

Mass. Schools Plan Laptop Program

Officials are worried public universities will fall behind private universities in technology instruction.

By **MONICA CHEN**
Staff Writer

Massachusetts' public universities are awaiting the state legislature's decision on a proposal which will require all public university students to own laptops. If approved, the proposal - put forth by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education - will put aside \$123 million

for loans and vouchers for laptops, facilities and faculty training.

The legislature is expected to render a decision in the coming weeks.

Aaron Spencer, a member of the Board of Higher Education and chief architect of the plan, said it is important to educate young people about technology in a world that is increasingly dominated by computers.

"If we don't get into the technology area of instruction now, we're going to fall behind private schools," Spencer said.

UNC-Chapel Hill launched its Carolina Computing Initiative this fall. CCI requires all incoming freshmen

purchase a laptop computer. The program has hit several logistical bumps in its first two months.

Barbara Pitoniak, news director at University of Massachusetts-Amherst, said her chief concern is the kind of information infrastructure that will have to be in place for the proposal to work.

"For example, how many additional outlets are going to be needed in every classroom to accommodate the laptops?" Pitoniak said.

"And also, since technology develops so rapidly, how new is the technology for the infrastructure going to be?"

Pitoniak said university administrators generally supported the proposal despite the many potential problems that might arise during implementation.

"We applaud any efforts to have our students become as technologically proficient as possible," Pitoniak said.

Spencer said the details of the proposal are still waiting to be hammered out by state legislators.

He added that Massachusetts officials should proceed with the proposal despite any initial problems.

"Even if we use all our money now,

(the plan) still won't get off for another two to three years," Spencer said.

"It's an enormous task adjusting, and if we don't start now, then when?"

Marian Moore, UNC vice chancellor for information technology, acknowledged the far-reaching impact such a program could have on students and universities.

But she added that like CCI, the Massachusetts program will benefit both students and the universities.

"Only with a laptop program can we do some of the other programs we were wanting to do," Moore said.

"More desktop computers in the classrooms is hugely expensive to do."

Spencer said it is important to expose public school students to the same technological benefits as private school students.

"Most people think (the public college university) is the domain of the dumb and poor," he said.

"But it ought to be up to the standards of the privates. The cost should be the only difference."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Campus Calendar

Today

11 a.m. - Alpha Phi Omega and Delta Zeta will co-sponsor an **American Red Cross Blood Drive** in the Great Hall of the Student Union.

All interested students are encouraged to attend.

4 p.m. - A **silent auction** will be held at the School of Law for PILF, the **Public Interest Law Foundation**.

All proceeds go to fund summer internships for students interested in public interest law.

5 p.m. - Join **Carolina Cancer Focus** in making **Cancer Awareness Week** a success!

Come to dinner in the Union Cabaret and pay \$5 to raise money for cancer.

Food from local restaurants served at the event, sponsored by Kappa Delta Phi.

5 p.m. - The **UNC National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** will hold its general body meeting in Union 213.

Those interested in joining are welcome to attend.

5:30 p.m. - The **Peace Corps Happy Hour** will take place at Artist's Escape.

Friends and family of Peace Corps volunteers, returned Peace Corps vol-

unteers or anyone interested in Peace Corps is welcome.

6 p.m. - The **Carolina Academic Team** will hold a practice in 321 Greenlaw Hall.

Anyone interested in Jeopardy, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, quiz bowl or in putting trivia knowledge to good use is invited to come.

No experience is needed.

7 p.m. - **Dan Korem** will present "**Lies, Cons and Truths**" in the Great Hall. Come and discover the truth behind magic at this free event.

7 p.m. - The **Carolina Union Activities Board** will host a sneak preview of "**The Legend of Bagger Vance**" and give away a **Phillips MP3 player giveaway** in the Union Film Auditorium.

7:30 p.m. - Equality North Carolina will facilitate an **election 2000 information session**.

Free T-shirts will be available.

8 p.m. - There will be a meeting in Studio 2 of Swain Hall for all those students interested in any aspect of **film production**.

The public is invited

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