A time to remember!

After weeks of resistance, the head of Civil Engineering Department kindly agreed to appoint a new director for the computer centre.

When the job was started, there was fairly nothing to be called a centre. Several computers, without even a hard disk, were put in a room with no one in-charge to the needs, complaints and requests of students and teachers. Even the floppy disks were locked to avoid transfer of viruses, and the few running stations had four different operating systems, with virtually no internet access.

Maybe, my first and most difficult task was to let the users know and believe that at least there would be a person to listen to them. In the first week, Mr. Kamrani, a first year B.Sc. student (now a PhD student in Davis), furiously came to my office and complained: "what a mess is this! and what are you going to do about it?" My reply was to ask for his help and other students; the beginning of the major re-construction of the centre in the next 5 years. Undoubtedly, the helps of many students, especially my friend Mr. Kamrani, my colleague Mr. Mesgari, and the full unconditional support of all heads of department have been essential in improving the conditions in the computer centre and turning it into the mostly visited site of the university.

Major decisions to largely extend the size of the centre, to remain updated with the operating systems and office and scientific applications, designing the first department-owned web service even for the PhD students, and finally setting up shared and parallel processing systems shaped the way the computing and documentations have been performed in the department and perhaps the Engineering Faculty. I recall a time when in a breakthrough decision we decided to replace existing poor 12" or 14" monitors with luxury 17" monitors, and equipped the centre with turning chairs to enhance the view and attractions of the remaining low-grade computers. The move was so strong that it was criticized in the general council of the Engineering Faculty, and concerns were raised by other departments that how they should then deal with similar requests. I was even asked by the head of Electrical Engineering Department to send them our second-hand 14" monitors. Similarly, two years after we installed the first generation of very expensive CD writers for free unlimited use of all students, the Informatics Section of the Engineering Faculty was trying to obtain a budget to buy one CD writer for conditional acceptance of the requests of computer centres.

I am much indebted to the full support of 4 heads of department in the past 12 years; too long for any managerial or administrative work in the standards of this country. There is no doubt that much better work could have been performed, but we have given our best to respectfully fulfill all requests of academic members, and to listen, respect and properly respond to the needs of students, and to avoid unnecessary short-minded restrictive measures; technically motivated or otherwise.

I am not sure if the users feel in the same way, but despite all ups and downs, shortcomings and advantages, restrictions or freedoms, this period is certainly an outstanding time for me to remember.

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