

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
DECEMBER 6, 2005

[In these minutes: Wireless Networking Standard, CALEA, Webmail]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT:

Andy Lopez, chair, Nancy Herther, Mark Sanders, Dale Swanson, Stephen Cawley, Christine Blue, Greg Laden, Stuart Speedie, Jim Waddell, David Moretz

REGRETS: Deanette Schmidt, Eric Celeste, Douglas Ernie, Joan Hughes, Mahmoud Sadrai

ABSENT: John See, Linda Jorn, Alan Ek

GUEST: Mark McCahill – OIT

OTHERS: Bernard Gulachek, John H. Miller, Kevin O'Rourke, Scott Ruud, Shih-Pau Yen

I). Professor Lopez called the meeting to order and asked those present to introduce themselves.

II). Members unanimously approved the November 1, 2005 minutes.

III). Professor Lopez asked members whether this same meeting schedule would work for next semester. Members agreed to retain the same meeting schedule for spring semester.

IV).

Steve Cawley reported that before OIT can move forward with drafting a wireless networking standard, the following two questions need to be answered:

1. Should there be a common wireless experience across all campuses?
2. Should there be centralized control over the wireless network?

Members agreed that both a common wireless experience and centralized network control are desirable, but several factors such as cost of implementation, affordability of access points for departments, etc. need to be taken into consideration before such a policy is put in place. Mr. Cawley stated that within OIT he has received feedback that rather than investing more money in the current network (to make it work as well as possible), the University should install a next generation wireless network. Mr. Cawley added that he plans to bring this issue to the next OIT director's meeting for further discussion and input from the coordinate campus OIT directors.

In closing, Mr. Cawley agreed to bring this item back to the committee for an update during spring semester.

V).

Mr. Cawley stated that it is uncertain whether CALEA (Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act) regulations will impact the University.

This legislation gives law enforcement agencies the right to place wiretaps on new digital wireless networks. CALEA also requires wireless and wireline carriers to make their digital networks able to support law enforcement eavesdropping and wiretapping equipment and activities.

In August 2005, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) voted to extend CALEA to include Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

Under this new revision, colleges and universities must comply with VoIP (Voice over IP) from and to public Internet services.

While the 18-month CALEA compliance clock started ticking in October of 2005, institutions of higher education are hoping for an exemption from this legislation. The possibility exists that if CALEA applies to higher education that the University would be required to upgrade all its edge switches on all its campuses. To conclude, Mr. Cawley volunteered to keep the committee updated on this matter as further developments unfold.

VI). Next, Mark McCahill provided members with the evolution of email and Webmail. With respect to Webmail, he noted that this application is extremely popular at the University. Statistics for Webmail usage in the first three weeks of November alone demonstrate its popularity:

- 2,390,690 site visits
- 35,440,336 page views
- 991,681,317 kbytes transferred

He noted that this level of usage was never anticipated when Webmail was initially rolled out. While Webmail was never intended to be a main mail-reader, many people are using it this way.

With this said, there exists the need to improve Webmail, and, therefore ADCS (Academic and Distributed Computing Services) is working to incrementally improve Webmail. Enhancements to Webmail 3.0 include:

- Better usability.
- Increased speed for large mailboxes.
- Addition of a spellchecking feature.

Additionally, recognizing that different users have different needs in terms of the features they use on Webmail, ADCS will be moving away from a one-size-fits-all Webmail client. Instead, in the not too distant future, two Webmail options will be available, one for power-users and another for simple-users. As Webmail 2.0 is being phased out, Webmail users will be encouraged to move onto the new version, Webmail 3.0. Webmail 3.0 will put significantly less load on the central mail servers, and thus save money.

With respect to inflection points in technology, Mr. McCahill stated that further enhancements to Webmail are forthcoming.

For example, rich Internet applications will move user-interface logic back onto the PC for better interactivity.

Additionally, web browser plug-ins will embed dynamic programming environments into web pages. Examples of this type of technology can be found at: <http://squeakland.org/>.

Directions for the future:

- Better versions of pure html based applications.
- Rich Internet applications will be used to improve Webmail and other applications as well e.g. WebCT.

Mr. McCahill noted that his interest in this technology has been spurred by the rich Internet implications for not only Webmail but also educational delivery tools such as WebCT. Many of the same challenges faced by Webmail are faced by WebCT and other educational delivery tools e.g. high demands on the server. In terms of improving Webmail and instructional delivery tools the goal is to push application processing onto the desktop rather than the central server.

Next, Mr. McCahill provided a demonstration of Webmail 3.0 (<http://www.mail.umn.edu/>) and took members questions:

- What is the difference between Squeak and Flash? Mr. McCahill noted that the primary difference between Squeak and Flash is that Squeak is an open-source application, and Flash is a commercial product. For more information about Squeak visit the following URL: <http://www.squeak.org/>.
- Does the University plan to only use open-source applications? Open-source applications will undoubtedly build on their own successes and the successes of the proprietary products. In Mr. McCahill's opinion, in order to be successful, course management/delivery applications will require a significant open-source component.
- What is Hermes? Hermes is an IMAP mail client run in Squeak. Hermes can run standalone or as a plug-in inside a web page.
- Mr. McCahill was asked to draw a parallel between this discussion and his work with OpenCroquet. It was noted that OpenCroquet is a combination of open source computer software and network architecture that supports collaboration and resource sharing among large numbers of users. Mr. McCahill stated that there exists the belief that game environments may have serious use for education and instruction. Currently, there are not a lot of resources for building these environments. The University is a partner in the OpenCroquet Consortium, which is in the process of building an open-source, 3D, virtual reality, multi-user environment for building these types of simulations. For more information about this project visit the following URL: <http://www.opencroquet.org/Community/consortium.html>.
- With Webmail 3.0 are users able to move messages from the server to his/her computer? Mr. McCahill indicated that Webmail 3.0 allows users to export address books, but, in terms of moving messages, users should use a client server to do this.
- Does Webmail 3.0 allow users to put their own words in the dictionary? This capability will likely be available later in December.
- What dictionary has been selected for Webmail 3.0? Mr. McCahill indicated that Webmail 3.0 uses GNU Aspell, a free, open-source spell checker.
- How will the open source applications discussed today work with the University's portal system? Mr. McCahill believes that the best strategy to facilitate this connection will be to have Squeak on user's browsers.
- Why is there so much white space on the left side of the Webmail screen? A user's browser will determine the amount of white space there is on the screen. Webmail 3.0 facilitates accessibility for those who use screen-readers.
- Is the attach files feature on Webmail 3.0 easier to use than in the old version? According to Mr. McCahill problems still exist with this feature. Webmail 3.0 does not permit messages with attachments to be forwarded. This glitch still needs to be fixed.
- Will another Webmail choice besides Webmail 3.0 be available to University users in the near term? Kevin O'Rourke stated that other open-source applications are being explored, and it is likely that after the winter break another choice will be available to the University community. He volunteered to present information at the February 7<sup>th</sup> on the other Webmail client that has been selected.

Additional agenda items for February will include: open source update and site licensing.

VI). Hearing no further business, Professor Lopez adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey  
University Senate