Lori,

I will echo much of what Brent and Jeff have stated already. Let me be clear, the move to Active Directory is not a problem in fact will save the University money and improve our network over Novell. The ability to have our instructional laboratories managed through Active Directory presents many advantages over the current system. There are always drawbacks to any system. This, in general, is a positive move. It will be nice to schedule a regular refresh of these machines to blow out the gunk and keep them at peak performance. This is also a benefit for the classroom computers as well. These computers could be scheduled for regular “cleaning” (re-imaging) so that they are kept at peak performance as well. The ability for IST (or in the CNSM, John Black) to complete these operations remotely provides improved efficiently and thus better maintenance.

Our concerns stem from the insistence that IST be granted complete control/access to our office and research computers. Physics and Astronomy has some large concerns when it comes to the changes that Academics has been informed (but not consulted) about.

First: The most critical issue is the control of sensitive information that all faculty store on their computer. We understand that the machine is owned by the University and therefore not our private machine. That said, no one has access to our machines currently unless we grant that access. Each of us stores student records on our office computers, exams, letters of reference, and other sensitive documents because we are reasonably certain of the security provided by our office computers. Even when a student was given illicit access to faculty offices, he was limited to stealing previously printed exams. He was not able to access the faculty member’s computers. Those of us who are administrators also store faculty and staff evaluations on our computers as well. Allotting IST remote administrative accounts allows access to all of these documents to anyone with the password. These machines would no longer be considered secure as more than one person has access to them. Faculty would no longer have knowledge or control over when their machines are accessed, what has been accessed, or who has access to their machines. This would prohibit the use of office machines for maintaining grades, writing exams, authoring letters of reference, and many other sensitive activities that faculty undertake on a regular basis.

Second: Faculty in the department are often experimenting with new curricula. This can involve using non-standard software. Installations and uninstallations often occur in a very unscheduled manner. Were faculty required to submit installation jobs to a work que and not see very rapid results, these activities would become cumbersome and most likely stop. This is detrimental to our student’s education. Keeping our curriculum fresh and up-to-date is important to our mission. Faculty who are no longer able to experiment in this way will by default be forced to settle on doing things one way and sticking with it.

Third: Faculty often use the office computers for their research and to collaborate with other researchers. Providing sole administrative control of all computers to IST compromises these activities. Collaborators would have to be informed of this access and may not be willing to collaborate under these conditions. Many collaborations would not be allowed under these conditions, e.g. collaborations with researchers at military laboratories, collaborations with industry that involve proprietary information, collaborations involving confidential medical records. Faculty conducting patentable research will be reluctant to store sensitive information on a system that they have no control over. This will inhibit scholarly activity.

Fourth: As with the curriculum argument above, faculty are constantly looking for new tools in their research. These are often software tools that require specialized installations. Many of these software installations support equipment. This is the type of activity that is done on the fly, quite often on weekends and holidays. It is not unusual to see faculty working on research while the University is closed between Christmas and the New Year. Given the teaching loads faculty carry, research time is a premium. Requiring faculty to pause research efforts to wait for their installation request to work its way through the que is a disincentive to scholarly efforts.

Efforts to use remotely accessed administrative accounts to manage public computers in instructional labs and open computer labs is a good idea. Currently in Physics we do not allow installation of software on our instructional laboratory except through an account held by John Black so this would not be a large change. In fact, the change would be beneficial as currently these machines are not remotely accessed for maintenance. These are public machines and sensitive material is not stored or edited on them. This is a far different situation from our faculty office and research computers. The policy that is being implemented is poorly thought out and is being implemented with little to no consideration for the use that faculty make of their computers.

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