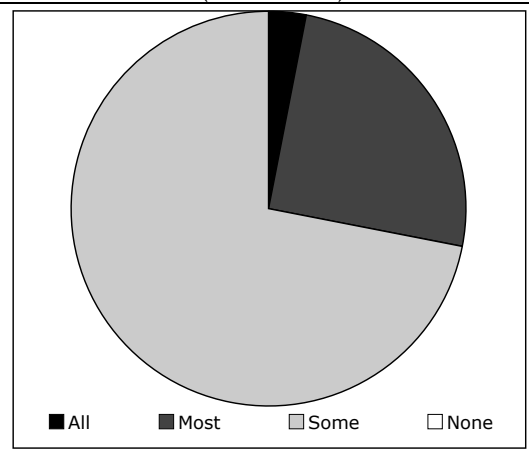
The most popular reason that people use the TR computers is because they have laptops but don't bring them to the department everyday (75%). Similarly, many students use the computers when they have already packed up their laptop for the day (about 60%). Nearly 50% of students do not have the printers set up on their laptops. A smaller number do not

have wireless internet or Rob6 set up on their laptops. A few need to use a different operating system. Only one student does not have a laptop. Other reasons for using the TR Computers include:

- I didn't have print capabilities until November so I was using the backroom to print a lot in the first semester.
- Entering grades is easier with a mouse.
- Only on a rare occasion when I can't perform a task on my own computer.
- Library files are on one of the computers.
- Doing something on my laptop, which I do everyday, and my laptop gets cranky (low battery etc.), and "I just need to print the damn thing" [sic]
- More comfortable to use a desktop
- Using programs (FileMakerPro)

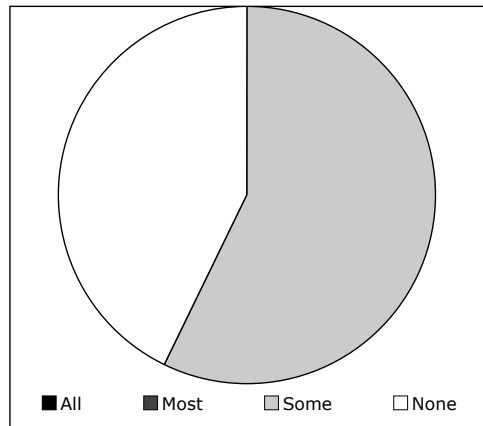
Questions 1e and 1f were designed to assess the traffic in the backroom. 1e is a two-part question that asks, on average, when using the TR Computers during the Fall and Spring semesters, how many of the computers are in use between 9 to 5 and after hours. Figures 5 and 6 present the results respectively.

Fig 5. How many computers are being used in the backroom (9:00 to 5:00)



On average, the computer room is always in use 9 to 5 Monday to Friday. However, the vast majority say that only some of the computers are being used.

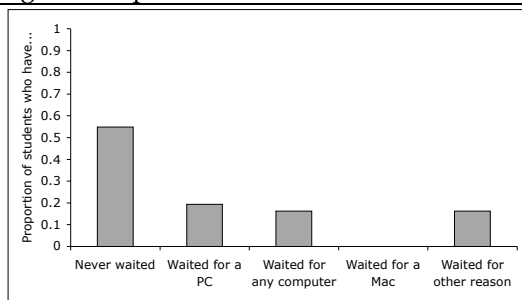
Fig. 6 How many computers are being used in backroom (After hours)



After hours the TR computers are used less. However, more than 50% of students would say that some of the computers are being used after hours.

Question 1 f asked explicitly if students have waited for TR computers. Figure 7 presents the results.

Fig 7. Computer room traffic



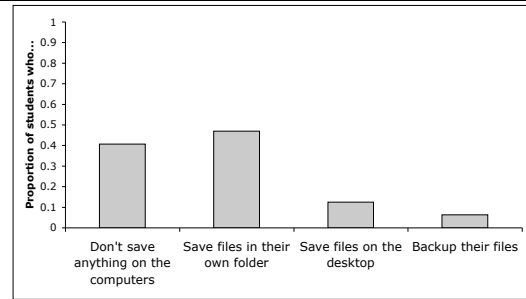
A majority have never waited. About a quarter have waited because all PCs were being used and about quarter have waited because no computer was available. Other reasons that students have waited include:

- Waiting for computer on which I had saved something.
- SPSS is only on one computer and we were taking a course using SPSS, so there were conflicts in time of use available.
- There was nobody there but there were some files left open, so I thought I needed to wait for that person to come and close those files so I could use that PC... Even sometimes you can see mailboxes left open for hours with no

one at the desk... so we do not know if it is okay to use that PC or not.

- Only one computer has SPSS.
- Never in the summer.
- Because a program was installed on a particular computer.

Fig 8. What's being saved on the computers?



Question 1g asks about where/what's being saved on the TR computers. Figure 8 presents the results.

Most people who save work on the computers save their work in their own folder. 40% don't save anything on the TR computers. A few save to the desktop and a few backup their files.

Question 1h asked about what maintenance students run on the TR Computers. Only 6 students report running maintenance. What they do includes:

- Mac Updates
- On occasion I've run Microsoft Office autoupdate to make sure office has the latest security patches.
- Office and OS updates on the Mac if I'm going to be there long enough and no one is using the machines. Maybe once a month.
- Virus scan on my USB key to ensure I'm not giving the computer a virus.
- Sometimes run Windows update on a PC or two, Norton Anit-Virus, update Firefox, occasionally run software updates on the Macs.
- Ran Anti-Virus on some computers, updated Word, cleaned up recycle bins, maintained some hardware like mice and keyboards, etc.
- Firefox, ZoneAlarm Firewall, Spybot, Basic Windows update
- Virus scan

Interestingly, 5 of the 6 students who run maintenance use the computers no more than once a week, some less.

The last question about the TR Computers is about the condition of the peripherals (mice, keyboards etc.). Students were asked to rate the peripherals on a five point scale in which a rating of 5 means excellent and a rating of 1 means terrible. The mean rating was 3.5. Most students gave a rating of 3. The highest rating was 5 (N = 1). The lowest rating was 2 (N = 2). Students were also asked to comment on the peripherals. Their responses were:

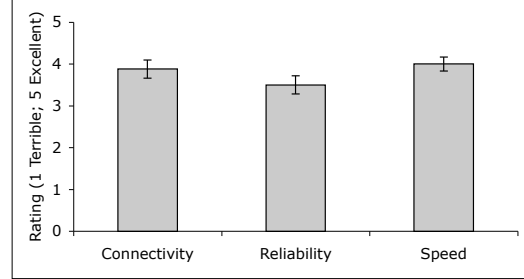
- Missing mice. Got stolen and whatnot.
- Some aren't working properly.
- Keyboards are dirty/stick.
- They're usually good for what I need to do although maybe some of the mice (roller balls) need to be cleaned.
- The keyboards should be cleaned.
- Sometimes they get dingy and then well-meaning grad students clean them.
- One Mac has a gross keyboard.
- Mice and keyboards seem fine.
- Not sure I like the display (stretched) on the screen of the PC that still has Word 2003.
- They are disgustingly dirty (especially keyboards). I've cleaned two myself but they are dirty again in a month.
- The mice and keyboards are really dirty and the users should clean them occasionally.
- Grungy keyboards.
- Keyboard for iMac, some of the keys stick.
- The MacMini's mouse was missing last time I was in.
- The mouse of the PC between them (iMac and MacMini) works but the mouse wheel doesn't. This could be a software problem though.
- Keyboards and mice are very dirty.
- Some mice seem to be breaking down.

Rob6 network

The next section of the survey asks students about the Rob6 wireless network in the department. Students were asked to rate

connectivity, reliability and speed on the same 5 point scale as above. 25 students responded to this section. Figure 9 presents the results.¹

Fig 9. How is would you rate Rob6?



The mean ratings for the three parameters are 3.9, 3.5, and 4 for connectivity, reliability, and speed respectively. The most common ratings were 5, 4, and 4. The highest ratings were 5 (N = 9), 5 (N = 2), and 5 (N = 7). The lowest ratings were 2, (N = 3), 1 (N = 1) and 2 (N = 1). Students were also asked to make comments. Comments included:

- It's annoying when CHASS cuts us off.
- Reliability is the biggest issue: the network has been very often shut down, often for several days or what seemed like as much as a week. This makes it very difficult to do work in the department, and is extremely inconvenient.
- Rob6 network was not accessible to me for the first 1.5 semesters even after trying to set it up, so the backroom computers were often my only way to access the internet and print documents. It was not until an IT employee from CHASS worked on my laptop for a couple hours that the network finally worked for me.
- Haven't used it much but never had any problems with it.
- It seems to have had a few problems this year—i.e. not working—and it's really vital to me. I think we should protect and enhance it at all cost.
- I have an Ethernet connection at my desk so I don't general use the wireless connection. I haven't bothered to set up the wireless connection mainly because I'm under the impression that it is often

¹ Error bars represent 95% confidence.

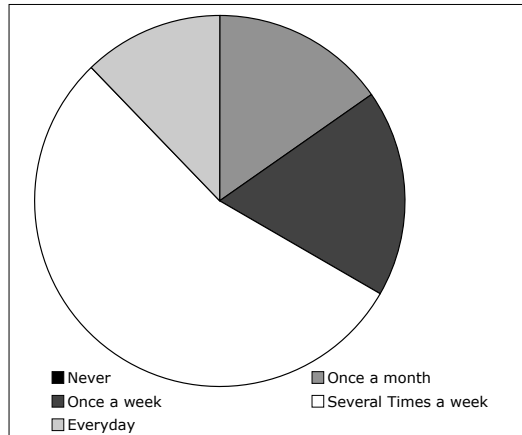
down, whereas the Ethernet connection is very stable. But this is just my impression. I haven't really used the wireless network so I can't really speak from experience.

- Please keep the wireless network set to broadcast itself. Due to a Mac OS update last year, it's very problematic to connect to wireless routers that are set as hidden or not broadcasting. Takes the computer forever to notice the network.
- Signal strength and connectivity might be better if we set up two routers on opposite ends of the spectrum (one on channel 1; another on channel 11).
- Perhaps it's time to install another wireless router.
- There are definitely problems with connectivity in certain areas, seems to be especially by the windows?

Printing

This section regards printing in the department. The first question of this section asks students how often they print in the department. Figure 10 presents the results.

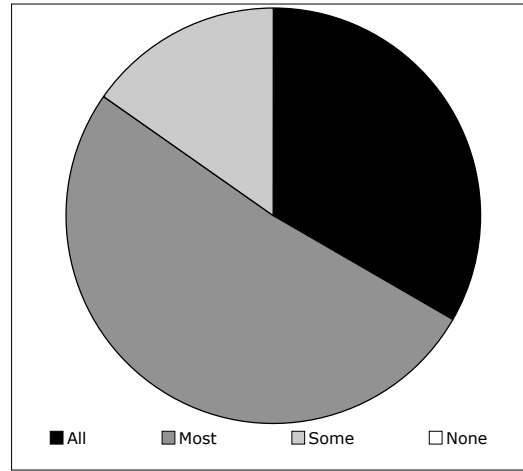
Fig 10. How often are students printing?



The majority of students print several times a week, some even print everyday. Just over a quarter of students print once a week or less though no one doesn't print in the department.

The next question asked students how much of their printing they do in the department. The results are in Figure 11.

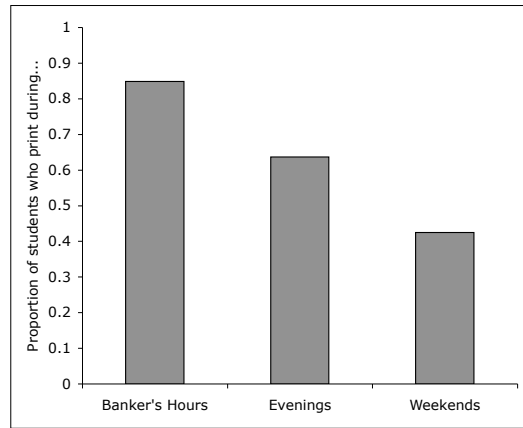
Fig 11. What proportion of students' printing is done in the department?



The vast majority of students do most of their printing in the department. A large number of students do all of their printing in the department. The remaining students do some of their printing here. Again, no students reported never printing in the department.

The last question in this section asked students when they do their printing in the department. Figure 12 presents the results.

Fig 12. When are students printing?



Although most printing happens between 9 and 5, Mondays through Fridays, more than 60% of students print in the evening and close to half print on the weekends.

Workshops

The next part of the survey asked students about workshops they'd like to

have. Two-thirds of students want a LaTeX workshop. Other programs that students are interested in having workshops on include:

- R
- Excel
- A bibliography tool for OpenOffice
- Advanced Praat features, scripting, text grids, tiers, and OT grammars, etc.
- Advanced level LaTeX; linguistic specific
- Virus protection programs we could have for free to protect our computers, where to get them and walk-through installation
- Advanced course on Excel (beyond simple formulas)

The next question in this section was with regards to the help from CHASS we received earlier this year. A technician from CHASS came to the department and helped people (especially those with PCs) to set up their wireless internet and the printers. 55 percent of students were aware of this opportunity. Of those who were aware, half took advantage. All of those who took advantage would have wanted the help earlier in the year. Additionally, three students who were unaware would have wanted the help and four students who were aware couldn't make it. The students had the following remarks:

- The only reason I didn't need this service was because I got my Mac laptop set up for the wireless department network at the beginning of September with Bill.
- When was this?
- It was extremely frustrating to not be able to access the rob6 network for the first semester and part of the second semester, especially since no one in the department could help me! It would have been much more helpful if a person from CHASS came at the beginning of the school year when it was first apparent that not everyone could access the network.
- I vaguely remember this and probably couldn't make it on that day. If this happens again and I can make, I will.

- I was aware but busy. It is better to set a time like Fridays so everyone can come and take advantage.
- I might have taken advantage of it if I was around, but I wouldn't have made a special trip for it.
- I would have, but I couldn't make it.
- I have a Mac so I was able to set up the network once I got the password from Bill.
- My problem was not anything about the set up instructions, it was about the router and its visibility to the computers. So it would be much better if the router was set up in the right way from the beginning of the semester.
- Bill was extremely helpful and patient in helping me get my (Mac) laptop setup for the network and subsequently reenter the password when my network at home overrode rob6 at the beginning of the year.

Wishlist

We also asked students if there are any software or hardware requests they have.

Software

- SPSS on more computers; R; OpenOffice
- LaTeX
- WordPerfect
- If we had the option of using either the new version of Word or the older one (on any computer) that would be great. Is it possible though? It would also be nice to have OpenOffice as an alternative to the new Word. Especially if an OpenSource bibliography tool that can be found that would work well with it.
- R if we are going to work with it; do we have AdobeProfessional?
- Getting the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Pro on each computer would be nice.
- The new '09 version of iLife could also be useful for students wishing to make simple personal webpages using iWeb.
- AdobeAcrobat full version with edit option.

- LaTeX and OpenOffice if there is any demand.
- Acrobat Writer or a program that can edit pdf files.
- LaTeX

Hardware

- A backup system on a server.
- New keyboards.
- Centralized password protected storage on a server somewhere, preferably accessible not only from the department computers but by secure internet connection from home. I would use it as an off-site backup for all of my work, and it would allow me to access my papers from school even when I've forgotten my USB key.
- No, but if one of the printers could be located closer to the backroom it would be much easier to check and take what you print from that location!
- External hard-drive for backups.
- I think some of the PCs have no speakers.

Further comments

Finally, students had a chance to make any other comments regarding computing in the department.

- Make all computers print; make all printers work.
- Thank you for doing this.
- Many of the computers are not working properly. I think there are only two computers that are able to open pdfs and print.
- My computer usage has changed throughout the year. Near the end of the year, I was using the backroom computers rarely. Near the beginning of the year I used them more, since at that time I didn't regularly take my laptop to school. I'd say it's likely I'll continue to bring my laptop to school nearly everyday and so my computer room usage will be minimal.
- On one of the backroom PCs someone has been setting the font to another script, possibly Farsi, so it's impossible to log-on to email and other sites

because the sites do not recognize log-ins in this script.

- Very useful to have them (the computers)!
- Thank you!
- Although I don't use the departmental computers on any regular basis, I do appreciate the fact that they are available. I have used them periodically when, for inexplicable reasons, I have been unable to print a particular document from my own computer, or when I need a PC. It rarely happens but when it does the computers in the backroom have been a lifesaver. Thanks to all of you for your work in keeping them up and running!
- Thanks to the computer committee.
- When the wireless router goes down, any computer back there which is not connected by an Ethernet cable is no longer able to print until someone resets it. I know this applies to the flat screen iMac because I recently reset it myself and got it to print again after the wireless router password was changed. I don't know if this applies to any of the PCs or the small iMac, the G5 seems to be connected by an Ethernet cable. I know it's a pain in the butt to configure all the Ethernet connections—there might not even be enough addresses available back there for all of the computers—but sitting down at a computer to print and not being able to because the machine is off the network? ARGH! The profanity that comes out of my mouth!
- Everyone turn off the lights when no one is there!! They're always on!
- It would be nice if we could replace the iMac's keyboard with a new Mac keyboard. (\$59 + tax in Canada.)
- On the wireless front, if we set up two wireless routers in the department instead of just one and place them on opposite ends of the department on different channels (and if possible on a different channel than UTORwin) this might improve connectivity, speed and reliability.
- Computer committee ROCKS!

- It's a good place to hand out and procrastinate :)

Incoming students

Incoming students were given a much shorter, modified version of the current student survey.

All of the students who responded said that they would use both their own laptops and the TR computers. Four students use PCs only, one student uses Macs only and one student uses both PCs and Macs.

Only one student listed software/hardware that he needs. These include:

- PRAAT
- FileMaker
- Audacity
- LaTeX
- Within FileMaker it is important that it have IPA font so as to ease linguistic transcription and the creation of databases especially for field methods.
- The "Field Linguist's Toolbox" computer program is good to have. More can be found out here: <http://www.sil.org/computing/toolbox/information.htm>

Two-thirds of incoming students would attend a LaTeX workshop. Other workshop requests included:

- A workshop on properly using the recording equipment that the department has, and all the fancy settings on them, and what each setting really means. This would be good for all.

In regards to printing, all students estimate that they will be printing at least once a week in the department though most will print several times a week. Half of the students believe they will be doing all of their printing in the department, 2 students will do most, and 1 student will do some.

The only general comments from the incoming students were:

- It would be very helpful if the computers in the backroom were standardized somehow in terms of which fonts they have. Very often it is

difficult switching from one computer to the next (which is very common when one or another computer becomes busy) because the fonts on one computer will not match the fonts on the other. Every one should be updated with up-to-date IPA fonts.

- It would be nice if a desk were set up in the corner with room to put your laptop on if you wanted to use it there.

Recommendations

The computer committee has the following suggestions based on the results of this survey and in response to graduate students' feedback:

The Network

- Bring in a CHASS technician in September, instead of January, to help people set up the network on their laptops (primarily PC laptops); this session should be held at a time when the majority of students are able to make it (i.e. not during scheduled tutorials or classes), since several students who would have attended this year could not because of a conflict with scheduled work/classes. We might want to consider having two of these sessions, if possible.
- The CHASS technician session should be advertised well in advance, so all grad students are aware of it.
- Reliability and connectivity of the network could be improved; putting in a second router has been suggested.
- Reliability has been a real issue this year, prompted mainly by security problems. Need to discuss with department what can be done about this. One suggestion from the surveys was a workshop on the anti-virus software available to us. The Computer Committee also suggests that we return to the previous system whereby the network was only accessible by computers that were registered.

Recommendations to the Space Committee (particularly regarding the move to Sid Smith):

- We would recommend continuing to have a grad computer room/area (though perhaps reduced in size – see below). The survey indicates the computers are well-used and necessary to grad students.
- Graduate students also need access to computers after hours (evenings/weekends), as more than 50% of students indicate some of the computers are in use during those times during the regular semester.
- Graduate students need access to a printer after hours (evenings and weekends), since a large number (60% evenings, almost 50% weekends) of graduate students print during these times.
- If possible, a printer should be located close to the grad computer room, and/or to the grad student area.
- Graduate computer room traffic indicates we could probably manage with a few less computers than we currently have, if necessary.
- However, given the above, the survey indicates it is equally important to facilitate student access to the wireless network on their own laptops, since many students indicate they currently use the backroom computers for printing and wireless access.
- Computer room traffic by OS indicates we need to especially ensure continued graduate student access to PC computers in the graduate computer room.

Traffic Issues

- In order to reduce computer room traffic and waits, we recommend that programs/software be installed on all of the backroom computers, if possible, instead of just one or two.
- We recommend the library files currently located on one of the computers be put on a local network

so that they are available from all computers.

- We also recommend an internal network be set up for students to save files to, so that they do not have to wait for a specific computer to access files they saved on the desktop.
- It would be a good idea to establish etiquette for leaving files open on a computer (for how long, etc.), and post these rules in the computer room, in order to cut down on traffic/waiting.

Maintenance of backroom computers

- We recommend further discussion regarding who will maintain computers. Survey indicates that 'heavy users' of the computer lab are generally not the ones running maintenance.
- Even though several students report running maintenance on the backroom computers, we still encountered problem this year with maintenance (i.e. viruses), so this issue still needs to be addressed.
- We need some kind of maintenance system in place to ensure these computers are printing, since several people commented that some of them do not, and printing is the highest use category for these computers.
- We need to standardize the fonts in the backroom or establish some kind of etiquette surrounding standard fonts, since several complaints have been made about non-standard fonts or switching of fonts. Note that this is also a traffic issue: if students are waiting for a computer with standardized fonts, wait-times will increase.

Wishlist

- Determine which of students' requests can be bought by the department; forward other requests to LGCU for vote.

- All open-source freeware requested (OpenOffice, R, & LaTeX) should be installed on all computers ASAP

Peripherals

- Computer committee/LGCU might want to consider purchasing new peripherals such as mice, keyboards, etc.
- Computer committee needs to establish etiquette regarding cleaning of peripherals. Perhaps it would help if a few minor cleaning supplies were purchased (i.e. screen cleaner, soft cloths, etc.)

Workshops

- Students have several ideas for workshops: need to establish who is in charge of organizing and paying for these.