

Introduction and Background

As part of a Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF) grant, the Information Desk — the UT Southwestern Library's unified public service point — developed and implemented a laptop lending program to provide more options and flexibility to our clients' information gathering efforts.

The grant period lasted from August 31, 2001, through August 30, 2002. Planning for the laptop lending program began in late Fall 2001 while the equipment was purchased and configured.

The program was officially launched in July 2002.



Photo by Alicia Rueber

Equipment and Accessories

The following laptop models were purchased:

- Dell Latitude C610 (17 laptops @ approx. \$1,900 each)
- Mac PowerBook G4 (8 laptops @ approx. \$3,200 each)

The models were selected using the following criteria:

- Price
- Usability
- Weight
- Healthy "lifespan" (at least three years)
- Capability

Specifications for these laptops, including available software, are listed at right. Accessories for the laptops were also purchased, such as:

- Laptop cases (approx. \$50 each)
- Laptop locks (approx. \$40 each)
- External floppy disk drives for Macs (approx. \$50 each)
- External Zip drives (approx. \$75 each)

To maintain consistency among the laptops, the following steps were performed:

- Creating a laptop "master" configuration with specific restrictions to protect computer hardware and software
- Cloning the "master" to all laptops

A total of 12 Dell laptops were initially made available for the loan program: eight at the main library and four at the smaller branch library. A few months later, six Mac laptops were added (three at each library).

Note: This program currently provides the only Mac platform access that is available to Library users.

Researching Policies and Procedures

An Internet and literature search was done to determine the policies, procedures, and experiences other libraries have used in lending laptops. In the process, we discovered that The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries had developed a laptop lending program, and a site visit was arranged to specifically learn more about their experiences.

The Laptop Checkout Guidelines issued by the TIF Board were of immense help in setting policies and procedures and creating forms. Their guidelines — available at http://www.tifb.state.tx.us/Grants_Services/White_Papers/Laptop_Checkout.doc — covered:

- Information that should be communicated to the user:
 - Eligibility
 - Location of laptops
 - Hours and duration of availability
 - Fees, fines, and penalties
 - Reservation and checkout guidelines
- Responsibility agreements to be signed by the user covering:
 - Terms on loss, damage, or theft
 - Acceptable use
- Best practices for these areas:
 - Use and checkout
 - Technical maintenance and storage

Specifications

Mac PowerBook G4 (pictured on left)

Feature	Description
Processor	1GHz Processor
Memory	2GB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Drives	40GB Ultra ATA
Network Card	802.11b Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11b Wi-Fi certified) in 1GHz mode; Built-in 10/100/1000BASE-T Ethernet
Sound Devices	Built-in Sound
FireWire Controller	One FireWire 400 port at up to 400 Mbps
USB Controllers	Two 12-Mbps USB 1.1 ports
Operating System	Mac OS X
Available Software	Adobe Reader 5.0, iMovie, iTunes, iPhoto, iText, iWork, Microsoft Office X (Excel, Entourage, PowerPoint, Word), Sherlock, QuickTime Player

Dell Latitude C610 (pictured on right)

Feature	Description
Processor	Pentium III
Memory	256 DDRAM
DVD/CD-ROM Drives	LG CD-ROM CDD-8494B
Disk Drives	MAXTOR-HC40102 37.2GB
Floppy Disk Drives	Floppy disk drive
Network Card	Adapters Intel® PRO/100 VE Desktop Connection
Sound Devices	SoundMAX Integrated Digital Audio
USB Controllers	Intel® i82801BA/BAM USB Universal Host Controller - 2442
Operating System	Intel® i82801BA/BAM USB Universal Host Controller - 2444
Available Software	Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Acrobat Reader 5.0, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Office XP (Access, Excel, FrontPage, PowerPoint, Word), QuickTime Player, RealOne Player, RealPlayer, Windows Media Player

Accessories

Jonag®® Floppy USB-Powered Drive (for Mac laptops)
Jonag®® Zip® 250MB USB-Powered External Drive (for PC and Mac laptops)

Going Mobile: Laptop Lending in an Academic Medical Library

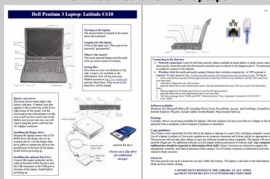
Jon Crossno, MLS, AHIP Sharon Giles, MLS Nathan Hooper, AAS
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas Library

Producing the Support Materials

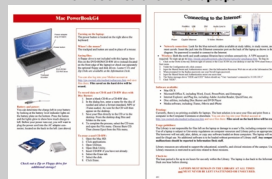
Once we had the suggested guidelines, we were able to develop the following support materials:

- An "Information card" kept in the case with the laptop, which explains how to use the laptop and restates the most important policies
- A combination checkout and responsibility agreement form to be signed by the user, which includes an equipment checklist to ensure that all accessories are returned
- Policies and procedures, including:
 - Eligibility limited to in-library use by UT Southwestern affiliates
 - Checkout period limited to a six-hour period
 - Users required to sign a responsibility form agreeing to pay for loss or damage and to follow computer use guidelines

Information Card for PC Laptops



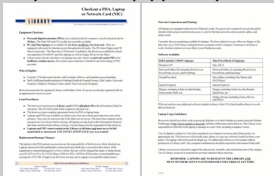
Information Card for Mac Laptops



Laptop Checkout Form



Policy Statement for Laptop (and More) Checkout



Marketing the "Laptops for Loan" Program

To spread the news about the new program, the Information Desk requested help from the Library's Marketing Team, and the following promotional methods were selected:

- Placing handouts in Library display racks
- Writing articles for:
 - Info-Library, our email newsletter/alert service
 - Information Times, a joint print newsletter about information technology on campus (in collaboration with three other campus departments)
 - Center Times, the University's newspaper
- Displaying posters in the Library
- Running a banner on the Library News Web page and other Library Web pages
- Showing PowerPoint slides on the Library's new Marketing kiosk using an iMac®® Photoshop® device

Display Poster



Evaluating the "Laptops for Loan" Program

Laptop Usage Survey

A brief survey was administered to individuals checking out a laptop and was intended to determine who was checking out the laptops and how the laptops were being used.

The survey period ran from March 20 through April 23, and 14 surveys were returned. (Note: A total of 58 laptops were checked out during the period, but clients were not asked to fill out a second survey if they had already completed one.)

In the results, a percentage indicates the number of respondents who selected a specific item. For the ratings question, a five-point Likert scale* was used.

* 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Average, 4=Above Average, 5=Excellent

Who is using the laptops?

- Medical students (57.1%)
- Residents/fellows (21.4%)
- Staff (21.4%)
- Graduate students (7.1%)

How often have responding clients checked out a laptop?

- Once a month (28.6%)
- 2-5 times a month (42.9%)
- 6-10 times a month (7.1%)

What are they using?

(Note: Multiple items could be selected.)

- PCs (57.1%)
- Macs (57.1%)

- Internet Explorer (78.6%)
- Microsoft Word (57.1%)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (28.6%)
- Microsoft Excel (7.1%)
- Floppy drive (14.3%)
- Laptop lock (21.4%)
- Zip® drive (21.4%)

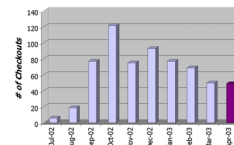
How do they rate the laptop lending program?

- Excellent (57.1%)
- Above Average (21.4%)
- Average (14.3%)
- Did Not Select (7.1%)
- Average Score: 4.143 (> Above Average)

Sample Comments (from survey)

- "Would be nice if I had additional software, such as the GroupWise client and VPN [Virtual Private Networking] (for use with the built-in wireless Ethernet on the Mac)."
- "Would be nice to have a mouse to connect. Also, addition of the lock is a great idea except that there are few places to hook the lock to in the library."
- "The checkout procedure could be faster."
- "It takes a while to check one out."
- "Good service."
- "It would be nice to be able to print from the laptops."

Laptop Checkout Statistics



Note: Checkout statistics for April is extrapolated based on usage between April 1-15, 2003

Determining and Addressing Issues and Concerns

Equipment Security

The most important concern is the physical security of the laptop equipment. Since replacing lost, damaged, or stolen items is very expensive, it is essential that equipment be stored as securely as possible.

Currently, the following security measures are used:

- Storing equipment in an office near the Information Desk using the following types of locking cabinets:
 - A "charging" cabinet, where the laptops may be recharged, if necessary
 - A basic storage cabinet for cases and accessories
- Locking the office door itself whenever the room is unoccupied

Separating the equipment in this manner increases a client's wait time when checking out a laptop because Library staff must:

- Collect and "assemble" all the pieces of equipment
- Accurately account for all the items using the inventory section of the agreement form

Both laptop users and Library staff have commented on the excessive time required to check out a laptop, but we feel that the length of time is a necessary trade-off for ensuring the physical security of the equipment.

Other methods are being investigated that would permit storing the laptop and accessories inside each laptop case in a single locking cabinet, but few options for off-the-shelf furniture with this capability appear to be available.

Laptop Maintenance

As the laptops are used more and more, the individual setup of each computer could become corrupted. Therefore, a regular maintenance schedule must be implemented to ensure that the laptop remains in working order.

To address this issue, the laptops will be "re-cloned" every six months, which will restore the initial settings and restrictions on the computer. If problems are detected sooner, then the maintenance frequency will need to be adjusted accordingly.