Changing The System

New phone service provides internet upgrade
by Kaitlin Hartnett

In the fall of 2005, the IT department began researching a new campus phone service. This began a chain of events that led to some vocal frustration from the CSP campus concerning the wireless service.

Jonathan Breitbarth, Director of the IT Dept., said that the old phone system had problems with safety issues such as being able to dial 911 Emergency Services.

"We want to make conditions as safe as possible for the students," he said.

According to Breitbarth, January of 2006 a decision was made to go with a phone service that was safer and more reliable. A new phone system, however, came with a price: to accommodate the new system, upgrading the internet infrastructure was necessary. This involves buying new network equipment, putting back-up power into closets to ensure that if there is a power outage, the phone service isn't lost, the list goes on. Although the upgrade is continuing to be a long process, Breitbarth said that it would be beneficial to the campus in the long run. After this improvement, there will not be another major change in wireless access for another four years, except with the arrival of the new laptops. But that won't happen for another two years.

Unfortunately, not many can see the work it takes to put in a new system. Breitbarth said that the planning phase alone took about four months, from January to April of 2006. After that, it was a matter of "getting the big picture."

Despite other unexpected occurrences, such as an electrical storm in April that knocked out the phone service in the houses and caused the old system to die faster; the main person on the project was moving to another company and the subsequent hiring of a new one; and yet another staff member having to take time off for a new baby, the new plan pressed on.

In May, a week after most students had left for the summer, the IT Dept. presented the new phones to faculty members. Two weeks after, the new laptops arrived and had to be tweaked to fit the new network design.

During the summer, the department worked on increasing the number of wireless access points on campus from 85 to 120. In August, the new system was tested in Meyer Hall. Since it was successful, the rest of the campus would soon be plugged into the new wireless network.

The project, however, is still not completed, and according to Breitbarth, will not be done for another month. He said he has heard about it being frustrating for students, but there is a reason. When the new system was installed, it impacted the old one. The transition is causing conflict between the networks, so if a laptop is sitting between them, the result can be frustrating for the student who uses that laptop.

Mike Miller, one of the Help Desk workers, said during the time of the switch, the desk was flooded with students needing help with access to a secure network.

"Even returning students were frustrated," he said. "They used to be able to do it by themselves, but now they had to learn a new set of skills."

Miller also said that the frustration students were experiencing wasn't even with the wireless, but not being able to perform tasks for class such as printing.

"The IT Dept. does their best to make sure people can do what they need to do," he said.