



## The Impact to UNCW's Internet and Video Conferencing Operations Pending Cost-cutting Measures at the Microelectronics Center of North Carolina (MCNC)

### **Background:**

UNC Wilmington is a long time customer of the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN), a video communications network, provided and operated by the Microelectronics Center of North Carolina (MCNC). NCREN supplies the primary Internet connection to campus, along with a two-way, interactive, multipoint video and audio system, which together allow students, faculty and staff to fulfill their academic, professional and individual goals in higher education.

### **Overall Impact of Cost-cutting Measures to Students, Faculty and Staff:**

Faced with cost-cutting measures, a reduction in these vital services would affect all stakeholders in the university. On campus, students work 24/7 on educational pursuits and heavily utilize the network as a primary research resource. As a service to students and faculty, Randall Library staff depends on the network connection for around-the-clock access to numerous subscription-based resources. To offer an example from a programming perspective, the UNCW-NCSU 2+2 Engineering program, a collaborative effort between the two universities, holds engineering classes on campus after 5:00 p.m., and should a reduction in service hours come into play, this program would be greatly affected. Moreover, if the heavily relied upon Internet connection was disrupted after hours—without prompt resolution—on campus business continuity would be seriously impaired. As a service-oriented division of the university, the Information Technology Systems Division (ITSD) would be unable to meet two of its Key Performance Indicators, numbers 2 and 8, relating to availability of services and fulfilling UNC Tomorrow distance education initiatives.



## Real Time Impact of Cost-cutting Measures to Students, Faculty and Staff:

- **24/7 Monitoring of the Internet Connection:** Through 24/7 monitoring of the campus Internet connection, NCREN is and very much has been a partner with UNCW in providing professional support for the mission of the University. UNCW relies on the support of NCREN to keep the connection operational at all times and to respond to outages and work collaboratively with ITSD as they occur, no matter the time. Working mutually with UNCW ITSD staff, NCREN has been able to maintain an uptime of 99.999% year round for the UNCW scholarly community. If NCREN were to reduce network operations center hours from the current 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m./ live with 24 x 7 pager coverage to 8:00 a.m.—12:00 midnight/pager coverage only, or to 8:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m./pager coverage only, as proposed by NCREN in response to UNC system budget cuts, it would have a direct, negative impact on the ability of the university to deliver the appropriate technologies, services and professional support needed by students, faculty and staff as they endeavor to fulfill the core academic mission of the university.
- **Daily Video Operations—Live Monitoring/Managing; Reduce Services from 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (\$37,500):**

Based on the last three academic years of programming, video conferencing services through UNCW's ITSD have been provided, on average, for six to eight academic courses per year that occur outside of the 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m. timeframe. Although technically possible to conduct some of these classes without utilizing the NCREN network, the quality of instructional delivery for many of these courses would be compromised without centralized technical support. (Additional note: any class involving more than four schools could not be accommodated).

While not all fall 2009/spring 2010 video conferencing reservations have been submitted, the Watson School of Education, the UNCW-NCSU 2+2 Engineering program, the UNCW School of Social Work, and the UNCW Division of Academic



Affairs have advised of their plans for increased usage of the network for academic delivery of courses to students at a distance (e.g., Onslow, Brunswick, Columbus counties and the Camp Lejeune Base Education Center). Courses scheduled outside of the 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m. timeframe or courses requiring MCNC bridging or Multipoint Control Unit (MCU) services would potentially be impacted by this reduction in service.

Any requests by the UNCW campus community to connect with distant locations outside of the 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m. timeslot could be impacted or denied altogether as MCNC bridging and technical support services are regularly used and/or required to accommodate such requests.

- **Video Schedule Availability; Reduce Services by 50% (\$21,750):**

Without quick access to a centralized scheduler, this cost-cutting measure would likely lead to delays in “turn-around confirmation” for scheduling classes and conferences on the network and severely place at risk the efficient scheduling of the growing number of state-wide and UNC System administrative conferences, which require a timely reservation and confirmation process for optimal effectiveness. As a trickledown effect, with more groups competing for room time, any reservation delays could result in the escalation of double-bookings or similar scheduling issues at each participating campus.

As we have seen a trend in the increase of administrative and ad hoc video conferences for each campus, this reduction in centralized scheduling resources could restrict growth in the use of the network overall as coordination between campuses and QoS for end users is potentially compromised.

### **Recommendation – Action:**

ITSD agrees to participate in a cost sharing model with other UNC schools to provide the \$60,000 shortfall from individual campus resources.