Facility Manager’s Report for 7 April 2000

Contents

Mechanical Engineering Undercroft 1
Printers 2
Thesis Lab 2
Database server 3
Modem Pool 3
Staff Issues 3
Filling Zebee’s position 3
Help Desk Manager 3
New Desktop Support Person (Mac Support) 3
Stephen is also leaving 4
Issues from last FC meeting 4
Assets DB 4
CSG performance evaluation 4
Mail lists proposal 4
PDF Support 6
Class Expiries 6
Class administrator to designate tutors 6
Help Desk Duties 6
Linux in the thesis lab 6
Mail and mlalias delays 7

Mechanical Engineering Undercroft

Stage one of the refurbishment of the Mechanical Engineering undercroft is now complete. This consists of replacing the old bell and spoons labs with four new slightly smaller (bell, spoons, moog and leaf) which became operational during week 3.

Stage two includes:
Another new lab The north west corner, which currently consists of two small offices and an open plan area, will be converted into a new lab, called bongo, containing 17+ computers.

The work here is essentially similar to the work already done in the other labs, and should thus be reasonably easy to organise. We still expect this to be operational by the end of the mid session break.

New Help Desk The room in the south west corner, previously occupied by the Engineering Faculty Computer Support Unit, will be refurbished to house the new Undergraduate Help Desk. We still need to talk to architects, et al, about the final design of the room.

This part of the project may be allowed to slide if it is likely to impede on other projects (the Help Desk does have a workable home at the moment in the EE undercroft). A more likely completion time is the mid-year break.

In the course, the current help desk (the consultation room in the EE undercroft) is likely to be a permanent home for CompSoc, so we really do need to push on with the project.

Printers

A number of new printers have arrived, and have begun to be installed. K17-6 now has a printer (though as I type on Wednesday swipe-card access to the area is problematic for some people).

Mechanical Engineering is still without a printer. Our plan had been to re-install a printer in the first small office while we designed and built a secure enclosure for it. However, demolition work in preparation for the new lab is imminent and that room is not available. For a little longer students will have to walk over to the EE undercroft for printouts. The EE undercroft now has two high-speed printers to handle the likely load.

The new thesis lab is still without a printer for the same reason (lack of a secure enclosure to keep prying fingers from delicate parts). There is not currently a printer nearby that these students can use.

Other areas are currently served by printers, but there are still several new printers to be installed and shuffles to happen before we get to final happiness.

Thesis Lab

The first 14 computers are now operational and we are in the process of ordering sufficient new computers and shuffling a small number of other computers to fully stock the lab with 50 machines. These should arrive in about a fortnight and will initially have Intel-Solaris installed on them.
Database server

The SUN E450 server for database teaching has arrived and has been physically installed in the computer room. Within days it should have an operating system, and within a week should be available for the database people the week after to play with in preparation for session two.

Modem Pool

The new Cisco box is here and working. The Telstra OnRamp 30 lines are installed and are believed to be working. As I type (on Wednesday) the Cisco is not talking properly to the phone lines. This is likely to be a configuration error which Peter is looking into, with some assistance from the Comms Unit. We are potentially within days of trial use of the new modem pool, but at the moment it just ain’t working. We will keep people informed of progress.

Staff Issues

Filling Zebee’s position

Applications for Zebee’s position have closed and by the FC meeting I should have seen the applications. Interviews in a week or two, hopefully someone starting within a couple of weeks of then

Help Desk Manager

This is about to be advertised (probably advertising at the end of next week). We are still a month or so off interviews.

New Desktop Support Person (Mac Support)

There has been some discussion over the past weeks about, amongst other things, re-focusing John’s Group to provide a more complete support of desk-top computers. At the moment, this mostly means Mac and NT support. In particular, there is a perceived need for deeper Mac skills in the CSG. I am interested in employing a software oriented person in John’s group. More discussion on this will follow from the work John is doing on job descriptions for his team and for individuals in it. A first draft of this is imminent, but John is a very busy boy and this has been delayed.

The position is describable as ‘software, admin and user support, Mac/Unix/NT’ and I hope to fill it from the interviews for Zebee’s position. If those interviews do not provide any likely candidates, we can look elsewhere, such as advertising in Mac-specific publications or contacting an agency (AGSM reports good success with agencies, Comms Unit reports poor success).
Stephen is also leaving

Stephen Fischer is also leaving us to take up a position in the Comms Unit. He has been a very valuable member of the CSG for a number of years, beginning as an SS person back in 1995. He has been involved in a number of projects and responsibilities in his time here, and has most recently taken a major responsibility looking after the give/sms system.

If we are extraordinarily lucky, we might be able to fill his position from Zebee’s interviews as well. However, even if we are that lucky, knowledge and skills within the CSG will be pretty thinly spread for a number of months while new people come up to speed.

Issues from last FC meeting

Assets DB

This is now ready for David Pisch to come and test.

CSG performance evaluation

There is apparently a requirement that all University salary supplements have a performance related component, though I observe that the Comms Unit are still able to offer a industry-parity loading in addition to the broad-band steps which are performance related.

The CSG has started discussing the matter will begin serious work on it in the next week.

Mail lists proposal

Several of the commonly used mailing lists (particularly cse and cse-astaff) send mail to too wide a group, and can be accessed by too wide a group. Gernot has proposed the following re-organisation of school mailing lists which, if approved, can be implemnted by the CSG.

    Gernot also proposes that the following aliases be kept for compatibility:

    cse-teaching   (= cse-tstaff)
    cse-pg-research (= cse-rstud)
    stu-official   (= cse-stud)

    and that other aliases with similar functions be removed. These include: ce-hon, cs-hon, undercroft-teacher and undercroft-student.

    Some of these groups will need care in their formal definitions.

    There will also need to be some care taken in keeping the UDB reasonably accurate. For example, the CSG is frequently not aware when people leave the school, and so UDB entries for such folk often do not reflect that person’s new relationship to the school. I will be talking to the admin staff about improving the information flow to help in this.
### Table 1: Proposed e-Mail Lists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Accessible by</th>
<th>Maintained by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-astaff</strong></td>
<td>full-time continuing academic staff + other authorised by HoS</td>
<td>cse-astaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>Bill Atherton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-gstaff</strong></td>
<td>full-time continuing general staff + other authorised by HoS</td>
<td>cse-astaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>Bill Atherton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-rstaff</strong></td>
<td>cse-astaff + research only staff (research assistants, post-docs, visitors, adjuncts)</td>
<td>cse-rstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>cse-tstaff</strong></td>
<td>cse-astaff + other teaching only staff (P/T A/Lects, casual tutors)</td>
<td>cse-tstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-staff</strong></td>
<td>cse-rstaff + cse-tstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>cse-staff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-rstud</strong></td>
<td>Students enrolled in PhD or research Masters</td>
<td>cse-rstud + cse-rstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>cse</strong></td>
<td>cse-rstud + cse-rstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>cse</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>cse-ug-thesis</strong></td>
<td>Students enrolled in undergrad thesis</td>
<td>cse-ug-thesis + cse-pg-thesis</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>cse-pg-thesis</strong></td>
<td>Students enrolled in postgrad (non-research) thesis</td>
<td>cse-ug-thesis + cse-pg-thesis</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-ug</strong></td>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
<td>cse-tstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-pg</strong></td>
<td>Postgraduate coursework students</td>
<td>cse-tstaff + cse-gstaff</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cse-stud</strong></td>
<td>cse-rstud + cse-ug + cse-pg</td>
<td>cse-rstud + cse-ug + cse-pg</td>
<td>automatically generated by UDB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PDF Support

There are still a few questions about support for PDF files. Many of these have been solved by moving to the latest version of xpdf. However, there are still several questions, particularly:

- editing PDF documents
- default font mappings are not always appropriate

There was also recently a question about turning pdf images into eps for inclusion into other documents. This is really a question about eps. pdftops seems to do a fair job of generating postscript, but as yet I have not seen anything which will turn postscript (hopefully only one page) into encapsulated postscript.

PDF generation may still be an issue: is ps2pdf good enough, or do we need to explore distiller or some other tool?

These issues have not been looked at since the last FC meeting.

Class Expiries

Neil will look at a new mechanism for UDB class expiries, so that people are not abruptly without appropriate privileges. This is particularly a problem for postgrads at the start of the year, when enrolment information is often slow reaching us. We must do it now, so that we don’t forget for next year. This has not yet been done.

Class administrator to designate tutors

A priv script should be created so that class administrators can designate appropriate people as tutors in the UDB, and so get them on mailing lists and allocate certain privileges. This has not yet been done.

Help Desk Duties

Part of the job description for the Help Desk Manager is (nearly) a list of duties for the Help Desk. It would be useful to extract this as separate description of ‘what the Help Desk does, what can be expected of the Help Desk’. Zain and Angie will do this over the next week or two.

Linux in the thesis lab

The suggestion is to put linux on half of the computers in the thesis lab as soon as this is practicable. We should be able to do this as soon as Trent has configured a CSG/conform-able linux distribution. I expect this to be in a couple of months, with the conversion happening over the mid-year break.
Mail and mlalias delays

There have been significant mail delays since the start of session, above and beyond what may have been expected from the start-of-session surge. Mlalias lookups have also been stunningly slow.

It seems that the mail server note has not been properly auto-negiating with the switch it is connected to, the result being bad duplicity (half-duplex talking to full-duplex). This has been fixed by talking sternly to the boot-level system parameters on note.

This has meant that traffic to and from note has been suffering, especially under load. A compounding problem is that the mlalias server is on note, and that note does a lot of mlalias lookups as part of processing mail, and that mlalias lookups generate YP lookups, and that the YP server is on a different computer (to spread the load), and that these requests and responses generate even more traffic which generate more load and have been degrading the duplicitious connection even more.

Since the duplicity has been set properly, mail and mlalias has been moving smoothly.

As well as this, the network card in note has been only able to talk 10Mb/s, rather than the full 100Mb/s that is should be capable of. We will need to do an OS upgrade on note to fix this which will take note off-air for several hours. We will schedule this for early one Monday morning.