Computing Services and Systems Development

Information technology has become an integral part of the academic and research missions of the University of Pittsburgh. Universal computing, networked information, online collaborations, and technology delivered instruction have become commonplace experiences at the University's five campuses. Computing Services and Systems Development (CSSD), provides the infrastructure, resources, and support for these activities which are utilized by nearly every student, faculty, and staff member at the University of Pittsburgh. CSSD reports to the Office of the Provost. Two committees, the Information Technology Steering Committee and the Senate Computer Usage Committee, advise the Provost regarding the activities of CSSD.

Network and Telecommunications Environment

CSSD provides the network infrastructure and telecommunications backbone for the University community. The University's data network, PittNet, connects thousands of computers at all five University campuses to the Internet. Ethernet connections are the standard for University offices. With nearly 6,000 Ethernet ports, the residence halls are fully-wired. Off-campus students, faculty, and staff have access to PittNet through a modem pool of nearly 800 modems. Extensive telecommunications support is provided to more than 18,000 telephones as well as telegraph, voice mail, telephone credit cards, paging support, and large-group conference call service. Telephone service to the residence halls is provided through an agreement with AT&T.

Resource Environment

The Technology Help Desk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, by calling 412-624-HELP (4357) or by submitting a problem report online at http://technology.pitt.edu. The Technology Help Desk provides troubleshooting, problem resolution, and answers "how to" questions on a variety of information technology issues. An online service, Knowledgebase, provides users with access to solutions and recommendations from the Technology Help Desk archive. This interactive resource helps users identify a problem and its cause, providing detailed instructions and direction on how to resolve the issue.

Students have access to computing resources and services via the six Pittsburgh Campus computing labs. David Lawrence and Sutherland Hall computing labs are open on a 24-hour schedule, 7 days per week. Resources include more than 600 computers (Windows NT, Macintosh, and UNIX) equipped with several hundred of the latest software applications and tools.

Each lab features several media stations which offer CD duplication, scanning, and image processing capability. Printing services include high-speed laser and color laser print capability. E-mail kiosks are also located in high-traffic student areas throughout the Pittsburgh Campus.

University timesharing services consist of UNIX, VMS, and MVS environments. Software applications include database management systems, graphical analysis programs, mathematical and statistical programs, simulation packages, and tape/file transfer utilities supported by these systems.

Support Environment

Students can sign up for free, instructor-led training classes provided by CSSD. These classes, range from beginner to advanced levels, and cover topics including operating systems, software applications, e-mail, and the Internet. Additionally, self-paced, web-based training programs are available to the entire University community, accommodating users independent of time and place. Through a partnership with Sun Microsystems, Inc., CSSD operates an Authorized Academic Java Campus (AAJC) center in which students may enroll in non-credit Java programming courses. CSSD also offers the Microsoft training curriculum for certification as a Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE).

CSSD operates a consulting and evaluation service to University departments on a contract basis. Through the contract program, systems analysts and technical professionals can be hired, from one to five days per week, to provide dedicated, high-level, on-site consulting. CSSD has also established the Expert Partners program to provide departmental technical staff with access to CSSD resources and liaison and training services. This program is designed to assist the departmental staff analyst in delivering high-quality support within his or her own department, coordinated with the overall direction of services provided by CSSD.

CSSD provides a wide range of software applications and utilities to students, faculty, staff, and departments through various site licenses and volume discount programs. As the result of a recent agreement with Microsoft, CSSD provides Microsoft applications and operating systems to students at no cost. Students receive all upgrades while they are enrolled at the University and may retain the software when they leave. CSSD also offers mathematics, statistics, utility, and Internet software products that are provided free or at a greatly reduced cost.

Source: Computing Services and Systems Development, December 2000.