

## **RUCS UPDATE 2003**

RUCS worked diligently to improve customer satisfaction with the organization's services between 1997 and 2001. Resources were increased in user-support areas and a dedicated effort on the part of RUCS' management to focus staff personnel efforts on service quality resulted in these improvements. For example, the number of inquiries to the RUCS help desks increased dramatically, with many individuals becoming "repeat customers" due to the helpful guidance they were provided. And, despite an increase in the number of students with direct network connections in their residences, the number of students who visited the computer labs for the services offered in these facilities actually increased by 1%, indicating the continued need students have for the resources available in these facilities.

Following university wide data collection from faculty, staff, and students in 2001, RUCS strategic planning efforts moved forward during that year with the formalization of a strategic plan for RUCS. The process for creating this plan was both iterative and interactive, with input from the university community, and RUCS' directors and staff personnel. This process resulted in a "living document" that will change with the needs of the university, will provide focus and direction to all RUCS' entities, and will help the organization use resources effectively and efficiently to further improve faculty, staff, and student satisfaction with RUCS services.

The following sections address individual areas of focus in the survey.

### **Email**

Increases in satisfaction can largely be attributed to improvements in the ease of use of email systems between the two timeframes. A more recent (2002) improvement aimed at further increasing satisfaction with email is the RUCS Webmail system. Users now are able to access Rutgers email from any location around the world where a web browser is available.

### **Telecommunications and Networking**

It is not surprising that satisfaction with telecommunications and networking has increased. Between 1997 and 2001, RUCS increased the number of students, faculty, and staff with access to the network from 12,000 to 32,000, due in large part to the RUNet 2000 project, a four year, \$100 million effort to improve access to the university's telecommunications network.

The increase from 22 residence halls connected in 1997 to 115 in 2001 is related to increases in satisfaction with dialup modem services. During the same time period modem lines were increased significantly (300 to 1,300) and latest technology was installed to meet the rising demands. Now that high-speed Ethernet access is available in the residence halls (and, even from home), the demands on the modem pools have decreased significantly and stabilization of modem service is the priority.

Since fewer students are using dialup services from the residence halls, there is less traffic and increased connection opportunities. The number of residence halls connected to RUNet currently stands at 150.

## **User Services**

### **Computer Store**

RUCS believes that the dissatisfaction with Computer Store services can be attributed to the fact that the physical store is located on the New Brunswick campus. We are examining the possibility of placing satellite Computer Store locations in Camden and Newark, as well as increasing marketing on all campuses, to improve satisfaction.

### **Information and training**

RUCS has made dramatic improvements in its telephone and walk-in consulting services since the 2001 survey. To provide consistency and continuous reinforcement of procedures, a standard operating procedures handbook was created for the RUCS Help Desk. The handbook documents Help Desk procedures for common problems, questions and inquiries from the campus community. In addition, the Help Desks implemented a "request tracking" system, to assist in gathering data on user requests for assistance. The system was successful in providing statistics, identifying problem trends, quantifying the volume of support calls received; it is currently being used to enhance customer service. Staffing for Help Desk activities increased from 10 full time and 9 student staff members in 1997 to 8 full time, 3 part-time, and 37 student staff members in 2001. The help desk is currently staffed by 10 full time, 2 part-time, and 54 student staff members.

RUCS has partnered with the Teaching Excellence Centers to provide enhanced computing education for faculty and staff during this timeframe.

## **Administrative Services**

Since 1998, there has been a sea change in the way business is conducted at Rutgers. Virtually all university business conducted by faculty, students, and staff can now be accomplished online. Students can do the following online: apply for admission, apply for financial aid and check document status, register for classes, obtain grades/transcripts/class schedules, manage their directory information, apply for parking permits and pay tickets, check events on the university's calendar of events, and transfer between colleges. Faculty and staff can update their directory information, complete the faculty survey, administer class rosters, obtain HR and pay for performance data, view student grades and transcripts, apply for parking permits and pay tickets, purchase goods and services, and many other tasks (some require special authorization).

## **Instructional facilities and services**

RUCS made significant improvements in the computing labs between 1997 and 2001 and has continued to make improvements since then. The two most significant improvements have been to establish a regular, three year replacement cycle for computers in the labs and to establish an effective process for hiring, training, and evaluating student staff. Other improvements range from new furniture and carpeting to improved heating and air conditioning. Additional course-

related software has also been added. Even with the connection of many residence halls to the Rutgers network since 1997, lab use by students has actually increased by 1%; attesting to the continued need for maintaining these facilities.

## **Requested Improvements**

Since 1997, at the suggestion of RUCS, many departments have shifted responsibility for departmental computing from faculty, who provided this service on an ad hoc basis, to full-time departmental computing staff (unit computing specialists and others). In 2001, half of the staff and faculty listed “computing staff support in their department” as a top priority. Since that time, training and other assistance has been provided by RUCS. In addition, the departmental consulting area within RUCS has been enhanced to provide support for departments that do not necessarily need a full-time computing staff member.

Addressing specific issues raised through the survey: “A phone help line for basic questions or problems that come up during regular business hours” ranks in the top five areas for improvement for faculty and staff while “telephone consulting during evening hours” was chosen by one-fourth of the students. As described earlier, RUCS has made dramatic improvements in its Help Desk operations, including expanding hours of operation into the evening and providing enhanced services in the residence halls.

“Dial-in modem services and access” were cited by more than one-in-five students and staff and one-third of faculty as a top priority. Reorganization of dialup services to provide improved services has been a priority within RUCS since this survey was conducted in 2001 with resulting service enhancements.

Finally, nearly one-half of students indicated that “PC computers [as opposed to Apple computers or Unix workstations] in public computing facilities” should be a top priority. Since 1999, the earliest year for which accurate data are available, the number of PC computers in the labs has increased from 954 to 1,125.

## **Areas of dissatisfaction**

As described in the previous sections, RUCS is analyzing the specific reasons for the areas where dissatisfaction is high and is examining ways to reduce it. As already noted above, several steps have been taken to improve email and telecommunications and networking. Many improvements to user services have taken place recently, especially the help desk, administrative services, and instructional facilities and services. Support for departments has increased as well.

In addition, RUCS has added two major programs that address some of the underlying issues. The PC Purchase Program, implemented to help departments purchase computer equipment at reduced prices, has enabled a massive upgrade in quality of hardware and software throughout the university. It has also provided for standardization of equipment that has facilitated RUCS’ ability to support departments.

RUCS has also addressed security issues, not directly mentioned in the survey but an underlying aspect of all that needs to be done to have safe and effective computing services at a university like Rutgers. RUCS currently provides virus scans for incoming email that block

about 125,000 messages containing viruses each month. We have also purchased a university-wide site license for antivirus software for use by students, faculty, and staff. Departmental security consulting, security planning seminars, and certification courses for computing staff throughout the university are also now available.

RUCS is involved in a process of continuous self-improvement through strategic planning. The process for creating and evaluating activities related to the plan is both iterative and interactive, with input from the university community, and RUCS' directors and staff personnel. This process has resulted in a "living document" that will change with the needs of the university, will provide focus and direction to all RUCS' entities, and will help us use our resources effectively and efficiently.