

Feb 22, 2000

Assured Access to Computing

As part of the IT Steering Committee efforts to obtain broad campus input on the initial proposal meetings were held with the following campus groups: Academic Chairs, Student Government, Faculty Senate, Classified Senate and Graduate Program Directors.

To date the following questions and comments have been raised regarding Assured Access. The questions and discussion regarding Assured Access has been excellent and has been very helpful in focusing this initiative.

1. *What is the distinction between Assured Access vs. Requiring Computers?*

Assured access will be defined as follows:

"Information technology will be an integral and necessary component of each student's higher education experience, students must be certain they have daily access to a computer, with appropriate software, and a connection to the Internet. For most students this will necessitate that they own a computer; however, students may find that they have sufficient access through external resources or through campus computer labs. UMBC is committed to providing equity of access to ALL students, and will continue to provide public access workstations for student use and will provide assistance to those with the greatest financial need through low-cost computer rental programs."

2. *If UMBC is not requiring a student to own a computer, why is this necessary?*

Presently, UMBC has no official statement in our admissions requirement stating that students must be certain they have access to a computer with appropriate software and a connection to the Internet. More importantly, our present system does nothing to assure equity in access for those with the greatest financial need. By implementing an "Assured Access" program we are also taking needed steps to assure equity in access.

Finally, through this program, we are taking the necessary steps to assure faculty that when they feel technology can benefit their course the campus will be prepared to support them.

3. *The document describing Assured Access appears to focus primarily on access for faculty and staff. Why?*

In researching the implementation of Assured Access programs at other institutions, the literature highlighted the strong correlation between successful implementation and providing faculty with the necessary resources to support the use of technology in teaching and learning.

Presently we estimate that 70% of our students have a computer that would meet

the present requirements. This is similar to what peers report and indicates that the problem of how we support student computer ownership is one that will not go away, regardless of what we do with Assured Access.

4. *There is concern that this initiative had been developed without faculty input.*

We do not believe this to be the case. The initial discussion on Assured Access was started in the spring 1998. We began discussions with different faculty constituent groups to get their input and perspective and have worked closely throughout the process with the Faculty Senate Computer Policy committee. Prior to coming before the Faculty Senate this fall, we had met beforehand with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, President's Student Advisory Committee, Department Chairs, Faculty Senate Computer Policy Committee, Technology Enhanced Learning Committee, and IT Steering Committee to develop and review the plans. The process that was chosen was to work closely with faculty constituent groups and develop a document that could be broadly disseminated to the campus. We would then meet with the campus Senates to get their feedback before taking this proposal to the campus administration. Broad discussion and support is very important to the success of Assured Access and the proposal has been improved greatly as a result of the input we have gotten.

5. *Concern was raised why a student who may not feel a computer is necessary will be required to purchase one. This could hurt enrollment in the humanities and liberal arts.*

We feel this is addressed in question 1. Students are not required to purchase computers, they are required to make sure they have adequate access to a computer. However, without "Assured Access" a student with financial need who would benefit from a computer would not receive assistance from UMBC.

Nothing in the literature on Assured Access programs has shown that this has had an negative impact on enrollment in general, and in the humanities and liberal arts in particular. To date, most early adopter programs have seen a slight increase in enrollments; however there is speculation that was associated with the increased publicity the program generated. Given that many schools are now going in this direction we will not see that much publicity.

6. *Concerns were raised that the university is becoming Microsoft centric and we are eliminating academic choice over technology.*

This concern is one that was expressed very passionately by a number of faculty members. It was never the intention to link Assured Access directly with Microsoft. The Assured Access initiative has been in discussion since the spring, 1998, well before the Microsoft site license initiative was even started. However, with the initiation of the Microsoft site license agreement in the summer of 1999 and the FaCT proposal submission in the fall 1999 the Assured Access document does appear Microsoft centric.

The Microsoft Site license is an important piece of Assured Access in that it provides students and faculty with a suite of basic applications; however, for

students in many disciplines, especially Physics, Mathematics, and CSEE we have been asked to consider other alternatives such as Linux. As part of the support costs for Assured Access, UCS will request funding to provide a Linux support group to assist students in departments where Linux would be preferred. The cost of this will be one-full time staff member and \$20,000 in student consulting costs.

7. *Will this apply to graduate students?*

Graduate programs have unique needs and any decision to apply "Assured Access" to a graduate program would be made by that graduate program. That said, it was apparent from the discussion with graduate program directors that many graduate programs do not have adequate graduate computing labs and that UMBC must do more to assist graduate students. This issue must be examined further whether Assured Access is implemented or not.

8. *Many staff, especially those in outlying locations do not have direct network access to the campus or adequate computers available to them, how will this be addressed?*

Assured Access will require that the university increase our investment for replacement of technology and when funded should address this issue.

9. *Many staff will need training, and release time to take the courses, on using technology effectively in their job, how will this be addressed.*

UCS is committed to working with the campus units to provide a wide range of training options: in-class, online, and self-paced. The issue of providing more release time associated with staff development is one that will be brought up the campus administration for consideration.