
Computer Lab Usage

How the computer labs at OSU are monitored for use

The computer labs at Oklahoma State University are equipped with Dell Optiplex PCs with Windows XP Professional. Access to these computers can be made by logging in with use of a user ID and password to the OSU Active Directory System. Access to the system is monitored transparent to the user. Survey forms are available to the students via a web-based survey instrument created with Lotus Notes.

Measurement instruments

Login log

There is a log file located on the lab server that captures login information from the 5 main campus computer labs. The information in the log includes day, date, time, computer name and the user ID. Each semester a fresh log file is created and the old one archived.

The computer name is comprised of the lab initials and a number assignment. The user ID is assigned to each user at enrollment.

The log is useful in depicting how each lab is utilized by day, date, time, lab and user. For example, by counting the number of computer names we can determine which labs are being used the most and at the time of day the lab is being utilized the most.

Survey Instruments

There are two different survey instruments to help gather information and statistics on lab usage. One survey focuses on customer service and the other focuses on computer lab usage.

The purpose of the customer service survey is to provide feedback from the clients on how we rate on customer service. Some of the questions include:

1. Which lab do you frequent most?
-

2. What software would you like to see added to the labs?
3. Do you think that there needs to be a basic orientation class given on how to use the computers in the labs?
4. Grading scale on the following areas: quality of service, printing service and computer lab assistant service.
5. There is a blank field for any other comments, suggestions or complaints

The purpose of the computer lab usage survey is to provide feedback on how clients utilize the computer labs. Some of the questions include:

1. Do you live in a residential hall?
2. Which IT Lab do you frequent the most?
3. What is your average time in the lab?
4. List the reasons for using the computer lab?
5. Do you own a computer?

The information gleaned utilizing all three instruments are helpful in determining whether the campus is providing adequate computer lab availability to the students. It is useful in determining which labs are utilized the most and those that aren't so utilized.

Measurement Findings

Login log

Information gathered from the login log revealed that one of the computer labs located in a dorm was the heaviest used lab of all 5 labs. The data showed the peak times when the lab is most heavily used. This information was used in determining the size of the new lab that was being built to replace an existing lab.

The log is useful in determining whether a certain lab is being utilized effectively. For example, there is a lab open on the weekends. The data indicates there is very low use of the lab on the weekends. Management can make a case to the overseeing committee of this lab resource as to the hours of operation the lab maintains based on the number of users tallied. The result would be savings in operation expense of the lab.

Survey Instruments

The surveys have been helpful in gathering information on customer service ratings and requests; demographics; reasons for lab use; and opinions.

Customer service ratings have been useful in determining performance of the computer assistants who assist the students in the labs. For example, the customer service rating in 2004 was not as high as 2003. This information is helpful in alerting management to potential training issues, selection of computer assistant candidates, and the lab environment.

The survey has been valuable in aiding management in determining software and hardware needs in the labs. There is a space on the survey for students to make software and hardware requests for the labs. An example is students had made a hardware request for zip drives to be available in the labs. Because of the number of requests, zip drives were added to the next order of PCs.

Another interesting statistic gathered from the surveys is the percentage of students who own computers. Findings show that over 80% of those surveyed own either desktop or laptop computers. 31% of those surveyed own laptops. This is an interesting statistic because it shows even though students own computers; they still have a need to use the computer labs. Further study shows 22% of the laptop owners use the lab PCs for printing; 15% use the lab for email and convenience; 9% use the lab because of the faster PC; and 7% use the lab for internet access, environment and software.

Conclusions

With the constant change of technology, it is vital to measure the effectiveness of the technology currently being used. By utilizing the login logs and survey instruments a reasonable measurement can be taken to insure the technology being used is adequate to meet the demands of the students at OSU. These tools help answer the question, "are there enough computer labs at OSU?"

Customer service issues can be dealt with in more timely and informed fashion. Trends can be identified and adjustments made. The operational budget is more effectively managed and maintained. The result is better informed decisions and easier management of the computer labs.