Resolution Addendum to BFA-R-11-1002: Faculty Computer Purchase Program

Boulder Faculty Assembly
BFA Academic Technology Committee
Resolution Addendum: Faculty Computer Purchase Program

September 12, 2002

TO: Phil DiStefano, Provost

FROM: BFA Academic Technology Committee
Andy Cowell, Chair
Anne Bliss
Greg Carey
Bruce Henderson
Liz Jessup
Mitch Nathan
William Waite
Terry Kleeman (ex officio)

CC: Rick Porreca, Bobby Schnabel

The BFA Academic Technology Committee met to discuss the Provost’s proposal to postpone funding the faculty computer purchase program for one year and then moving to a four-year replacement cycle. The committee considers this a reasonable course of action given the present budgetary constraints of the Boulder campus. The committee feels strongly, however, that the plan cannot be implemented within the “one size fits all” model under which the faculty computer purchase program currently operates.

Many faculty use computers solely as office machines where the major tasks are word processing, spreadsheet manipulation, slide preparations, email correspondence, and Web browsing. Machines for these types of tasks are inexpensive and can be replaced on a four-year cycle, providing that the operating system and office software are not aggressively updated. Other faculty, however, use their office computers for specialized projects in research and/or educational technology and pedagogy. The committee feels very strongly that a four-year replacement cycle will seriously compromise the research and teaching ability of some of the latter type of faculty. Many current software programs for fields as varied as bioinformatics and the creative use of digital video in fine arts cannot be run on three-year old machines. Hence, the committee recommends that some of the monies that would have otherwise been spent in the faculty computer purchase program be reserved to assist faculty whose research and teaching will be compromised by postponing the funding.

At the same time, the committee recognizes that it is opportune to re-evaluate and modify the current program to achieve further efficiencies. For example, funds could be made available for
upgrading current computers via increased RAM, more powerful CPUs, better graphic boards, etc. instead of a full replacement. Another example is upgrading the computer but not monitors.

Finally, the committee points out that there will be hidden costs associated with postponing the computer purchase program for a year and moving to a four-year schedule. The Provost is aware that funds must be devoted to extend the maintenance policies for those computers that would have been replaced this year. Other hidden costs include:

- Many faculty give their old computers to graduate students, their research labs, or academic departments, a process that we term "down streaming." With the change in policy, not only will there be fewer computers to downstream, but the down streamed computers will be older.
- There will be an increase in demand for support and maintenance of legacy systems and software. For example, a four-year old "Wintel" computer today would have been purchased in 1998 and would have come with Windows 95 or Windows 98 operating system. ITS has not supported Windows 95 for the past year or so. The effect of delayed down streaming will further increase the need to support legacy systems.
- The security concerns involved in networked legacy systems will probably involve the purchase of—perhaps even the development of—software to maintain appropriate levels of security.

BACK to the BFA's resolution.