



2010-11 Student Technology Survey Report

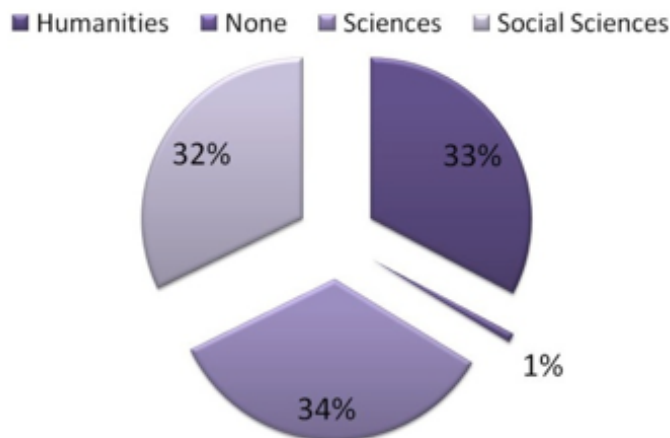
Full Report

Introduction & Overview

The limited availability of financial resources at the Graduate Center (GC) to enhance learning and facilitate innovative research leaves students with significant un-met needs. The Student Technology Fee (STF) provides supplemental finances for technologies that enrich the learning environment and is funded directly by a 100\$ charge issued to full-time and \$60 charge to part-time GC graduate students each semester. We estimate that with enrollment levels over 4,000 students each semester, most all of whom are full-time, STF resources are at least \$600,000 per year.

To assess existing IT needs of graduate students, the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) conducted the Student Tech Survey from October 2010 through January 2011. This survey was conducted for two main reasons: there is no formal assessment of student IT needs at the GC that involves students, and although a procedure exists at many CUNY colleges, there is no mechanism to solicit STF proposals from students at the GC. We believe that our survey results are representative of the GC student population; in total, 960 GC students participated in the DSC survey, with almost equal participation from each of the three academic clusters at the GC as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Student Tech Survey
Participants by Academic Cluster**



This report analyzes the extent to which STF can be used to satisfy needs that were identified on the DSC survey, and reflects the most urgent and important needs shared among students across disciplines. It is our hope that the STF Committee commits sufficient resources to address each of our recommendations, as they are based directly on student feedback.

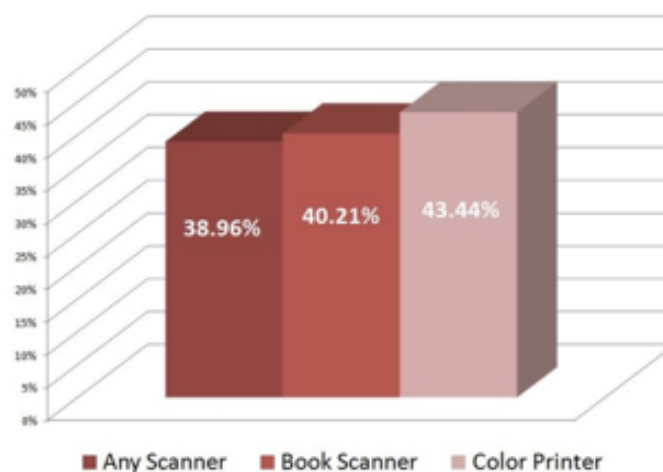
Several key conclusions emerge from our analysis of the Student Technology Survey.

1. The problem of access to state-of-the-art resources to support and enhance learning.

In a free-text area where students could provide feedback, many off-campus students report numerous cases of insufficient access to very basic IT needs, such as printing, or access to functional computing machines. Currently, these students pay out-of-pocket for printing or travel to the Graduate Center specifically for printing or computer access. Although most students are at the Graduate Center on a weekly basis, an increasing number are based exclusively at other CUNY campuses, especially those affiliated with science labs. In terms of remote computing, there are serious concerns about the usefulness of Citrix, and Mac users remain unsupported. And despite the new upgrades, there is incredibly poor feedback on the system's performance.

2. Enhanced scanner access is not meeting student needs. When asked what types of hardware resources were essential to their academic work but inaccessible or unavailable, 15.2% of students indicated book scanners when given a list of eleven hardware items. The top three reported hardware items are shown in Figure 2. In addition, in the free-text area where students could write-in responses, book scanners were the most requested item, and many serious problems with the current system were noted. That is, even with the new edge scanners intended for books, students continue to be inconvenienced by prohibitively long lines at scanning resources in the GC library. Students also expressed that when the edge scanner is available, the process of scanning books is inefficient, tedious and the specialized software/workstations have been known to crash after about 20 pages due to insufficient memory.

Figure 2. Top 3 Essential Hardware Resources Requested by Students



3. A better strategy for disseminating information about GC IT resources is urgently needed. One unexpected finding was the percent of students that are unaware of existing resources and IT services. This was apparent in both hardware and software requests made by students in a free-text box, but most common to software. We estimated that over 90% of software requests were for resources that are currently available either in the library, Mac Media Lab, Media Room, or Citrix-Xen Apps. Also, information about services was also limited; less than one third (23.1%) of students knew of the Equipment Loan Program before the survey.

4. There is a strong case for improving user support tools for our various software environments, services and other resources. Figures 3 and 4 show student feedback about the GC knowledge base. When asked how important students felt it was that our GC knowledge base be up-to-date, 70% of participants indicated that it was very important, and almost all noted that it was important that the knowledge base is comprehensive and user-friendly. Despite this expectation, among those students who have used the GC knowledge base, the problem of access to comprehensive, user-friendly, up-to-date resources was noted by almost 40% of survey participants, with students feeling most strongly that the resource was not up-to-date.

Figure 3. If you have used the knowledge base, would you describe it as:

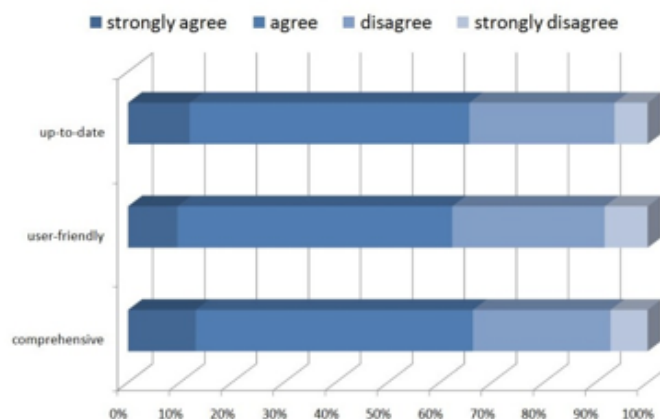
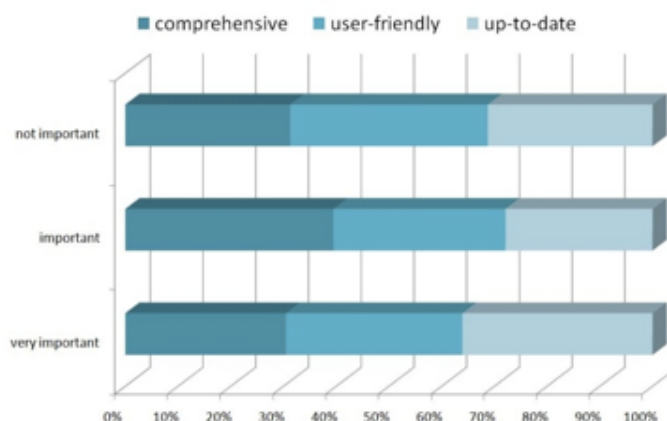


Figure 4. If you have used the knowledge base, would you describe it as:



Recommendations

Based on our conclusions, we have identified the following recommendations to improve student IT for all Graduate Center students.

1. Ensure that all non-GC based Graduate Center students have access to computing and printing resources.

In the past STF has been used to supplement the IT needs of students based off-campus by providing computers to the Social Work program at Hunter, and printing resources for Criminal Justice students at John Jay. However, our survey suggests that access issues go well beyond these programs, and a comprehensive assessment of all programs that have students based primarily outside of the GC should be conducted. STF funds should be used to ensure that these students have access to basic IT needs.

2. Provide access to a book scanner.

Access to a book scanner was a highly requested hardware need on our survey, indicated by 398 students representing 29 different programs at the Graduate Center. Enhanced scanner access has not resulted in a satisfactory solution and the recent deployment of edge scanners is not a sufficient alternative. Although the library is generously sized relative to other Graduate School areas, the total allowable space for physical books is quite limited, and the process of Inter-Library Loaning is problematic. In the worst case this unsatisfactory process can result in lost productivity and has implications for students' time to degree. Improved access to book scanning would go a long way toward addressing this problem.

3. Increase the visibility of information on IT resources.

In general, students are unaware that many important applications are already available. We believe that this may be due to the organization of applications in the current directory structure and a lack of information on available resources like the Equipment Loan Program and Citrix-XenApps. Strategies to address this issue may include program or user specific views of applications available, and/or better information about what resources are available and specific instructions on how to access them. Also, we strongly recommend that the Citrix environment is assessed for access, and usability issues.

4. Integrate disparate user support resources and improve the quality of the GC IT knowledge base.

Currently, GC IT user support resources are found through multiple access points, and some information is out dated. Also, for some items, such as the accessories that are used with the equipment in the Media Room, it is unclear if any documentation exists. Consolidating user support information into one centralized knowledge base for all GC IT student resources, providing a more intuitive interface for identifying relevant information, and updating this resource regularly would help students to more easily access and utilize resources effectively and help students to trouble-shoot IT problems independently.