The Open Computing Facility

Presents

A Forum On

Modem Access

At U.C. Berkeley

Featuring Guest Panelists:

Alan Coopersmith - Undergraduate Representative, Campus Computing and Communications Policy Board
Lee Fink - ASUC Executive Vice President
Cliff Frost - Director, Communications and Network Services
Tim Heidinger - Manager of Computer Services for the Office of Undergraduate Affairs
Thomas O'Brien - Academic Technology Director, Academic Achievement Division

Monday, November 17, 1997
6:00 p.m.
Sibley Auditorium
2nd Floor, Bechtel Center

On OCF General Meeting
ASUC Sponsored and Weelchair Accessible

Panel Members

Alan Coopersmith, Undergraduate Representative, Campus Computing and Communications Policy Board

Mr. Coopersmith is currently the Undergraduate Representative on the Campus Computing and Communications Policy Board as well as some of it's subcommittees, such as the Administrative and Student Services Computing Subcommittee, and the World-Wide Web Steering Committee. Mr. Coopersmith is a member of the Computer Science Undergraduate Association, as well as the Board of Directors of the Open Computing Facility.

Lee Fink, ASUC Executive Vice President

Mr. Fink a senior majoring in Political Science and is also a student representative on the Campus Instructional Technology Committee. Prior to being elected Executive Vice President, Mr. Fink served two stints as an ASUC Senator. As ASUC Executive Vice President, Mr. Fink is heading up the ASUC activity on the modem issue.

Cliff Frost, Director, Communications and Network Services

Mr. Frost is directly responsible for the campus modems, as well as the university's network and telephone systems. He has more than 14 years of experience in data communications at the University of California, Berkeley. He made the decision to impose the two-hour time limit on the general access modem pools.

Tim Heidinger, Manager of Computer Services for the Office of Undergraduate Affairs

Mr. Heidinger advises the Vice Chancellor-Undergraduate Affairs on technology issues and helps the Undergraduate Affairs Division exploit technology to better deliver services to students. Since the beginning of the year, his department has worked with IST and the Office of the President to focus attention on the necessity of providing an efficient and reasonable remote access solution.

Tom O'Brien, Academic Technology Director, Academic Achievement Division

The Academic Achievement Division is a federally funded Student Support Service program for low-income, first generation college students at UC Berkeley. Mr. O'Brien has been the course instructor for classes designed specifically for new socioeconomically disadvantaged transfer students. He has been engaged in an informal analysis of the saturation problems experienced by the Berkeley Modem Pool, and the effect this has on low-income students who may not be able to afford alternative access.

Background Information

In the next few pages you will find excerpts from public discussions this semester regarding modem and Internet access. You can find links to this information and more on the web page for this forum:
`http://www.OCF.Berkeley.EDU/OCF/modem/`

David Wagner (daw@joseph.cs.berkeley.edu)

11 Sep 1997 18:39:52 -0700

[...]

the real problem is the student/modem ratio.

Current ratio is 50/1. Vice Chancellor of Information Systems admits that 10/1 is the appropriate ratio.

(For context, industry standard is about 20/1 to 15/1. Premium ISPs offer about 10/1 ratios. University students are logged on more than most ISP customers, and so need many modems. Also, for comparison, back around Christmas when AOL was getting slaughtered by customers and by the press for not having enough modems, AOL had about a 30/1 ratio. UCB's current ratio is far worse.)

The problem is that UCB simply isn't allocating enough resources to Internet access. (Typical for UCB.)

Until more resources get allocated, and the student/modem ratio is fixed, any minor tweaks (such as a two-hour timie limit) will be nothing more than ineffective cosmetic patches.

Jerry McDonough (jmcd@info.sims.berkeley.edu)

22 Sep 1997 17:30:56 GMT

Well, I already whined about this once on ucb.sysadmin, but what the hell, why not flame again? The 2 hour auto time-out is an ill-conceived waste of time. It makes HomeIP less convenient for users, while not doing anything to really address the issue of the overloaded modem bank. If you're going to implement a rationing system, do a real one, not a faux-rationing system that kills your session in the middle of your work every two hours.

[...]

I appreciate CNS' dilemma; there isn't a good solution to the problem they face (failing Pete Wilson suddenly throwing $90 million in Jack McCredie's direction). But there are more effective, more equitable solutions to the problem of the impacted modem bank than what they're proposing.

Daily Cal Editorial, September 24, 1997

Modem Access Is Not University's Responsiblity

In the recent storm of opinions regarding a university-proposed fee for off-campus Internet access, a separate and more pertinent issue has emerged. While ASUC officers and university officials bicker about fee hikes, they ignore the fact that the university is under no obligation to provide off-campus Internet access for students.

In the beginning of the Internet age, the university was the natural provider of modem accounts because it stood on the forefront of technological advances. It could provide the services students wanted and needed at a cheaper price than the few private providers.

As the decade that saw the birth of the Internet draws closer to its end, the situation is quite different. The university can no longer meet the Internet needs of its students, nor should it be expected to. Private providers can meet the demands of students in a more efficient and cost-effective manner than the university currently does.

Some critics of the proposal argue that, as tuition-paying students who are sometimes required to use the Internet for classes, we are somehow entitled to free access provided by the university. They have made analogies between modem accounts and library facilities (Letters to the Editor, Sept. 12).

These parallels just don't match up. Every UC Berkeley student can go online at one of the 11 campus computer facilities, just as he can go to the library to borrow a book. No one will argue, however, that the university needs to purchase each individual's books. The idea that the university is responsible for providing off-campus Internet access is equally ridiculous.

If the university really wants to help Internet users, it should work with a private company or companies to create a low-cost Internet package for students. Similar to the telephone setup in the dorms, the university could act as a middleman between students and private providers. In addition to this, the university could reallocate the funds currently used to support off-campus modems to boost on-campus facilities. Adding more terminals and/or upgrading the existing ones would be more beneficial in the long run than funneling funds into a tired off-campus modem service.

All the clamor raised by ASUC officers and some students resounds over a moot point. Sure, the university's proposed fee increase for improved Internet access is wrong, as is the new two-hour time limit. The problem, however, does not lie in the reasons cited by ASUC opponents. The university is not responsible for providing at-home Internet access for students, just as it is not responsible for buying books or Scantron forms.

September 22, 1997

TO: Chancellor's Cabinet

FROM: Associate Vice Chancellor Jack McCredie

With more than 40,000 individuals eligible for free modem service in our campus community, the costs of providing high quality remote dial-in service are at least $2M per year. IST currently is able to spend only about $400,000 - $500,000 per year on this subsidized service. Obviously there is a large gap between these numbers.

[...]

IST has never suggested that we should, and is not now proposing that we will, remove the free modem service for students and staff. Our implementation plans for this calendar year include (1) upgrading the present free dial-in service to bring obsolete modems up to modern levels, and (2) reducing the price (to approximately $10 from $15-20 per month) and increasing the "tier two" options available for individuals who choose to purchase a higher grade of service than we can provide through the free modem pool. We will continue to adjust the time limits and the mix of timing options available in order to provide a fair and equitable set of free services to the campus community.

The IT Committee, the CCCPB, and the Academic Senate Committee on Computing and Communications have discussed this issue many times during the past few years. ... Even though student ASUC leadership remains opposed to any student charges, the IT committee, the CCCPB, and the Senate continue to recommend cost sharing approaches to this problem.

Most members of these committees believe that with its limited University resources, IST investments should be used to develop (a) the best on-campus infrastructure possible, (b) better campus connections to the Internet, (c) additional campus networked information resources, and (d) general instructional technology support for better teaching and learning environments.

Dimitri Shlyakhtenko (shlyakht@math.berkeley.edu)

Wed, 24 Sep 1997 08:28:55 -0700

I just wanted to add my 2 cents worth: as far as I understand, there is one significant advantage in getting connected through the university modem pool, and that is access to the web sites for which the university has purchased a site lincence; the one that interests me most is MathSciNet, but there are others (e.g., Encyclopaedia Britannica). I would be willing to go with a commercial ISP and pay my way, if there were some easy and legal way of me still being able to enjoy access to these places. (The key words are easy and legal, I don't want to have to run a proxy server on my math. dept. account, or anything of that sort). I don't know how many people are in the same situation as myself, but would imagine that this is one of the points that prevents migration to commercial ISP's. Maybe implementing this somehow campus-wide will do more for modem conjestion than any sort of time limits.

Jerry McDonough (jmcd@info.sims.berkeley.edu)

25 Sep 1997 19:33:59 GMT

... the larger issue of whether it's a reasonable and responsible use of the monies we're giving them to run a modem bank at all. I'll conceed that that is a more debateable point. However, I'd ask you to consider these points: 1. as has already been pointed out, resources that students need to access for their work are not necessarily accessible if you're using a commercial ISP; and 2. If the University ... wishes to continue in a policy of encouraging/requiring the use of electronic resources for coursework, while simultaneously A. not spending sufficient funds for student access to computing resources and B. not making student ownership of computers a legal requirement of attendance, then they are effectively implementing another fee on students, and one which students *cannot* use financial aid resources to acquire...

Maybe we should pay. But I'd feel a lot better about it if: 1. IS&T and the campus made more efforts to consult with students about overall campus technology policy directions instead of implementing things by fiat (the student reps. to the CCCPB are a good start, but not adequate in themselves), and 2. the campus engaged in a policy of making financial aid for computer ownership available *before* they make attendance at the University difficult or impossible to perform without one.

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ryan travis tate (ryantate@uclink.berkeley.edu)

25 Sep 1997 08:12:00 GMT

the whining over 2 hour modem time limits and suggestions of rationing or charging for campus modem use are silly and ill-conceived. if ucb hadn't, as a key part of the internet in its pre-commercial days, offered modem access to students and faculty, no one would have the gall to suggest it has any duty to do so now. it doesn't.

no more than it is obliged to pay for students' books, personal computer, cable service, backpack, bluebook, notebook paper or any other key instrument of higher education. no more than uc provides the (non-dorm) telephone service that is so vital to registering for classes from anywhere but campus.

the cost of using a private internet service provider is nominal -- especially when compared to the substantial cost of purchasing the pc and modem that neccesitate such access in the first place. why put up such a fight to avoid paying $80/semester (on the high end) for private dial-up access?...

campus administrators should avoid the painful, screeching complaints of spoiled student netizens and opportunistic campus politicos by bravely stating right here and now that they have no obligation -- or further intention -- of providing dial-up internet access.

pull the plug on the modems for both students and faculty now. the core competencies of the university, the forces of the market and the nature of technological evolution dictate that it must happen eventually. best to avoid a loud, painful, annoying (& costly) transition by expediting the process.

(tedcrum@socrates.berkeley.edu)

28 Sep 1997 06:59:11 GMT

At one time, the policy at Berkeley was to move enough modems to the Warhol pool to keep the Quality of Service fairly high, and only to put those modems which were left over in longer-time service. The idea was to let everyone check POP mail, with enough modem availability that users would work off-line, and knowing that a modem would be available later, reconnect to send queued messages. Newsreaders were to have been used in a similar manner.

Just when did that plan softly die, and how did 2-hour downloads become more important than reliable e-mail service?

Jerry McDonough (jmcd@info.sims.berkeley.edu)

28 Sep 1997 23:27:14 GMT

I realize that you are more less stuck on this issue, Cliff, with no good solution in sight. If this debate accomplishes nothing else, maybe you can save it to show people in the campus administration to encourage them to slow down in their pursuit of the all electronic campus (at least until they're willing to give CNS the money to adequately support it). But I've got to say, my opinion of CNS's service is going to be taking a big hit every time I hear my modem click off without warning in the middle of an e-mail to my faculty, dean, or fellow tudents.

Bruce A. Mah (bmah@conviction.CS.Berkeley.EDU)

7 Oct 1997 18:04:57 GMT

my memory goes back to 1987, when *I* was a freshman. Back then, the only "computer room" in the dorms/ResHalls was a terminal room in CKC, which had a bunch of dumb terminals. Other than that, you used your own modem or you walked over to campus. ... I well remember falling back to 1200 or even 300 bps modems when the 2400 bps dialups filled up. 3-9600 was a godsend when it was instituted (with 32? modems), and I remember the first, fledgling days of Home IP. I understand some of the ResHalls now have Ethernet hook-ups that multiplex an ISDN line to campus? When I was a dorm dweller, my roommates and I had to compete for access to our room's one phone line (I once called Telecomm to find out how much a second line would cost...the answer was in the three-digit range, so I gave up).

What's the point? Same as Alan's...progress gets made, even if it's not as fast as some people would like. (I know this isn't going to get people connected, but maybe a bit of perspective could be helpful. After nine and a half years, you kind of learn to take a long-term view.)

WHAT IS THE OCF?

The Open Computing Facility (OCF) is a student-run, student-funded organization and is dedicated to free computing for all students, faculty, and staff of the University of California at Berkeley. The mission of the OCF is to provide an environment where no member of Berkeley's campus community is denied the computer resources he or she seeks, and to provide a place for those interested in computing to fully explore that interest.

The OCF runs a lab of Unix workstations located in 217 Eshleman Hall that is open to all OCF account holders. Students, staff, and faculty without OCF accounts can register for an account there free of charge whenever one of the OCF volunteer staffers is present.

For More Information About the OCF Visit

`http://www.OCF.Berkeley.EDU/`**, stop by 217 Eshleman Hall, or send e-mail to** `staff@ocf.berkeley.edu`**.**

Help Sessions:

Watch for announcements posted outside 217 Eshleman or online in the ucb.org.ocf newsgroup. For a complete schedule, finger `helper@csua.berkeley.edu`**.**

Volunteering for staff:
Send e-mail to `site-manager@ocf.berkeley.edu` **or read the web pages at**
`http://www.OCF.Berkeley.EDU/OCF/staff/`

OCF Board of Directors:
Watch for announcements posted in 217 Eshleman Hall or online in the ucb.org.ocf newsgroup or send e-mail to
`general-manager@ocf.berkeley.edu`**.**