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Staff Ed — Technology Services, Support Top Priorities for Haverford CIO

Since the beginning of last week, Haverford has held campus visits for the finalists for the school's first-ever Chief Information Officer position. The CIO should provide long-overdue coordination, support and a clear long-term vision for Haverford's Information Technology infrastructure.

The Academic Computing Center and other technology-focused parts of the college, like the library, have lacked strong, coordinated IT leadership for some time. Therefore, Haverford's e-mail and Blackboard services have suffered, wireless internet access remains limited to non-residential spaces and service delays from the ACC have become more common. Moreover, while the Go! Boards have evolved into a dynamic forum and offer services used by students, faculty and staff, they still receive very little institutional support.

The Bi-College News commends Haverford on hiring a CIO and hopes that he or she will address these pressing issues well.

The MISO Survey, developed at Bryn Mawr in 2005 to evaluate a college's computing resources, was administered at Haverford this past February in preparation for the CIO search. More than 250 students responded, and the survey results indicate that Haverford fails dismally at providing wireless internet access to the community.

Both Haverford and Bryn Mawr would stand to benefit if Bryn Mawr students could easily connect to Haverford's system, and reciprocally, if Bryn Mawr's wireless policies could be changed to allow Haverford students similar, easy access to Bryn Mawr's network as well.

Wireless has also never been available in the dormitories at Haverford, and the ACC has maintained a policy prohibiting the use of student-owned wireless routers that could ameliorate the problem at no cost to the college. Haverford could stand to learn a thing or two from Bryn Mawr, which provides wireless internet in most dorm common areas. Also, for years, Bryn Mawr has allowed students to register, use and maintain their own personal wireless routers in the dormitories, provided they meet certain security standards.

Along with wireless, two aging yet necessary services, Blackboard and Squirrelmail, could benefit from a close evaluation by the new CIO. According to the same MISO survey, Blackboard is used by a whopping 98 percent of students.

While Blackboard works well for the most part, isolated issues and general annoyances are consistently present – incompatibility with all browsers, occasional “missing” uploaded readings, periodic downtime and a clunky user interface. A new version (9.0) has been out for some time and includes fixes and general improvements. Blackboard is a unique case in that it is hosted at Swarthmore and requires significant coordination efforts across all three colleges, yet it would be worthwhile for Haverford's new CIO to consult with his or her counterparts in the Tri-Co and consider the possibility of upgrading.

Squirrelmail, Haverford's web e-mail system, is under-featured. An open source project, Squirrelmail says on its website that the program is not intended to be used as one's primary e-mail client. It would make sense for Haverford's CIO to consider an upgrade to a webmail system like Google Apps (similar to Gmail), or even Bryn Mawr's superior and

well-featured system, based on Zimbra.

The CIO can be at the vanguard of other, future information technology improvements at Haverford as well. When the economic crisis and college-wide hiring freeze lifts, hiring more support staff to work at the ACC – which currently has three unfilled positions — would be incredibly worthwhile.

A better-staffed ACC would serve two purposes: first, it would improve turn-around time when students, faculty or staff bring in their computers in for service. In addition, the ACC could dedicate a staff member to providing support for FIG in their operation of the Go! Boards, similar to how the Multicultural Center supports affinity groups. When only students who graduate after four years possess all of the technological knowledge for Go!, problems inevitably arise. This leads to the present situation, where the boards have been down for three weeks with no repair in sight, due in large part to the graduation of most of FIG's Go! expertise. Having a permanent ACC staff member with knowledge of the Go! Boards would benefit institutional memory and ensure that this crucial communication tool remains up and running.

For too long, Haverford has survived without an integral IT position that many other colleges and universities, including Bryn Mawr, have had for years. As such, many large-scale questions regarding computer and technology use on campus have gone unanswered for some time. Technology is an integral part of our education and Haverford's mission, and *The Bi-College News* commends the college for hiring a CIO even in this tough economic climate. Whichever candidate is selected, we hope they will be able to provide the expertise and insight to tackle these pressing IT issues.

Staff editorials are the consensus opinion of the Editorial Board, whose 26 members are listed on Page 2. Andrew Thompson stood outside of consensus due to a conflict of interest. Elizabeth Held also stood outside of consensus.

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