Providing information solutions

When I decided to write a story about Brian Crouch and his information technology group, I did so with some hesitation. After all, this group spends all day, every day, five days or more a week working with many wide-ranging aspects of computers. And what are my computer skills? I’m able to write this story in Microsoft Word (but I have a current copy of *Word for Dummies* by my side), I can send and receive e-mail, and I can play solitaire — sorry credentials for understanding what the ITG does and then writing about it.

Nevertheless, this competent group deserves a story. So here goes: You’ll meet the members of the ITG, just as I did.

My first real encounter with Brian came when I was writing a book. I was retired, so I was writing at home, but was experiencing a problem with e-mailing my co-author and my publisher. I called Brian, and, to my surprise, he told me that he would stop by my house on his way home. He did, and my e-mailing problem disappeared within a few minutes.

Later, Brian told me that the ITG’s mission is “to provide information solutions, enabling students, staff, and faculty at IUB Chemistry to effectively meet their goals in a world-class learning and research community.” While it was completely unexpected, his house call more than lived up to his group’s mission.

When I encountered Brian again, I had an ailing laptop; it was a machine laden with more viruses than ticks on my uncle’s old hound dog. My laptop and I entered the ITG area and found rooms that are small by any standard. Several desks make the first room even narrower than its naturally constricted width. One of those desks belongs to David Felker, who provides design and management of the technical needs of the department’s instructional program. Steve Creps, who maintains the UNIX systems, sits at the other desk.

When I edged past those desks, I found Brian’s office at the back of the room. It is so small that my grandmother’s kitchen pantry would have swallowed his office with plenty of room left over for another office of the same size. Information overflow might be a way to describe my impression of the contents of Brian’s space.

Later, I learned that the group assists the faculty, students, and staff in their instructional, administrative, and research-based computing activities. At the time of publication, they oversee 1,498 devices, including printers, Apple systems, Windows work stations and servers, and UNIX workstations, as well as climate-control monitoring systems and instrumentation. You can find a complete description of their duties and activities at www.chem.indiana.edu/facilities/AboutITG.asp.

Back into the narrow room, I found a crowded room on the left where computers are repaired and built. When Brian and I entered this space, I met Becky Hanson, whose job description includes technical support for administrative computing as well as development and maintenance of information systems. She was scanning some of the departamental computers for viruses. Brian then introduced me to Scott Harrington, the group’s computer consultant. Among his many responsibilities is the supervision of two hourly employees. Together they repair, rebuild, and upgrade the departamental computers as well as dealing with data recovery. I left my laptop with Scott, and several days later, he had chased all of the viruses away and recovered the data while adding a few bells and whistles that had not been there before.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also mention Robin Nordstrom. She doesn’t solve computer problems, but she does belong to the group and she does deal with information. Anyone who has written an exam in the last 30 years should know her — she is the one who does the duplicating. During the years that I wrote exams, I would sometimes submit one late, but Robin always found a way to duplicate it in time for class.

Whether supporting professors Clemmer, Raghavachari, and Iyengar with their high-performance cluster-computing needs or explaining to an old, retired professor what the letters UNIX and CPU represent, the ITG does it with ease and assurance. It’s clear to me that Brian runs a tight but happy ship.

— Rupert Wentworth