

Information Technology Requirements for UNSW students

Introduction

We have reached the stage where the use of information technology in education is no longer novel, but is a standard tool used widely by lecturers and students. The 1998 student survey indicated that 95% of UNSW students have some level of access to computers outside the university.

The purpose of the following recommendation is to make clear to prospective students that UNSW is a place where information technology will be integral to their education, and to make clear to staff that they can expect students to have access to and use information technology.

However, it should also be recognised that computers remain expensive items, and on equity grounds the University should continue to provide some on-campus access to generic information technology resources.

Recommendation 1

That UNSW will expect all new students to have off-campus access to a standard modern computer with CD drive and Internet connectivity (e.g. via a modem). The software on the computer should include:

A word processor able to import and export RTF files.

†Software able to read PDF and Postscript files

A spreadsheet program able to import and export ASCII delimited tables.

A drawing/painting program able to import and export images in widely used formats such as GIF, JPEG, TIFF or PNG.

†A Java 1.1 capable Web browser that supports HTML 2.0

†Software to enable file transfer using the FTP protocol.

†Networking software to enable TCP/IP connection (e.g. via modem using PPP)

†Email software able to link to a popserver.

†Anti-virus software.

These requirements will be reviewed on an annual basis.

UNSW will provide limited on-campus computer facilities that meet these standards for students who are unable to obtain access to off-campus access to such resources.

Recommendation 2

Faculties and Schools should advise prospective students if a particular computing platform is preferred. However, Faculties and Schools cannot expect students to have

† The Division of Information Services has provided free software of this type. Handling and media costs only are charged to students. It is likely that DIS will also be able to provide free software to meet the other requirements as well.

access to computers with specifications beyond the UNSW standard requirements in recommendation 1.

It will be the responsibility of the Schools and Faculties to provide adequate resources that meet their particular requirements for those students unable to obtain off-campus access to such resources[‡].

Course approval documents should indicate any specific information technology requirements beyond the UNSW standard requirements and how these will be met*.

Notes

Although, UNSW and individual Faculties and Schools provide advice and software for home computers and for connecting to the UNSW network, no responsibility is taken with respect to individual student machines being able to use this software or to access the network.

It is expected that all students will be required to produce word-processed documents. All students can also be expected to use spreadsheet and graphics packages, but the requirement to use such packages will vary with the course and students will probably obtain such software only as required.

Guidelines for students

It is anticipated that UNSW, through DIS, as well as individual Faculties and Schools will provide detailed advice to prospective students on meeting these requirements.

The requirements intentionally avoid recommending either a specific brand of computer or proprietary software. In general any computer with modem, CD drive and standard software packages purchased in the last eighteen months should well satisfy these requirements. Older machines may also support the requirements. As a guide, both PC's and Macintosh computers less than 5 years old, with Windows 95 or Mac OS 7.6, or above, should support these requirements; as should machines running Linux (or other versions of Unix). However, the performance of modern software on older machines can vary from acceptable, through inadequate, to not working at all.

A 28K modem or above is desirable for adequate Web access. CD drives are now effectively standard, but the relevant format standard is ISO-9660.

RTF and ASCII (tab) delimited spreadsheets are standard ways of interchanging files between different word processing and spread sheet packages. Most software in the last 5 years supports such interchange. PDF is increasingly becoming the standard for read-only formatted documents. There are a variety of graphics formats in use but public domain software is available to convert between common formats.

[‡] However, in assessing students' resources a Faculty or School may reasonably expect a student computer to make up to 500M of disk space available to meet course requirements.

* For example, this documentation may indicate that 90% of students have computers meeting the extra requirements and that the School will install a laboratory of a further N computers to provide adequate access for the other students and to provide on-campus access to all.

A Web browser will normally include an appropriate email package and is normally provided with the relevant PPP software. There are variations in the level of Java support provided by different Web browsers. It will be the obligation of the Faculty and School to ensure that Web material they provide can be read by a Java enabled, HTML 2.0 browser. Again, if Faculties have requirements beyond this, they will be responsible for providing adequate access for students.