

Information Resources Committee – Report, May 2002

Who are we:

The Information Resources Committee (IRC) is the medical school council standing committee charged with looking into information and network needs of the faculty in the medical school. Our mission statement states:

The IRC represents the views of the faculty regarding information technology issues in the medical school. This committee will offer guidance for IT projects to meet the computing, communications (email, teleconferencing, etc.), research, and educational needs of the faculty. This committee will gather relevant information regarding IT issues & report results of our analyses and interpretation of this information to the school council and administration.

Current Composition (2001-02) & Meetings

- Arun Malhotra (Chair), Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, malhotra@miami.edu
- Brian Bowen, Department of Radiology, bbowen@med.miami.edu
- Coralie Carraway, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, ccarawa@med.miami.edu
- Luigi Meneghini, Department of Medicine, l.meneghini@umiami.edu
- Abdul Mian (School Council Representative), Department of Medicine, amian@miami.edu
- Mark T. O'Connell (Ex-officio, Library committee), Department of Medicine, moconnell@miami.edu
- Stephen D. Roper, Department of Physiology & Biophysics, roper@miami.edu
- Kenneth E. Rudd, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, rudd@molbio.med.miami.edu
- Albert Varon, Department of Anesthesiology, varon@miami.edu

Several changes have been made in the composition of the IRC over the past few weeks. First, Steve Roper has requested to be taken off this committee, due to other commitments. He is being replaced with Dr. Wolfgang Nonner from the same department. Dr. Mark O'Connell has also requested that he be replaced by Nick Pikarsky (Director of the Office of Biomedical Computing).

Our meetings are held every 4-6 weeks, and are regularly attended by other faculty interested in IT & networking issues (Dr. Richard Bookman, Dr. Rudolph Werner, etc.), as well as one or more representatives from Medical Network Services (Chris Bogue, Director of Medical Network Services, Mark Elliott, CIO for the Medical School, or their representatives).

Issues addressed over the past year

E mail issues: One of the most important issues identified in a comprehensive survey carried out by our committee in fall 2000, was the lack of uniform no-cost email for the faculty and staff at the Medical School. This issue was discussed in several of our meetings in 2000-2001, and was also presented to the School Council, at our urging, by Dr. Abdul Mian. These efforts, in part, led the administration to make email universally available to all Medical School faculty and staff at no cost beginning summer 2001. The IRC would like to thank the Dean's Office, Medical Network Services, and the School Council for all their efforts to make this important goal possible. Our committee has also raised other email issues such as security, confidentiality, reliability, web access, attachment limitations, use policies, etc. with Medical Network Services.

Network Speeds & Upgrades: Our committee regularly conveys the concerns of faculty about problems with network hardware, reliability, and speeds (especially in buildings such as RMSB) to Medical Network Services. Chris Bogue has been keeping the IRC apprised of current efforts underway at Medical Network Services to upgrade and replace aging routers and network hardware in the different buildings in the Medical School. This will be followed by a multi-year project to upgrade the cabling infrastructure.

Software licensing: Since summer 2001, a comprehensive software license for all Microsoft products (OS upgrades and Office software) has been purchased by Medical Network Services and the UM IT department (Coral Gables). This license allows all faculty and staff to obtain copies of the latest Microsoft software (Windows and Macintosh) for office use, as well as for limited home use. Our committee has been urging Medical Network Services to come up with a comprehensive plan for distribution of this software. At our last meeting (May 6th), it was decided that the IRC will contact each department chairperson to designate an IT contact person, who will then be responsible for making the software media available to his/her department. This list of departmental contacts (much like the Y2K contacts in each department established in 1999) will be also be regularly polled by the IRC regarding any local IT or network issues. Our committee expects to finalize a contact list over the next several weeks, and then make this available to the Medical Network Services for software media distributions.

Web issues: Our committee plans to look at web issues over the next several meetings. We plan to invite the people involved in planning and implementing the web interface for the Medical School to IRC meetings (such as Billy Weinstein, Web administrator for the school). Our committee plans to look at issues such as uniformity guidelines, links policy, and maintenance of individual and laboratory web pages. Other issues related to this include the use of web for medical teaching, security concerns, etc.

Other issues: Other issues raised by our committee include streamlining of computer purchase approvals for standard PCs (currently all computer related purchases have to be approved by Medical Network Services, which adds an extra layer of processing and delays for PO's).

Another problem area identified by committee members relates to the separation between the IT departments at the Medical School and the Jackson Memorial Hospital. There appears to be little or no cooperation between the two IT departments, which is causing major problems for many clinical faculty with computer systems or components that overlap between UM and Jackson. A similar transition between UM and the VA IT departments appears to be going much more smoothly.

Future Plans

Over the next few months, our committee plans to focus on issues related to the web policies and software licensing. We will also examine IT infrastructural issue, and long term networking plans from Medical Network Services.

Our committee is given regular updates on future IT directions and alternatives by Dr. Richard Bookman and Chris Bogue. These include discussions of clinical information and training systems, creation of a centralized data center for the medical campus, network based teleconferencing, wireless network coverage for the medical school, etc. Many of these issues will be taken up by our committee. We also hope that establishing a mechanism for departmental level liaisons will allow us to more efficiently gauge IT needs and problems in these areas.

Additional information

Our committee activities are posted on the web at <http://structure.med.miami.edu/irc>. We can also be reached by email at irc.med@miami.edu or malhotra@miami.edu (committee chair).