Information and Communication
Technology Council
January 28, 2014

Attendance
• Steve Brewer
• MJ Canavan
• Ian Walls
• Nikki Stoia
• Michelle Rosenfield
• Jack Finn
• Gail Cruise
• Bret Holloway
• Robert Einstein
• Julie Buehler
• Iris Chelaru
• Jon Olson
• Eric Gendreau

Announcements

• The new Adobe campus contract is being signed this week, after which Adobe Creative Cloud will be available. Forthcoming communications will layout the transition plan from Creative Suite 6 (CS6) for University-owned computers. For personal computers, a $10 yearly subscription is required through a secure external website (Adobe does NOT have your web login information). Current licenses of CS6 for personal use are good until March 1st.

• Discussion of free software: many users are not using the specific attributes and features of some of the campus-wide licensed software; freely licensed alternatives would suffice. Using free and open source software avoids licensing issues like what we experienced with Adobe, and could allow us to more strategically focus resources. There is also a marketing angle: “UMass produces students that can use free software”, which may have appeal to local businesses and startups. Regardless of which software we use for any purpose, we must have solid support plan.

New Business

OIT Communication Strategy

Listening tours indicate many people feel “communications need to improve”, but we must first figure out what kinds of mechanisms to use, since people prefer different methods of communication for different kinds of messages Email is often the official communications method of the University, and therefore becomes the “fire hose”. Concern was expressed not just about reaching faculty, but also administrative staff, who are often relied on to
answer questions about the messages sent. Communications need to be archived with permanent URLs and strong taxonomy to allow for historical browsing. We should identify who is doing this kind of thing well, both in higher education and the public sphere.

Email project and forums

Beyond just collecting open feedback about Exchange, perhaps focus discussions could be enhanced with leading questions such as “how much time to spend managing your email?”, “what barriers do you encounter?”, etc. Special attention should be paid to the Engineering and Business schools to get specific feedback on their experiences migration to Exchange, not just with email but also with calendaring.

The pause on the Exchange migration is both an operational issue (a major IT project is stalled) and longer term issue (what is our vision of email/calendaring/etc. for the campus). We need an IT strategic plan, and clear governance. Whether units migrate to Google Mail instead of Exchange should be discussed at multiple levels, and decided based on needs, not solely by IT leaders.

Building communities of interest

Another constant need discovered during the listening tour: “I know other people on campus are interested in X, but I don’t know who they are”. An idea was floated of creating a marketplace modeled after Craigslist or Reddit for people on campus both with needs and things to offer in order to get together and form connections.

Sustainable Computing

An undergraduate student (Eric Gendreau) interested in sustainability in computing is now on ICTC. He asks if anyone has any advice on sustainable computing. The High Performance Computer Center, while still start-up mode, is a large asset for the University, and its usage should be encouraged. Student-led meetings around sustainable computing are also encouraged, and the CIO would be willing to send OIT staff to such meetings to provide information and help make connections.

Upcoming Faculty Senate Presentation (Jan 30)

The CIO was asked to come to Faculty Senate and present on what she’s heard so far here, what is her assessment of IT and where are we going. Areas of concern included the quality of service at the Help Desk (students are answering phone calls), a lack of clarity and transparency around IT priorities and funding, and various infrastructure issues (wireless, available storage space, etc.).

In her assessment, there are strategic, organizational and operational issues. Strategic issues include overall mission alignment, a lack of multi-year planning and low investment in
IT compared to our peer institutions. Organizational issues include challenges around resources and training, weak vendor relationships and too many open IT leader positions. Operational issues include too much time spent “firefighting”, new buildings being built without protocols for their IT infrastructure and years of deferred maintenance on the network.

The path forward includes forming a mission-aligned IT strategic plan, revamping communications, strengthening vendor relationships, filling IT leader positions and working to improve the network. Debriefs on new building issues should be conducted to avoid similar issues in current and future construction.

Suggestions for enhancements to the presentation included the strong use of images instead of text, and underscoring the benefits of the path forward for students.

Old Business

Associate Provost for Instructional Innovation

Feedback has been factored in, and the official posting is going out soon. Anyone interested in servicing on the search committee is welcome to volunteer.