The Silicon Ear
(with apologies to Linda Coughlin)
An occasional academic-computing newsletter for faculty and staff.

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With the Learning Systems Group
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Farewell to Max Smith St. Mary's is losing one of its highly talented Learning Systems Specialists as Max Smith takes what everyone (including Max) agrees is his dream job: producing educational videos for a firm called "LYNDA" in California (so he'll still be working for Linda. Some kind of poetry here, I think). We'll miss you, Max! [But before you go, please correct the above job description, which I know is wrong!]

Need Tech Help in a Hurry? Call or e-mail the Help Desk. Really! All the technicians and Learning-Systems Specialists (all one of them)   have "Blackberries" surgically implanted in their central nervous systems (well, OK, not really, but they do have Blackberries). These gizmos are like advanced pagers and can alert them to a crisis situation. Since such people are more often roaming around than sitting near their phones, this method of contact is usually faster than phoning them directly.

Training in Late August Look for training sessions just before fall semester begins. There will be training on Blackboard, classroom technology (how do we get that pesky "RGB" from displaying on all our slides?), and whatever else people want: ask!

Spam and More Spam, but you don't have to have it all display in your "in" box. Ask your friendly local tech or LSG to help you set up a junk mailbox and have everything marked [SMCM-SPAM] (plus items not marked spam that you can specify—but please, not the Silicon Ear!) put into a special "junk" mailbox that you can check occasionally to be sure there was nothing useful put there accidentally. It's quick and easy.

What's Coming During the Summer

Network Upgrades. The core campus network will get some upgrades to make it faster and more reliable, starting in June. The duct bank that resulted from all that digging during the spring semester will get its first customers as optical fiber is routed to Maintenance and the Health Center. Cobb House will get wireless, and new switches will be installed in Schaefer Hall and Baltimore Hall (the campus network will down for a few hours while this happens—stay tuned for an e-mail message about this in June). A Mac OS X server will come online, making the network interface smoother for on-campus Mac users, for example it should be easier and more intuitive to reach network files (e.g., the "H drive" or "L drive;" more meaningful naming for these collections of data is in the works, too). You can look at the Network Services site <> for a detailed schedule for these upgrades (on-campus access only). While you're there, look at the statistics for Internet II use—we were surprised to find that more than half the College's traffic uses this new, advanced network.

Low-Calorie Computing Baltimore Hall's lab is about to get "thin clients," extremely compact, low-cost, low-energy-use computers that will replace the machines currently there (these machines will replace aging units in the Kent and Anne Arundel labs). These tiny machines are perfect for things like word-processing, web browsing, and e-mail, the major tasks people use the lab computers for. A larger computer in the back room will actually be doing most of the computing. (We've been around long enough that this sounds like "time-sharing," and in fact that's basically what it is.)

Licensing Expensive Software Suppose a hundred people want to use an expensive piece of software, like Adobe's Photoshop—obviously, we get a hundred licenses, right? Forty thousand bucks: ouch! But wait, it's pretty unlikely that all of these people will want to use Photoshop at the same time, so why not just get, oh, fifty licenses? So now we have to check software out of the library? Sounds ugly… Enter the "key server." This is a piece of network software that keeps track of who uses what licensed software when, and in the unlikely event that the full complement of licenses is currently in use it will tell us to try again later (don't know whether it will let us listen to Mozart's clarinet concerto while we're waiting—we'll check on that). This should allow practically all of us to get software we've always wanted and save the College money at the same time. The key-server can accommodate off-campus use; we'll set up a web page that discusses all the ins and outs as installation draws nearer.