

1990 TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT  
(Phase I of Long-Term Campus Computer Planning)

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## INTRODUCTION

This report is both an end and a beginning. It is an end because it completes the major documentation prerequisite for implementation of the Computers at Evergreen DTF report. It is a beginning because it only defines more clearly the commitment which the college would undertake to fulfill the vision which the DTF laid out for computing and computers at Evergreen over the next five or more years. This report is only another phase in a long process.

The Task Force took its cue from the DTF recommendation that "the President immediately charge the Director of Computer Services to lay the foundation for an 'electronic campus' as proposed in part II of this report by appointing a Technical Committee to recommend hardware and software standards for all future purchases of computers, computing equipment, and related needs." Much came to pass between the cue and this report. First of all, the DTF report was not finally submitted until December, 1984. Secondly, after there at first being a president-to-be, there was a new president whose primary focus was necessarily the activities of the state legislature. In June, consultants hired by the President submitted a report also addressing computer issues. Now whether or not the college does in the end commit itself to an "electronic campus" or any version thereof depends upon the deliberations and conclusions of a strategic planning process yet to begin and not to be completed before June, 1986.

Responsible planning could not and cannot wait upon either the DTF report or the strategic planning process. If the DTF had never been created, it would still have been important for Computer Services, for its own reasons, to assess the future of computing at the college over the next five years and beyond. In the end, when the managers of Computer Services assessed the charge of the DTF, we concluded that we could not set hardware and software standards without knowing what we were setting standards for. We needed to understand more clearly and specifically what an "electronic campus" might mean at Evergreen. We needed to conduct a so-called "needs analysis" which, to be effective, had to include the entire campus, every office, and the needs of faculty and students as well as staff.

In Computer Services' own terms, the campus-wide study was necessary in order to maximize congruence between long and short run needs. Perhaps in state government especially, and even moreso at times of serious fiscal constraint such as the state faces today, there is a tendency to purchase what one can afford now and ignore the long-run implications and costs of the choices. If one is allocated \$50,000, it seems far easier to buy a \$50,000 system that solves the immediate need even though in the long-run this system will be thrown out in favor of something else which would cost \$75,000 now. More specifically, one can imagine purchase of a computer which will run a particular system, an inventory package, for example, but be completely incompatible in the long-run with a future campus communications network. Avoiding this misallocation of resources was the intent of both the DTF and Computer Services in having the 1990 Task Force Study.

As it turns out, defining the needs of the campus and making calculated guesses about the direction of the industry were more important than defining or selecting specific hardware and software standards. Historical trends in the American economy and analysis of patterns within the computer industry proved to be, in our estimate, more important than industry standards per se. Both the "Current Trends" and "What Next" sections which conclude this report convey the reality which faces everyone working in the industry today of swimming in a sea of uncertainty, making no better than best guesses and estimates of the right course to pursue. If there are uncertainties in our choices, they are no more than those of billion dollar corporations, major universities, and state and national governments.

In developing this report, we adopted a team approach focused on identifying campus needs for applications, software, and hardware. Although we had intended to make more specific estimates of costs via a formal cost-benefit analysis and Request for Proposal (RFP) format for illustrating options, the uncertainties and rapid change of the technology for delivering the needed systems led to an emphasis instead on reviewing the state of technology and delimiting possibilities, with later development of specific RFP's to respond to specific systems and applications identified for near-term development. It is unlikely that the improvements in campus life to be had from computerization can be justified in people laid off and dollars saved. The improvements are more typically qualitative and intangible.

For completion of the report, Judy Lindlauf had overall responsibility for coordination and clarification of tasks, plus organization and editing of this final report. Jim Johnson took responsibility for the needs analysis, coordinating the work of Judy, Don Nickolaus, Ron Woodbury, and Dale Baird. Each of these people worked through a needs analysis questionnaire (Appendix A) with one or more major areas of the college, for which every office on campus was visited and most employees interviewed. Don wrote the "Current Trends" analysis of the industry and "Computer Services Review". Ron wrote the prospective section, "What Next?" All members of the team shared in the development and definition of codes. Randy Rahn completed the programming resulting in the final statistical reports. (Full reports, office by office, are available on request.)

The rest of this report is divided into seven chapters and two appendices. Chapter I, "Group Narratives," surveys the current status of computing in each of the principal areas of the college, from the Affirmative Action to the Vice-President and Provost's offices. Chapter II, "All-Campus Databases/Applications," focuses on those computerized services which would serve all or most all members of the campus: students, staff, and faculty. Chapter IV outlines the "Benefits" which might be expected from the major applications presented. The next to last two chapters review "Current Trends in Computing," an industry-wide survey, and what has been happening in Computer Services itself, the past and current status of applications and services.

The final chapter of the report, "What Next?", points to the next phase, priority setting as part of strategic planning. The principal conclusion precedes the report in the sense that the DTF pointed towards the possibility of an "electronic campus." The budgetary

realities of the state and college make clear that the millions of dollars necessary to implement the goal are not in the near-term offing. Yet the fervor with which individual areas, especially at the end of the biennium, look towards computer purchases to help solve their problems of staff shortage and paper and number flow verify the functional reality of the DTF's vision. This report represents Phase I of long-term campus computer planning. Phase II must be priority setting as part of the strategic planning process. The last chapter presents Computer Services' estimate of initial priorities.

The college is moving towards an electronic campus. At the end of each biennium, it does so willy-nilly--but so it does nonetheless. The only question is whether we will plan our way to a computerized campus or just fall into it. The needs analysis makes clear the need and the desire. The statistical reports indicate an ultimate need, for a campus of 3,000 students, of 1,189 terminals on-line 7,813 cumulative hours per day. We believe that this report will help the college understand the dimensions of its undertaking and by that clarify the importance of planning for maximum efficiency, economy and utility in creating a campus-wide communications network and system--or system of systems. There are no guarantees that our choices will be the best that hindsight will provide, but by stressing common standards and hardware and software compatibility in an overall planning scheme, established at an early stage, we believe we might do a little better than other folks at other places have been able to do in their earlier and more head-long leaps into computerization. Caution seems to be in order even if the dollars were available. Our small college cannot hope to better the efforts of the giants of industry, government, and higher education; it can hope to learn from their mistakes.