

Ken Janda: Renewing Old Acquaintances

Vogelback Computing Center welcomes Kenneth Janda, new acting director. No stranger to its staff and activities, Ken has been an active member of NU's University Computing and Information Processing Committee since its inception, and in 1982-83, chaired the University Computing Funds Allocation Committee.

Perhaps more than any other faculty member, Ken has made a steadfast commitment to quality computing services at Northwestern. Last year he won the coveted College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher Award, in part, for his meticulous preparation of political science classes and students who use VCC's computing facilities in conjunction with their assignments and research. His book, "Political Parties - A Cross National Survey," published in 1980, is dedicated to Northwestern University Library and Vogelback Computing Center.

Most recently, Ken served two years as chairman of the political science department. He was appointed acting director for VCC after Tom Board resigned to become associate director of NU's Telecommunications Service. Tom succeeded Ben Mittman, who, after 16 years as director of VCC, resigned in June, 1983 to establish the Center for Technology in Management at NU's Kellogg Graduate School of Management.

Ken has agreed to fill the post of acting director through the end of the academic year. A new director for VCC will be appointed after the University hires a senior computing officer who will report directly to the president. Since the administration is flexible in its definition of the responsibilities of this senior office, it is possible the person selected could become the architect of a new campus computing structure with jurisdiction over the Computing Center, as well as any or all of: computer networking, telecommunications, cable television, and coordination of administrative and library computing functions.

The VCC user community and staff have welcomed Ken and will continue to cooperate with him to maintain our excellent reputation among university computing centers. (Read his article on the next page, summarizing goals and expectations for computing at NU.) We anticipate major achievements and an even stronger position for the future.



A New Role for Vogelback

by Kenneth Janda

In early January, the Vogelback Planning Group (Tom Board, Bruce Foster, Rosemary Karr, Albert Steiner, and Kenneth Janda) outlined a "new role" for VCC in a concept paper addressed to the Committee on Computing and Information Processing, chaired by Gilbert Krulee. It focused on ideas for serving the University community in a context of distributed computing rather than on details of equipment acquisition. We have been discussing the implications of that plan with the Administration and the Committee on Vogelback Computing Center (Chairman, Joshua Dranoff). The equipment and personnel implications are considerable, and it remains to be seen whether sufficient resources are available to implement all its facets. At this time, I wish to share with Vogelback users the "operative assumptions" about the future of academic computing that underlie our unfolding view of central site computing.

1. The need for computing and information processing services on campus will continue to increase.
2. An increasing proportion of computing will be "distributed" away from the central site to departmental minicomputers, microcomputer clusters, and personal computers.
3. Departments that have been heavy users of computing will continue to be heavy users (but not necessarily at the central site).
4. The greatest rate of growth in central site computing will come from new communities of users in the humanities and professional schools.
5. While the proportion of computing done at the central site will decrease, the overall amount will increase.
6. The role of the central site will evolve away from "introductory" applications in programming and word processing toward (1) "advanced" research applications, (2) networking, (3) electronic mail, and (4) specialized peripheral processing.

The key assumption is No. 5: the proportion of computing done at the central site will decrease, but the overall amount will increase. Our experience as well as the experience at other universities supports this assumption, which contradicts thinking that the mini-micro revolution will replace central site computing. Accordingly, the VCC Planning Group proposed a forward-looking plan to implement an expanded "new role" in keeping with assumption No. 6 -- serving advanced computing applications, networking, specialized peripherals, and electronic mail.

Our special focus at Vogelback will be on developing database management software designed to integrate our mainframe and minicomputer with selected makes of microcomputers in compatible networks to search, select, and transfer data. In conjunction with the new telecommunications system and the direct fiber-optic cable between Chicago and Evanston, such software would serve the growing group of faculty and students with personal computers and students at microcomputer clusters being planned for both campuses.

Other aspects of our plan build on Vogelback's strength in computing for behavioral and health research and in processing large data bases. The plan also addresses VCC's most serious weaknesses in rate structure, outmoded mainframe system, saturated minicomputer, and neglect of microcomputer developments. It also proposes new initiatives to serve, in different ways, three general sectors of the University community: (1) science and technology, (2) humanities, arts, and professional schools, and (3) the behavioral and health sciences.

Although we address virtually all aspects of academic study in this triptych of scenarios, we cannot afford to offer everything to everyone. Some areas will be served differently than others. Our plan involves tailoring the future equipment, personnel, and organization of Vogelback to conform to these goals while building on our current investments. At this writing, we are evaluating alternative makes and models of computing equipment to supplement our overloaded VAX minicomputer and to replace our outmoded Cyber mainframe. We are less concerned with the vendors or the models of computers at Vogelback than we are about the principle of upgrading our current facilities to meet the expanding needs of academic computing at Northwestern University over the next five years. We believe that these initiatives will place Northwestern at the forefront of higher education in integrating mainframes, minicomputers, and microcomputers in the overall computing environment.
