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Improving Learning Through Assessment

University of Washington General-Access Computing Labs: Client Preferences - 2000

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INTRODUCTION

Through the management of two general-access computing labs, the Student Access & Computing Group provides general access to computing resources while dynamically supporting and enhancing the effective use of those resources. Workstations in the Odegaard Undergraduate Library Computing Commons and the Mary Gates Hall Computing Resource Center (CRC) are available to anyone with a UW-NetID. Clients at the Computing Commons and CRC were surveyed regarding their computing preferences in order to help plan for future hardware and software upgrades in the general-access labs.

METHODOLOGY

During the week of Nov 27 through Dec 1, 2000, clients at the Computing Commons and CRC were asked to complete an on-line survey. A total of 2646 surveys were completed.

FINDINGS

Responses have been summarized below on a modified version of the survey. Frequencies of responses are given for each item, and percentages are based on the number of responses for each question. Seniors (29.9%) and juniors (26.7%) responded more frequently than other students (Figure 1). Females (53.4%) responded more frequently than males (46.6%).

Client Responses

Lab usage

- Most respondents reported using the CRC (60.2%) and department computer labs (77.2%) fewer than 3 hours per week. The Computing Commons was used at least 3 hours per week by 55.7% of the respondents (Figure 2).

- The majority of respondents (87.2%) that used "other" computing resources did so less than 3 hours per week. Other resources identified include: a computer at work (21%), a family/friend's computer (10%), a computer at home (8%) and a public library computer (4%) (Coded Responses).

Software and World Wide Web usage

- Email (selected by 95.6% of survey participants) was the most frequently cited reason for using the general-access labs, followed by word processing (86.1%) and browsing the internet (76.9%) (Figure 3).

- Software packages that were infrequently selected by respondents include Final Cut pro (1.9%) and OmniPage (2.2%).

Activities

- Over the course of the quarter, the majority of respondents (over 60%) spent less than 25% of their time on personal development and academic planning.

- Respondents devoted most of their time to studying, with 38.7% of the respondents indicating that they studied at least 50% of the time.

Preferred computer availability

- Most respondents (73.5%) selected PCs as their preferred computer type, with 11.9% choosing Macs, and 14.5% having no preference.

- The majority of respondents (83.1%) reported being able to use their preferred computer type "almost always" or "most of the time." (Figure 4).

Preferred hardware and software use

- Software titles most frequently requested by survey respondents were Matlab (N=24), Flash (N=22), Dreamweaver (N=20), FrontPage (N=13), and Photoshop (N=13). However, FrontPage and Photoshop are currently available, suggesting that these resources might need more promotion (Coded Responses).

- CD burners (N=56) and more reliable, faster computers (N=19) were the most frequently requested hardware resources.

Video conferencing

- Most students (85.6%) would not use video conferencing if it were available.

- Out of the respondents that would use video conferencing, more would use it for communicating with family or friends (N=35) than for educational purposes (N=15) (Coded Responses).

Instructional technology

- Many respondents reported that at least half of their instructors were using the web to publish syllabi and provide course materials on-line.

- The majority of respondents (88.3%) indicated that less than 25% of their instructors administered tests or quizzes via the web.
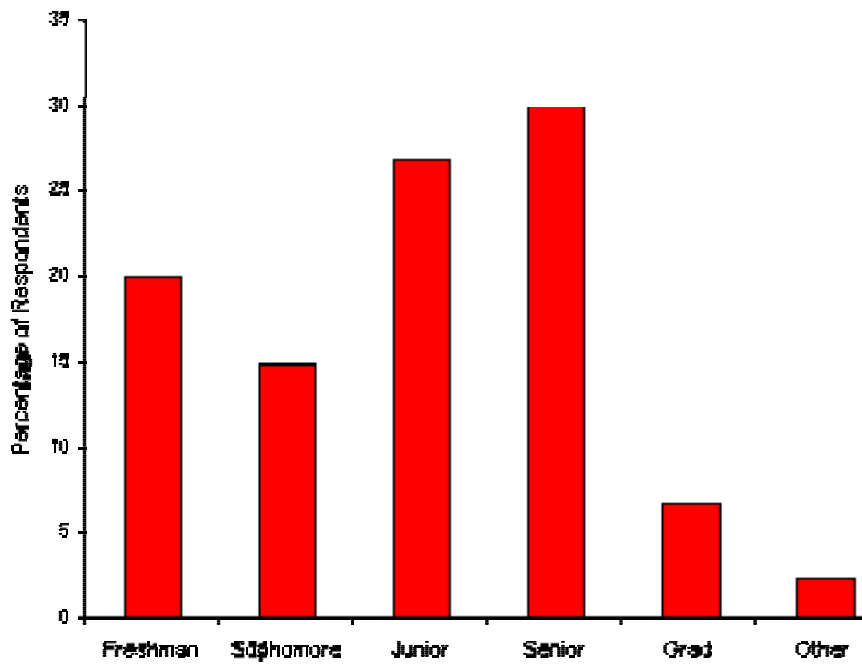
CONCLUSIONS

Responses to the client survey provide information relevant to the existing services in the general-access labs.

- Because the majority of clients are upper-division or graduate students, lab services should be targeted at these groups.

- About half of the clientele use the labs for 3 hours or less each week, suggesting that they do the bulk of their work elsewhere and rely on the labs for services otherwise unavailable (e.g., email, Internet access, and printing).

- Students using the labs more than 3 hours per week are more likely to use the OUGL Computing Commons, suggesting that 24-hour access use may be increasing.

- Students want access to computers that can be used to accomplish multiple tasks simultaneously (e.g., email, word processing, web browsing/development, printing, and library searches). With STAR online available now we expect web usage to increase in both labs, especially the Mary Gates Hall CRC.

- While the preference for PC's remains higher than for Macintosh computers (73.5% vs. 11.9%), comparing figures to previous surveys indicates that more students have no preference (14.5% vs. 0 in 1999) indicating that students are becoming more comfortable on either platform.
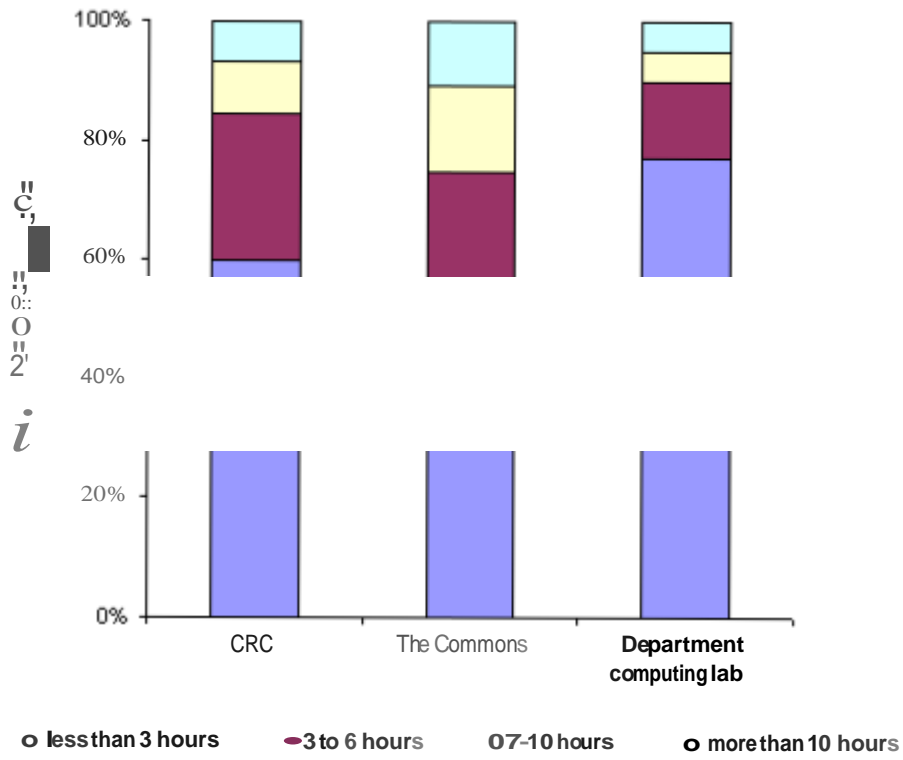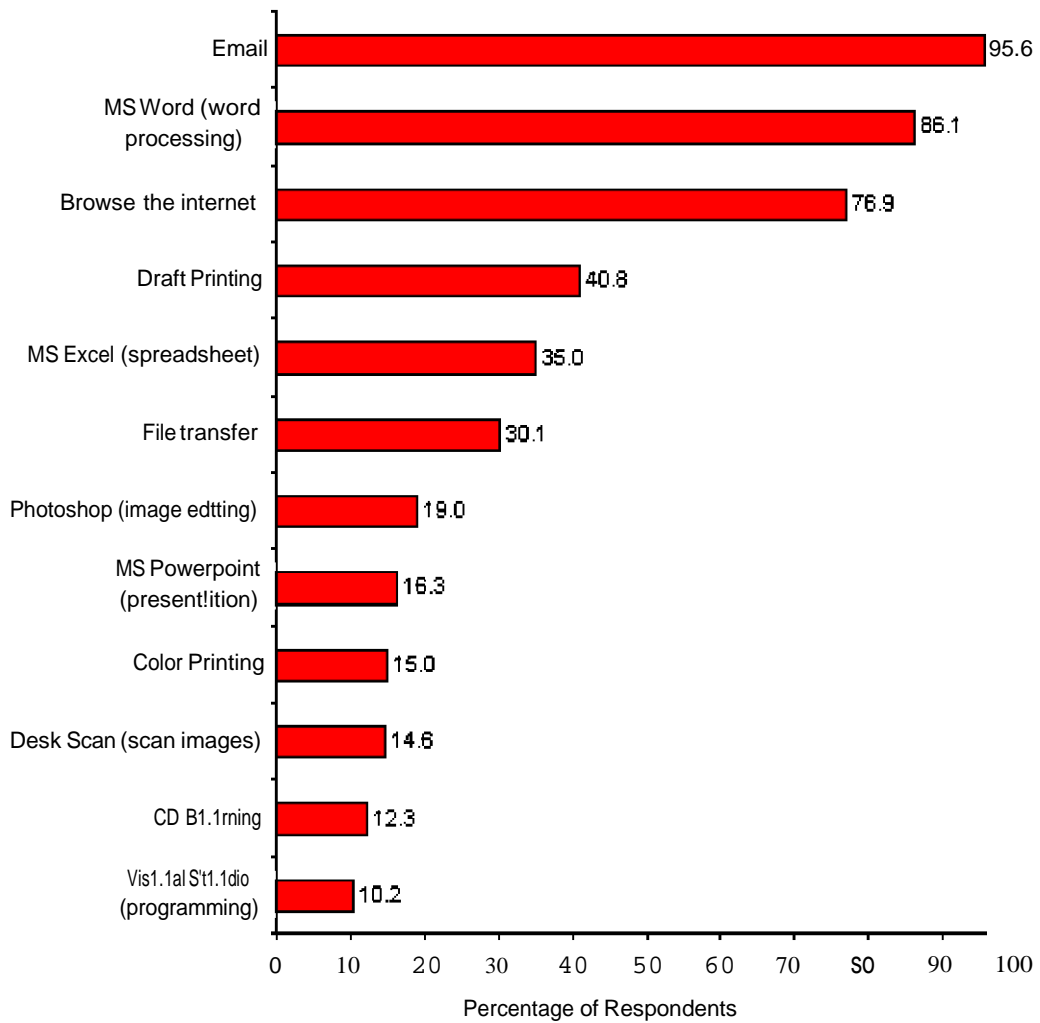
FIGURES

Figure 1. Class standing of respondents

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Figure 2. Weekly computer lab usage

o less than 3 hours ● 3 to 6 hours O 7-10 hours o more than 10 hours

Figure 3. Computer lab resource usage

	Percentage of Respondents
Email	95.6
MS Word (word processing)	86.1
Browse the internet	76.9
Draft Printing	40.8
MS Excel (spreadsheet)	35.0
File transfer	30.1
Photoshop (image edtting)	19.0
MS Powerpoint (present!ition)	16.3
Color Printing	15.0
Desk Scan (scan images)	14.6
CD B1.1rning	12.3
Vis1.1al S't1.1dio (programming)	10.2

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Figure 4. Preferred computer availability

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