

Future of Laptop Program Uncertain

With fewer eligible students participating, administrators weigh cost of laptops for everyone

By Jay Weiler

As a three-year lease with Lenovo comes to an end, Concordia administrators are in discussions concerning the future of the laptop program for students. The program—in which all traditional undergraduate students are eligible to receive a laptop provided by the university—has been a staple at Concordia for 15 years.

“The university expects us to make a wise decision about our technology,” said Jonathan Breitbarth, director of computer services. “Whenever our lease runs out, we have to ask a few questions. Do we continue on this route? Is longevity a good enough reason to continue the program?”

A number of factors will influence Concordia’s decision on continuing the laptop program. In the current academic year, 25 percent of eligible students did not take the laptop provided by the university. This is the highest number since the beginning of the program, and the trend has continued upward over the past few years.

The ways that technology interacts with higher education is vastly different than fifteen years ago. With an explosion of choices in the marketplace, most people have a personal preference when it comes to their technology leading to a “bring your own device” mentality—a policy that many businesses have adopted. Breitbarth estimates that most campuses now need to prepare for up to seven wireless capable devices per person. Strengthening the network infrastructure to support this many devices could be a key reason to divert funds.

Additionally, the rise of cloud-based computing (i.e. Google Apps) decreases the necessity of university-provided technology, as students can now access software downloads, personal files, and even on-campus printer servers directly from personal laptops.

A number of alternatives have already been identified if Concordia chooses to not renew the lease with Lenovo. A popular policy at many universities and the most likely alternative is providing the purchase of a laptop through the university bookstore; through this process, Concordia would endorse a few different laptop models and give increased financial aid to help cover the cost. Other options include installing a handful of computer labs around campus, extending the lease on the current laptop model, or simply requiring students to bring their own laptops.

No matter what the university de-

cides, Breitbarth stresses that it will be in the students’ best interests. “We need to look at how money is being used and that we’re not spending it ‘just because,’” he said. “There are implications from a tuition standpoint; if a quarter of our students aren’t participating in the program, is this a wise use of their money?”

Concordia plans on engaging students in the decision-making process through a survey of the student body and the relevant student senate advisory committee.

The official university decision is expected in late February or early March.



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