UNA steps to forefront of technology

By BARON BERRY
Executive Editor

The University of North Alabama has recently stepped to the forefront of information technologies among its contemporaries in higher education with the implementation of a new campus computer network.

Dr. Garry Warren, dean of Information Technologies, said that a few years ago automation on this campus was almost non-existent. "The computers we had were old IBM ST's, which were first generation PC's, if we had them at all," Warren said.

In 1991 the Board of Trustees for the university stepped out on a multi-million dollar bond issue which got the ball rolling toward a complete upgrade of the computer system at UNA and full automation of a network which would link the entire campus to the world.

Dr. Lee Allison, director of Academic Computing, said, "We have completed everything that was in our 1991 five-year plan, everything we planned for is in place, including the technology fee. We are ahead of schedule and we didn't go over budget."

"A lot has happened in a very short period of time and we are intent on doing this right and giving the students the services they need, and lots of good things are yet to happen," Warren said.

In order for this progress to continue at a steady rate it was decided to include the introduction of a technology fee. "The technology fee is to assure future students that the situation does not deteriorate, because obviously, all this equipment that we have now in the PC laboratories will completely max out in two or three years," Warren said. "Somehow it has gotten to be known as an Internet fee. It is not an Internet fee, it is just to help maintain what is already in place."

There are certain services which the university offers to students, like library services and telephone services to those living in the dorms. Access to the Internet is another service that UNA offers to students during the term. "One of the rights or privileges that our students have which they do not have at other institutions is access to Internet, and as long as they are a student here they have that right," Warren said.

Although this new service has opened many doors of opportunity to the students and faculty of UNA, there have been a few problems along the way. One of these problems is, a limited amount of people can sign on at one time, therefore many are finding it difficult to get through to the service and locate the information they are pursuing. "We are very surprised what the demand for Internet is," Warren said, "and we are very busy adding additional access points for students."

Another problem with the new service is with students who sign on to the system and stay there. "We have students who stay on this for six and seven hours at a time," Warren said. This also prevents others from signing on to the Internet.

"We have a certain number of connect points to Internet on the campus, so if all those telephone lines are busy when you dial in you will get the busy signal," Allison said.

"If we have 30 connect points to our Internet system the first 30 people are happy, the 31st is not. What we are doing is rapidly increasing capacity with new equipment that we have ordered," Warren said.

"We would appreciate it if the students involved would be considerate of their fellow students and be willing to share," Allison said.

"If the students will be patient with us, as soon as this equipment comes in there will be multiple more access points," Warren said.

Warren said that UNA has the potential for 30 plus connect points but that they will make available whatever is necessary. "Since this was our first time out we did not know what our use level would be so we are trying to be quickly responsive to what this use level is."

Some students who have signed on already have voiced frustrations about having to reapply for the service every semester. Warren said that this was necessary to preserve the integrity of the service which is offered only to students of UNA. "We are required to keep certain accounting functions for Internet. Every time someone gets an Internet account they get what is called an address, this is also registered with the FCC," Warren said. "We have certain obligations to the students who receive this service. Once the term is complete we delete that list and begin a new list so that only enrolled students have access to the system."

Computer mischief