CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

Open Up! Documenting the NERSP System

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Open Up! Documenting the NERSP System

During the past three years, one important activity performed by the Open Systems Group staff has been to map the NERSP computer complex and to document their activities related to its management.

In previous Open Up! columns, we have talked about the nature of the NERSP complex. It is a collection of servers and peripheral devices that provide integral computing services to the UF community. Each server has its own copy of the operating system and its own complement of software required to perform that server's function.

If a server is replaced, either via a hardware upgrade or an emergency recovery procedure, it is imperative to have a map of any hardware or software specifications that are different from the default configuration. That is the only way that we can continue the service assigned to that server without disruption.

Additionally, given the rapidity of change in the computing industry, it is important to keep documentation about the internal structures and applications that allow us to provide services as well as the procedures for using and managing them. For example, our mail servers must coordinate services with authentication services, LISTSERV services, virus scanning services, and more. To replace, change, or repair any of these services, we must have ready knowledge of how they interrelate.

In all of these situations, it is the goal of the Open Systems staff to document local (non-standard) changes and to codify institutional knowledge. That is, they are working to prepare documentation that supplements and adds to available user manuals with information unique to our system.

Documentation is written by the person responsible for each system or service within the NERSP complex. The OSG "gold standard" for testing this documentation is to ask someone from a different area of responsibility in Open Systems to try to perform the task, procedure, or sequence, using only this internal documentation and available manuals.

If the tester encounters any problems, the question is noted and the documentation is sent back to its author for revision. When the activity can be completed without referencing the local OSG expert, the documentation is determined to be robust enough to be serviceable in an emergency.

While writing system documentation is not the most exciting topic we have to discuss with you, we think it is very important that we do this behind-the-scenes work and that you know this support is available for the services that you use and rely on.

Your Comments are Welcome

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