Information and Communication Technology Council

October 22, 2013

Attendance
- Steve Brewer
- Julie Buehler
- Chris Misra
- Ian Walls
- Heath Hatch
- Jon Olson
- Nikki Stoia
- Jack Finn
- Ernie May
- Michelle Rosenfield

Announcements
- A group of students came to OIT wanting to participate in ICTC. There are currently 3 undergraduate seats on the council, but members need to get selected through the proper process.
- Migration of Faculty Senate procedures to the new CESD-created website is beginning with 3 pilot groups: Gen Ed, Writing, and AMC. A cohesive rollout, training and outreach plan needs to be developed. Proposed idea: a big meeting between ICTC and pilot groups (60-70 people).
- Motion to approve minutes from 9-24-13 meeting, seconded and approved without changes.

Email and Mailing Lists
Guest: Chris Misra, Associate CIO for Security, OIT.

Google Apps and Mail
As of Fall 2013, all undergraduates are on Google Mail and have access to Google Apps. Email addresses are now in the @umass.edu domain (rather than @student.umass.edu). Student response has been overwhelmingly positive, largely due to significant familiarity with the Google suite of tools, and the solid mobile interface. The biggest complaint heard was the desire to use personal Gmail accounts, which is not feasible for a variety of reasons. Beyond that, there has been very little pushback to the migration.

Every faculty member also has an email address in the @umass.edu domain, and access to Google Apps, but not Google Mail. These accounts have been created so faculty and staff can interact with students in the Google environment. Reception has been hit or miss; there is lots of complexity and nuance to Google Apps. Folks with a higher tech background are generally happy, while folks with less experience may find the setup and
use less intuitive. This raises the question: How does OIT document Google Apps for all levels of user skill?

Currently missing from Google Apps is a way to provision groups. This makes giving all the students in a class access to a document challenging. The native Google Groups tool is designed as a mailing list, not a permissions group, and is not currently available. All the pieces exist to allow for this kind of functionality, but it would require building and maintaining the middleware.

Umail
Umail was original developed as an IMAP-based service between 12 and 15 years ago. The web front-end, Horde, was added later as a supplement to the service so that users did not require a IMAP-based client such as Thunderbird or Outlook Express. While still functional, Umail is not providing the level of service to which we’re aspiring. There are issues with storage, software patching, security, and more. The metaphor of an old 1969 Volkswagen bus was floated; it may still get you from point A to point B, but doesn’t have all the safety features of a new Volvo.

Migration of Faculty and Staff Email
There are two possible directions to go: Google Mail or Exchange.

Google has been floated before without success. One of the major challenges getting faculty and staff into Google is data security requirements. Google would not negotiate contracts to meet our various needs for data confidentiality. Permission was obtained for undergraduate students because they are very unlikely to have any of this kind of information.

Microsoft Exchange is locally administered, so we can be certain of it meeting data confidentiality requirements. Exchange is good at calendaring and email, and handles delegation and permissions control much better than Google, but migration to Exchange has been time intensive, particularly when compared to Google. This challenge is in the process of being solved, but the tools are not yet complete.

There are drawbacks and benefits for both directions. Who decides what is the smallest unit of faculty/staff to move at once? Both the School of Management and the College of Engineering have decided at the Dean’s level to move to Exchange. Is this the level where the decision should happen? Determining the level at which to migrate is vital to balancing operational efficiency with operational overhead. Units with risky data or strong calendaring needs would be better served by Exchange, while units operating in a Linux-heavy environment (Mathematics, Astronomy) would have a more challenging experience.

What happened with the Exchange migration plan?
When this process was started, it didn’t look like Google contracts were working out so well for research data restrictions. As migrations began, though, it became clear that it would be safe to let some of the less risky groups join. The strategy focused on getting
undergraduates on Google, and continued moving groups to Exchange that were already in process.

As it stands today, there is a full production-ready Exchange 2010 instance. Both Administration & Finance and Student Affairs have fully moved over their email services to Exchange. In addition to School of Management and the College of Engineering noted above, several other academic departments, much of OIT, most of the Chancellors office, and several other offices are currently on Exchange, totaling roughly 2700 - 2900 accounts. In the process, David Powicki, who was managing the Exchange project for OIT, has left UMass, which has slowed down progress somewhat.

MSP Proposal to Suspend Migration to Exchange
Faculty have expressed worries about losing emails and/or attachments in the migration to Exchange, but what are the real issues, and what are only perceived? How many people are having issues? Is it reasonable to send in experts from Microsoft to help (at an average of $300 an hour)? OIT is willing to pause the migration project, but needs a list of the top concerns with Exchange so they can formulate a strategy to deal with them.

Strategy for identifying major issues
The CIO desires an open dialog with Faculty Senate to discuss the best way to move forward. The steps to bring about that dialog are:

1. Gather information from faculty and staff who have undergone migration to Exchange (particularly from the College of Engineering), and identify the problems they experienced, both technical and training/communications.
2. Present these problems to Faculty Senate, along with how OIT plans to address them, as well as the context of why migration from Umail is necessary.
3. Organize ‘birds of a feather’ groups and a volunteer Exchange migration pilot project to build buy-in between peers.

Motion
Whereas the Executive Board of the MSP recommended halting email migration until implementation problems had been addressed and there was a clear roadmap regarding options, Be It Resolved that the ICTC recommends that OIT evaluate current experience with email migration, develop a plan that makes clear the options academic units have regarding migration, and recruit pilot faculty and staff that are ready to move forward deliberately in light of what is learned.

So moved, seconded and approved.

Other business
None