Multics shutdown? users react

By Greg Erwin Lemke

The possible termination of Multics, MIT's computer time-sharing system, has prompted anxious reactions among students, faculty, and administrators at MIT.

The MIT Information Processing Service (IPS) may be forced to terminate the widely-used Multics system due to rising costs and decreasing deficits (see The Tech, March 4).

"We simply are not taking in the revenue to meet an expense budget of several millions," said Robert Scott, Director of IPS. "At a rough, ballpark valuation of the overall Multics system, it can be counted as an option for us."

Some acknowledged that termination of Multics would be most felt in certain quarters of the MIT community.

"There are many things that are unique to Multics," Scott noted. "For those people or organizations taking advantage of the unique aspects of the system, changing to another would be a difficult and expensive proposition. Some of our current users simply could not make such a transition."

In addition to its effect on MIT users, termination of Multics service would also have a considerable impact on non-MIT users:

"It depends on how you count, but it may be accurate to say that about 40% of Multics users are not affiliated with MIT," Scott said. "These non-MIT users, some of whom are very substantial accounts, include Honeywell Information Systems, the University of Illinois, and a variety of companies and universities in the Boston area. The termination of the system would present big problems to some of these groups."

Scott denied that IPS is negotiating with Honeywell to modify the Multics system so that it is cheaper to operate.

"We would like to work with Multics here at MIT," Scott continued. "We understand the difficult position that IPS is in;" and he asserted, "We like working with Multics here at MIT.

"We understand the difficult position that IPS is in," Klemin continued, "but Multics is vital to us. It's a research tool of fantastic value."

Klemin said that if termination of Multics were to come about, the project would, in the short run, switch over to a Multics System operating elsewhere. Eventually, he said, the project would adopt a different computer system.

Other reactions
"This really raises all sorts of questions about how the IPS is managing to be only one cent," said one labman, "and about just how fiscally responsible it is.

"It would be interesting to see how the termination of Multics would affect the MIT community with free access to blood from the American Red Cross. Although the first Multics blood drive this year netted 600 fewer pints than the 1973-74 total, this blood coverage will be maintained. The Institute also donates more blood each year than any other university in Massachusetts.

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