

# IT Help Desk Assessment Report

March 24, 2005

This is a report on what we learned as part of a recent assessment of the Information Technology Help Desk at Illinois Wesleyan University. The evaluation examined the services and operation of the Help Desk. It looked at existing data, and collected original data from a brief survey of our campus community. While a good percentage of our campus community is satisfied with technology services, we found that many, particularly students, want service improvements.

## ***Background***

Illinois Wesleyan's office of Information Technology (IT) provides help desk services from its offices at the IT House on 1311 North Park Street. This service includes telephone and walk-in support from 8AM to noon and 1pm to 4pm, Monday through Friday. Calls for support outside these times go to a voicemail system. Student workers normally staff the help desk. These students receive training and are supervised by the IT Services Coordinator, a technical staff position. The telecommunications coordinator, a support staff position, also handles help desk support as time allows. The Help Desk has three phone lines. During peak periods, such as the start of a semester, all three lines will be busy and overflow will go to voicemail. Phone logs indicate that these three lines average over 900 incoming calls per month.

IT makes available a web-based help request system<sup>1</sup> (the "3900 system".) Members of the campus community can enter requests for IT support directly into this system. Help Desk workers also enter calls into the 3900 system if they are unable to resolve a call immediately, or if the call needs attention from another IT professional. All members of the IT staff are responsible for providing such second level support as needed. The number of calls logged to the 3900 system averages about 100 per week, although in some weeks, such as the start of the Fall semester, as many as 400 calls can be logged to 3900.

IT provides a personal computer repair service in the basement of the IT House. This repair service is for computers owned by members of the campus community. This repair service is staffed by students, and supervised by the IT Service Coordinator. The primary purpose of this service is to help with network connections as well as virus and spy-ware removal. People using this service drop-off and pick-up their computer from the IT House. IT has a policy of providing software and network configuration for free, and charging \$25 per half-hour for parts and labor on other repairs<sup>2</sup>. However, the charge for labor is almost never assessed.

In addition to services in the IT House, two other locations provide direct IT support for the campus. The IT Service Center (ITSC; "the old bookstore") performs repairs for university owned computers. Two IT professionals staff the ITSC. The Help Desk routes calls for repairs to the University's computers to ITSC staff. ITSC staff determine whether a fix can be made on-site, or if the equipment needs to go to the ITSC. IT also operates the computer labs in the Buck Library<sup>3</sup>. During academic semesters the labs are open 8am to 11:30pm Monday through Thursday, from 8am to 5pm on Fridays, noon to 5pm on Saturdays, and Sundays from 11am to 11:30pm. Student workers in Buck answer "walk-up" support questions during those hours.

## ***Existing data***

The 3900 system indicates that services and repairs for personally owned computers are growing. For this academic year through February 2005, we've already logged more services and repairs

for personally owned computers (527) than we logged in all of academic year 2002-2003 (481). We're on track to best last year's record number of repairs to personally owned computers (781).

The help desk is also logging more support calls on the 3900 system. Since the start of the academic year the help desk has already logged over 655 calls. This number exceeds the number of calls logged to the help desk in academic year 03-04 (570). Data on phone use for the 3900 Help Desk lines also indicate that Help Desk calls have grown dramatically. An example is the January and February call data compared to the same time period in 2003. For January/February of 2005, the Help Desk received 4254 calls, with total call time over 164 hours. The comparable period two years earlier had only 1735 calls for nearly 73 hours of call time.

IT attributes a substantial portion of this increased work to computer virus infections. Since the "Blaster" outbreak of August 2003, IT has periodically checked the campus Internet connection for disruptive traffic (typically caused by computer viruses.) Computers found disrupting the network have their Internet access "redirected". A redirected computer trying to view an Internet web site will instead see a web page stating that their computer is disrupting the campus network, and instructs the user to call the IT Help Desk<sup>4</sup>. For the academic year through March 2005, IT has redirected Internet access for 322 student computers and 35 university computers.

### *The Survey*

The University's Institutional Review Board<sup>5</sup> reviewed and approved this survey's methodology. To conduct our survey we used Zoomerang's zEducation service<sup>6</sup> to send an e-mail inviting students, faculty and staff to answer a brief web survey (10 questions). The survey was hosted on Zoomerang servers, and we used some Zoomerang tools for data analysis. There was no follow-up request for response. We received 300 student responses, and 112 responses from faculty, staff or other members of the campus community. While this response rate is low, it is not atypical for a web survey. A follow-up request for response may have elicited more feedback.

The survey's 10 questions asked about computer use, use of the IT help desk, and information technology generally at Illinois Wesleyan. On most questions there was a significant difference between student responses and those of faculty and staff. Here are some survey highlights.

- The majority of students (55%) report that their primary computer is a laptop computer (versus 21% for faculty and staff.)
- Two thirds of respondents report that the primary way they contact IT is by calling 3900.
- Windows is the dominant operating system used by students (93%). While 18% of faculty and staff use Macintosh computers
- When students have a technology problem, they most frequently turn to other students for help. IT is their second source. Faculty and staff go first to IT for a technology problem.
- We found that 94% of faculty and staff respondents had contacted the IT Help Desk for support. Only 71% of students reported using the help desk.
- For the three questions asking whether the respondent strongly agreed, agreed, was neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with a satisfaction statement about the IT Help Desk, faculty/staff responses were more positive than student responses.
- On a question asking whether assistance was "clear, accurate, timely, and helpful" less than 50% of students agreed, 18% were neutral, and 36% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In contrast, 77% of faculty/staff agreed with the statement, while only 9% disagreed.

The responses to two open-ended questions were most revealing. The first asked what was the one thing we should do to improve the IT help desk. Almost all responses to this question related to service issues (as opposed to equipment or infrastructure.) Faster service was most often cited as needing improvement (11% for faster service in general, and 14% for faster computer repair specifically.) More IT staff (10%) and more knowledgeable IT staff (11%) also were frequent requests. (Presumably more IT staff, and more knowledgeable staff would provide faster services.) Respondents also cited the need for better communications and training (17%). The second open-ended question asked what would the respondent most like to see IT improve in the next 2 years. We found that 57% of these responses related to people issues. These included faster services, longer support hours, and more IT staff. Infrastructure and equipment accounted for 26% of responses; with more wireless computing (9%) the leading infrastructure request.

### ***Survey Analysis and Recommendations***

Several observations are clear from this data. First, faculty and staff have a more positive perception of the IT help desk. Students were particularly unhappy with the speed of help desk services, in particular how long it takes to repair a personally owned computer (Several respondents said they “knew someone” whose computer had taken weeks to repair. IT acknowledges that this delay can occur, particularly at the start of an academic year.) Improving staffing and services was seen as more important than providing better equipment.

The differences in responses between students versus faculty and staff may reflect the service differentiation that occurs within IT. University owned computers *do* get better service than personally owned computers. However, there are factors that exacerbate the service level differences. The multiple locations for IT service do not help. By splitting repairs done by students from the repairs done by professional staff we create a situation that hinders interaction between students and staff performing computer repairs. Steps to improve this interaction and additional training of student workers may help, but the ideal situation would be a facility that better serves the University’s technology support needs.

The survey responses show that students feel they are entitled to high quality computer repairs that are both fast and free. This is an unrealistic expectation. While better communications may help this perception, the university may want to consider revising the repair model for personally owned computers. Models that we have begun considering include “first repair free”, fee for expedited service, and negotiated discount for students to use a local repair vendor. Better IT resource allocation and fix-your-own computer assistance are other strategies. The data indicates we have a growing problem with repairs to personally owned computers. If service demands continue to rise, there is some doubt that existing resources will satisfy the rising demand.

### ***Conclusions***

The intent of this evaluation was to help determine whether Illinois Wesleyan should continue or change its IT Help Desk services to better serve the needs of the campus community. The data indicates that campus use of the IT Help Desk is growing. However, the speed and quality of service, particularly for personally owned computers, is a concern. The IT Help Desk is performing a valuable service, but there is room for improvement. This assessment presents quantitative and qualitative data for future planning regarding the IT Help Desk and IT services.

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<sup>1</sup> “IWU IT Support Database”, Illinois Wesleyan University intranet, <http://help.iwu.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> “Repair Service for Personally Owned Computers”,  
<http://titan.iwu.edu/IT/Support/PersonalRepairs.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Buck Computer Lab”, Illinois Wesleyan University intranet,  
[http://intra.iwu.edu/IT/Buck\\_Lab/](http://intra.iwu.edu/IT/Buck_Lab/)

<sup>4</sup> “Security Alert: network disruption”, Illinois Wesleyan University intranet,  
<http://intra.iwu.edu/IT/Support/Alert.html>

<sup>5</sup> “Policies regarding Use of Human Subjects in Research at Illinois Wesleyan University”,  
Illinois Wesleyan University Faculty Handbook,  
[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/fhndbook/fh/chapter6/human\\_research.html](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/fhndbook/fh/chapter6/human_research.html)

<sup>6</sup> “Zoomerang zEducation”, <http://info.zoomerang.com/zeducation/index.htm>