

PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE AcIS NETWORK PRINTERS

Columbia College Student Council

February 2002

To the administration:

Network printers constitute one of the most widely and frequently used resources by undergraduate students at Columbia University. A significant number of students rely on them as their only source of printing. Even students who have printers of their own often use the network printers because of their speed and high quality. Indeed, as student leaders we feel confident in saying that network printers are of vital importance to the academic careers of students at Columbia.

However, frequent problems with these printers often render them unusable, causing substantial problems for those who depend on them. The need for improved service of network printers is overwhelming. While we understand the difficulties associated with maintaining such high-use printers, there are several problems which, we believe, have very manageable and feasible solutions.

Thank you for your consideration,

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Representative, CCSC

Michael "Novi" Novielli- Columbia College
Student Body President

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Proposal I: Improving Posting of Instructions for Printer Use

Observation:

Signs instructing students how to use network printers and how to report problems with printers are often missing. Also, those instructions that are posted can be incomplete or unclear. Finally, the double-sided printing option is currently advertised as “Duplex Printing.”

Proposal:

- a. Signs informing students how to use the “Refresh” function (Ctrl + L) and the “Restart” function (Ctrl + Alt + Backspace) should be posted and regularly maintained at all network printer terminals.
- b. Signs should be posted in all AcIS labs and at all AcIS network printers publicizing the ways to report printer problems: consultant@columbia.edu and the computing help line.
- c. Instructions for double-sided printing should be simplified and advertised as “Double-Sided Printing” instead of “Duplex Printing”.

Argument:

Many of the problems students encounter with network printers arise from a lack of knowledge about how the printers and terminals work. Problems with terminals freezing or printing jobs not appearing at the terminal station could be scaled back considerably by making students aware of the “Refresh” and “Restart” functions at stations. The maintenance of these signs throughout the year is necessary, as they may not be seen by many students if only posted at the beginning of each term. This will likely cut down on the reporting of minor printer errors and help to maximize the efficiency of the printer servicing staff.

Making students aware of how to report problems with printers will decrease the delay between the appearance of a problem and its being reported and ultimately fixed. This will also decrease the frustration of students who may feel that they have little power to resolve these issues.

Finally, the term “Duplex Printing” is not familiar to many students. Consequently, they are not able to print documents double-sided. By simplifying the instructions and advertising the option as “Double-sided Printing” more students may take advantage of it.

Proposal II: Equally Distributing Default Printers

Observation:

Currently printer 213a in Butler Library processes over three times as many pages per day as the other two printers in the 213 computer lab. The computers in Schapiro are currently sent to default print to Lerner.

Proposal:

The default printer on computers in labs with more than one printer should be evenly distributed between the room’s printers. Each computer’s default printer should be posted at the computer terminal.

Argument:

Users may not know how, or may not think to change, the default printer setting on the stations in computer labs. By equally distributing the default settings to all printers in a lab, the overuse of one printer, like 213a in Butler, can be decreased, in turn reducing the maintenance those printers require.

Proposal III: Extended Hours of Printer Maintenance Staff

Observation:

The service staff for the printers works from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday and are only able to service all printers twice daily. Additionally, the network printers are used more frequently during the service staff's off-hours.

Proposal:

The service staff should be increased so that a service can be extended from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM Monday through Friday and 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM on Saturday and Sunday. AcIS should also consider adjusting staff hours to correspond with peak usage times.

Argument:

Increasing the service staff and its hours of operation will allow more regular service visits to printers during the day, eliminating the two-day service gap during the weekend. This is especially significant given that network printers receive at least as much, if not more, use on the weekends as during the week. Additionally, by eliminating the accumulation of problems during the weekends, the service staff will have fewer problems to address during the week.

Proposal IV: Establishing a Separate Printer Problem Reporting Line

Observation:

The only way to report a printer problem, other than e-mail, is to call the Computing Help Desk, which responds to all computing, not just printer, problems. A user reporting a printer problem has to wait for an available consultant to file a report.

Proposal:

A separate line should be established and dedicated solely to the reporting of problems with printers. A consultant should respond to calls on this help line immediately.

Argument:

Reporting a printer malfunction does not require the amount of time needed to help students work through more detailed computer problems. Users should not have to wait on hold to give a report that takes only a few seconds. The addition of a separate phone line will facilitate the repair of printers by decreasing reporting time.

Proposal V: Increased Printer Availability

Observation:

There are not enough printers currently available to effectively service the need and demand of students.

Proposal:

There should be at least one network printer added to the following areas: Butler 209, Butler 213, Hartley Computer Lab, both Lerner computer labs, East Campus 10th Floor and Schapiro Residence Hall.

Argument:

The availability of printers is not sufficient to satisfy student need or demand. The Hartley Computer Lab, which services all students in Hartley, Wallach and John Jay Halls, has only one network printer. East Campus 10 and Schapiro printers receive such a high traffic that problems there are relatively frequent. By increasing the total number of printers, use of each individual printer will decrease, reducing the service requirements of all printers. With more than one printer in each lab, an individual printer problem will not render an entire lab nonfunction.

Proposal VI: Utilizing and Expanding the RCC Program

Observation:

Resident Computing Consultants (RCCs) are utilized only to help with individual student computing problems. There are only 39 RCCs to service the entire undergraduate population.

Proposal:

- a. The number of RCCs should be expanded significantly. The Student Council can be utilized as a resource to help in recruiting RCCs. The program of training RCCs to perform basic printer maintenance should be continued so that RCC can be utilized in adding paper and toner, fixing jams and resolving terminal problems.
- b. RCCs should be assigned to Butler, Lerner and Mudd so that those printers can be serviced at the same level as Residence Hall printers.
- c. Aliases for reporting room specific printer problems should be better publicized. Additionally, such specific aliases should be created for printers in Butler, Lerner and Mudd and directed to the individual RCCs responsible for those buildings' respective printers.

Argument:

Although a 24-hour service staff would be costly to maintain, using RCCs for this purpose will allow vastly expanded service of printers while still being financially feasible.

RCCs are only paid for hours they work now, not hours when they are “on call.” As such, they would only have to be paid when responding to a problem, but would be available 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Training RCCs to perform these minor service jobs would be an easy task. Furthermore, by increasing the total number of RCCs, quick and efficient service will be possible. Although some RCCs may not always be available, in having a large pool of people, there will likely be someone on hand to service the printers at any given time.

By better publicizing and expanding room specific aliases, students will better utilize them and RCCs will be better informed of printer problems.