Memo
To: OIT Cabinet
From: Software Coordination Cross Functional Team
Date: April 11, 2003
Re: Web browser, e-mail client recommendation

There is currently a discussion occurring within OIT and within the campus computing support staff regarding a possible move to Internet Explorer as the campus standard web browser and Outlook as the campus standard email client on Microsoft Windows machines. The OIT Software Team has discussed this issue and wants the Cabinet to know that we offer a conditional endorsement to this change.

In the past few years IE has become a dominating web browser in the Microsoft Windows environment.

- Industry surveys (CNET.com) mention that more than 90% of users running Microsoft Windows use IE, resulting in a majority of web applications, internet pages and web services designed for use primarily with IE.
- IE seems to be faster, more reliable and compatible with various web applications than Netscape.
- Information gathered by the recently implemented Princeton University web based Financial Aid Application shows that most of the users prefer IE; of the 6500 worldwide applicants for Princeton admission, completing the financial aid portion, 98% used IE, and only 1% used Netscape (remaining 1% used AOL’s browser). Thus, it is logical to assume that most of the incoming (as well as existing) PU students would prefer IE over Netscape as a standard web browser.
- Major administrative applications used or soon to be used on DeSC machines (such as Microsoft Office, People Soft, Data Mall) will require the use of IE.
- Microsoft products are more completely integrated with IE than with Netscape.

It is for these reasons that the team is willing to support the standardization of Internet Explorer on Microsoft Windows machines at Princeton.

Given a move to IE as the browser, an accompanying move to Outlook makes sense for the following reasons.

- Outlook’s seamless integration with Internet Explorer.
- Migrating to Outlook keeps client consistency regardless of whether the customer is using imap or Exchange for email.
- Lagging development for the Netscape email client.

However, as noted above, we offer a conditional endorsement. Our concerns are threefold with the first being that this move could result in a need to mass convert users from Netscape to Outlook for email; such a move could be complicated and strain existing OIT resources. In addition, this will require users changing the way they do things, and a need for training.

Secondly, IE is not available for all computing platforms in use on campus and this will cause a decrease in uniformity. We realize that most users of other platforms will use the
browser they are most comfortable with regardless, but this move creates a situation with less standardization for a major campus application.

Lastly, moving away from the use of the Netscape client moves away from providing the “roaming” service as there is not an equivalent for IE and Outlook. Roaming allows users to store address books and bookmarks (primarily) on a server so they are available for use on different computers around campus, or to go from office to home and back again. Unfortunately, roaming is a "deprecated" service, meaning the vendor no longer supports it, leaving OIT’s ability to support roaming limited. So, even if we continued with Netscape as the browser of choice (and by extension, email of choice), at some point, roaming will no longer be available. This year, there are 670 unique roaming users. It is suggested that OIT consider alternatives to providing a similar service for browser and email users.