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Date: Wed, 13 Mar 91 14:50 EST  
From: "Judy Hallman" <HALLMAN>  
To: ncvtx-1@ncsuvm  
Subject: Info on UNC-CH INFO for CAUSE publication

Ernie,

I pieced together a few e-mail messages (one was my first message to CWIS-L in January 1990). I haven't worried about how well it is written, so please let me know if you can't make sense out of sections. I have tried to update the messages a little, though, as I combined them.

I'd like to suggest that in the article you give credit to Carl Malstrom. It is my understanding that he is responsible for our all getting started in this venture.

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At UNC-CH, we are using DEC hardware and their VTX product, using the part called UPDATE. Our system is display only -- we don't currently use the software needed to collect responses and inquiries. We acquired a program from NCSU that lets us use some simple dot commands; the program generates input to the

DEC programs (it is time-consuming to enter text for UPDATE using just the DEC software).

We started experimenting with VTX in the winter of '87, planned our implementation and started putting in data in the spring, and announced it in the fall ('88). We studied NCSU's system to see what they had. NCSU apparently studied Clemson's, when they were getting started.

We had a steering committee of about six (faculty, staff, student, librarians, some experienced with videotex) to help us define content, menus, policies and procedures, and the like. We spent quite a bit of time working on the menus, assuming we would put in all the information we could get and trying to figure out how all the pieces would fit together. The committee was VERY helpful in advising on the menus and data organization, as well as providing guidance and moral support. We haven't met since the system got off the ground, but I see some of the participants around and they seem to like what we have. I don't see much value in meeting again now.

Like many other ventures in a university environment (especially computer centers), we took this on with no additional staff; the hardware was already here. I do most of the contact work -- call people to ask them to send information and remind them when it is out of date, and I currently do most of the documentation and PR work. I think the project is fun and has lots of potential and would like to spend more time on it than I can manage to find for it. I think I average less than 5 hours a week on it and that's mostly my own time (some

computer people develop a weird sense of fun and odd hobbies). We have another full-time person who, in addition to her other full-time duties, oversees the daily maintenance, works with the personnel office on job openings, puts in many of the newsletters, and the like. She probably averages about 1 or 2 hours a week on INFO. We have a secretary who spends about half her time (20 hours a week) maintaining the calendar section and job openings. Our DEC systems programmers probably average about 1 or 2 hours a week.

The only data providers who put data directly into the database are the Office of Research Services who maintain the grant and funding portion. Most people have too much to do and the procedures we have for putting data in are not real easy. Right now we just ask people to send us their files in whatever format they have them in (an ASCII file would be nice, but lots of us are using MS Word on Macs and ASCII files aren't easy to get out of it). We do this stuff every day and it's not hard for us to do (just takes time). If I asked the data providers to do it, it would take at least as much of THEIR time and be harder for them to do -- if they send info once a month or once a semester they'll forget how, and something's bound to change. Sometimes there is a new person providing the data the next time I get it, and sometimes they are preparing it with different software. I don't think I'd get the data if I asked the providers to do all the work.

We are trying to address all needs -- a calendar of events, information of value to faculty, staff, students, incoming people, towns people, alumni, and to provide a service for the state and beyond.

We already provide information of value to anyone wanting to connect in from the outside world. Some items that come to mind are our directory (separate directories for faculty/staff and students; we include e-mail userids for faculty and staff; currently we find monthly updates sufficient), jobs openings, newsletters (especially the Bulletin on Aging, Instructional Computing, and our own Newsbrief), continuing education courses, and the courses you can take through extension (these are the courses offered by the "Greater" University of North Carolina). I think these items already make Info a good public service.

I am also on the Board of Directors of Public Information Network, Inc. A non-profit corporation set up by a group of volunteers to offer a similar service to the town/county. I want to ensure that the two systems will talk to each other.

We currently have links to other UNC VTX systems in NC. I'd like to see this expanded to include Cornell, Princeton, New Mexico, etc. as well as the proposed system for the town and possibly some other services, such as the online catalog for

the library.

I think we have only scratched the surface of services we can provide using systems of this type. I'd like to see terminals in public libraries with access to our system and the ability to link to other systems around the world. Can you imagine looking for a job in another state through such a system, and then perhaps checking the housing market in the town of your choice?

There was a lot of start up time. It's the chicken and egg thing. I didn't want to tell people about the system until we had a lot of data in it, but it's hard to get people to keep sending data when no one is using the system. We were pretty lucky to have patient people who kept sending data even though no one was using the service. Once we got jobs in everything took off. The person in charge of that department sent a letter to all full-time staff telling them how to look at jobs in INFO. "Jobs" is the most used part of our service. I think we are now on the edge between nice-to-have and a necessary service. I recently had a request from someone from UNC Greensboro to put phone numbers for departments in. I knew I wanted to do that for our

campus, but hadn't realized how much benefit there would be for the other UNC campuses that are tied together through our VTX systems. I'm about ready to talk to the alumni office to see if they will do some blurbs on info in alumni publications. The undergraduate course catalog is currently being updated. I hope to tackle that this summer and then think the service will warrant some publicity for high school use. I don't think INFO has cut anyone's publication costs, but I see it as a way to spread information farther. Once information is prepared and edited, why not make it accessible electronically too? In some ways, I think of INFO as a great big filing cabinet for the university -- not so much a place to learn things as a place to look up bits of information you need. What's hard is knowing what you can look up and where to look for it. But can you always find what you are looking for in your filing cabinet in your office? Well actually I guess it's more like looking for something in someone else's filing cabinet -- you don't know if it's in there or what it's filed under.

One thing I'm thinking about offering ONLY electronically is the course evaluation booklet. Course evaluation is very expensive. Preparing and processing thousands of OCR forms, running programs, typesetting and printing thousands of copies. How do people use them? They don't read from cover to cover. They probably look up one or two courses or professors and then throw the thing away.

I watch for things that I'd like to put in and call people to get them. Current I'm after department phone numbers, and I hope to work on the personnel office to put in the university staff handbook, retirement booklet, and the like. I'd like to put in something similar to "Ask Uncle Ezra," like Cornell has,

but I don't know how to do it yet.

\*\*\*\*\* Bottom Of Message  
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