

Date: March 14, 2011

From: SUNY Oneonta Information Technology Services Workgroup

To: President Nancy Kleniewski, SUNY College at Oneonta

Introduction, Charge and Methodology

The IT services workgroup has been charged with exploring realignment of how information technology (IT) services are organized on campus with an eye towards identifying efficiencies to be gained, dollar savings to be made, and ways of improving customer service. The task force is composed of:

Sue Clemons, Director of Student Accounts

Dr. Wendy Mitteager, Assistant Professor of Geography

Roger Sullivan, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management

Dr. Bill Vining, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry (convener)

Dr. Barry Warren, Associate Vice President for Development

The task force approached the task by first gathering data about how IT services are organized on our campus and at our sister SUNY institutions. As part of this effort, we personally interviewed:

Leslie Bidwell, IT Security Administrator

Phil Bidwell, Director of Administrative IT

Mark English, Manager - Technology Services

Patty Francis, Assoc. Provost for Institutional Assessment & Effectiveness

Joe Graig-Tiso, Director of Telecommunications

Jim Greenberg, Director of TLTC

Dr. Dan Larkin, Provost

Hal Legg, Director of Communications

Steve Maniscalco, Director of Academic IT

Deborah McClenon, Technology Training Coordinator

Andy Perry, Director of Milne Library

Justin St. Onge, Academic Server Administrator

Jennifer Smith, Web Development

Sue Smith, Interim Director of Computer Services

Rita Szczesh, Academic IT Acquisitions

Teri Weigl, Manager of the Help Desk

The two technology committees on campus, the Educational Technology Committee and the Senate Committee on Technology, were both consulted.

In addition, we offered online surveys targeted at:

- IT Staff
- Banner Steering Committee
- Web Advisory Group
- All Oneonta Employees
- IT Administrators at Sister SUNY Schools

In all, we received 165 on-campus survey responses and 12 from other SUNY IT administrators.

We were particularly struck by the high quality of responses to both our in-person interviews as well as written survey comments. All respondents seemed to have the best interests of the college at heart and offered dispassionate critiques of our current operations and constructive ideas on potential improvements.

It is important to emphasize that the current level of satisfaction with IT services among survey respondents is high. Less than 10% of respondents indicated that they were less than satisfied with the ability of our technology services operation to help solve their problems. Moreover, that level of satisfaction cuts across all job functions, from faculty to administrators to clerical staff.

Given this level of satisfaction, the workgroup asked the basic question: why change anything? However, despite the excellent job IT services does at this time, we recommend a set of organizational changes that we feel will increase efficiencies and offer both short- and long-term cost savings.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Combine what broadly constitutes Administrative IT and Academic IT, as well as desktop support and classroom maintenance functions that are part of Milne Library operations.
2. Appoint a single IT administrator at the CIO or Senior Director level, who should report to VP of Finance and Administration.
3. Appoint an IT governance committee to aid the IT operation in keeping proper balance between serving administrative and academic IT needs.
4. Take steps to improve communication and cross-training among IT staff and IT users across campus.
5. Retain position of IT security administrator, reporting to the Information Security Officer.
6. Ensure long term innovation is not impeded by ongoing operational/maintenance needs.
7. Explore moving Web Development under Director of Communications and creation of a Marketing Department.

Recommendations Narrative

1. Combine what broadly constitutes Administrative IT and Academic IT, as well as desktop support and classroom maintenance functions that are part of Milne Library Operations.

Our current "split" administrative and academic IT organization is extremely rare among academic institutions. Indeed, we have not found another like it within the SUNY system. Replies to our survey by other SUNY IT administrators shows all to have unified structures with varying degrees of academic and administrative functional autonomy. Suggestions from those IT administrators mirror our own conclusions about positive changes we can make. The benefits of this combination include:

1a. Duplication of Effort. Within our current structure, we see numerous examples of different groups performing the same functions without substantial coordination. Most important among these are desktop support, purchasing and server administration. While we do not see that immediate decreases in staff are warranted due to this duplication, we do find that combining these functions should yield a substantial increase in efficiency, with the strong potential for cost savings by combining positions through attrition in the midterm.

1b. Purchasing. We currently expend significant budget dollars on hardware and software. These purchases are typically less expensive per unit for larger bulk purchases. At this time, our separate IT groups primarily purchase independently; combining these purchases would yield savings in the short term. Moreover, increasing our standardization of hardware and software across academic and administrative functions should streamline maintenance and training efforts "downstream."

1c. Strategic Planning and Assessment. Combining operations would improve the ability of the IT administrator to construct longer term, more accurate plans and construct more useful assessments of efficacy.

1d. Improve Cross-Training. When solving technological problems, "two heads are indeed better than one." The benefits of having staff working on similar problems in close proximity cannot be overestimated, especially in the context of the trend toward integrated access points and functionality. Particularly in IT, this is how people learn and stay current in their fast-changing field.

1e. Flexibility. Greater cross-training will improve business continuity in this area (for example, when a staff member is out sick). In addition, this combined group will have greater agility, being better able to realign assigned tasks as needs shift. This flexibility may well extend to management of space, freeing up areas for other campus needs.

1f. Best Practices. It is clear that our operation, through historical quirk, has drifted from IT best practices. More closely following those best practices, as practiced by our sister SUNY institutions, should allow us to better interface with them and gain from their knowledge.

Combining our current operations also comes with potential pitfalls, the two most important of these being the need to retain a balance between administrative and academic IT needs, and the challenge of combining two IT groups that function with significantly different cultures. These are addressed in the recommendations below.

2. Appoint an Administrator of IT at the CIO or Senior Director level.

There are a number of reasons for appointing a single head of IT, the most important of which are enumerated below.

2a. One Voice. There are a variety of operations and services for which IT needs to speak with one voice and for which there needs to be a single "go to" person. This is important on our campus as well as externally, where the IT administrator would represent our campus interests, both within SUNY and nationally.

2b. Foster Integration. A single IT administrator will be able to better align responsibilities within IT so as to foster integration of the current IT groups. Although a short term need, properly and sensitively guiding this integration will have long-lasting effects on the services IT will provide as well as the satisfaction that IT staff will have in their jobs. While it is clear that there is some apprehension within the IT staff about combining operations, we have found widespread support for the idea of combining groups. Our survey of IT staff found a significant percentage of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the current split organization, and a desire for stronger, clearer leadership at the top of the IT structure. This sentiment is not universal, but it does represent the preponderance of opinion.

2c. Manage Change. The IT leader will be better positioned to implement change protocols that ensure continuity of service while at the same time improving that service. This change will result in greater efficiency afforded by combining these groups, whether through long term consolidation of staff or by reducing the need for future staff increases.

2d. Ensure Appropriate Balance. Much of the current academic-administrative separation of IT services is artificial. A desktop is a desktop. As such, we see much of the need for balancing academic and administrative priorities disappearing under a combined structure. However reasonable competing interests will remain and will require appropriate balancing. A single IT administrator will be in a position to best implement policies that support a proper balance, in conjunction with the IT governance structure described below.

In addition to the benefits described above, we offer these recommendations:

Level. At other institutions our size, the IT administrator position is at either a Department Director level or a Chief Information Officer (CIO) level. Either would work for us, but we do not see a clear need for a Cabinet-level CIO.

Ideal Qualities. The leader of the IT group should have experience managing technology services in an academic environment with experience and sensitivity to both academic and administrative technology needs. The IT administrator should provide leadership not just in managing operations but also in developing and articulating a vision for campus IT directions and initiatives.

Report. Given our current administrative makeup and experience set, we believe the IT administrator should report to the Vice President of Finance and Administration. If the head of IT does report to the VP of Finance and Administration, it is particularly important that the head of IT should have an understanding of and appreciation for the needs of both administrative and academic IT.

Lower-Level Organization. We offer no detailed recommendations for organizing IT personnel beyond the high-level combining of IT groups; this is a responsibility best left to the newly appointed IT administrator.

3. Appoint an IT advisory committee to assure that the consolidated IT operation keeps a proper balance between serving administrative and academic IT needs.

There have been significant benefits to having an academically-centered area of IT on our campus. This has been translated into a strong TLTC, excellent classroom and computer lab facilities, and very high student and faculty satisfaction with IT services. Likewise, having IT staff devoted to providing service to crucial administrative functions has led to strong satisfaction among administrators and staff. As a result, it is to our benefit to put in place an effective governance structure to assist in retaining a balance between academic and administrative areas .

In short, this committee will be the "voice of the campus" when speaking to IT management. This newly appointed Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) should include in its membership:

Faculty representation, most likely chosen from membership of the ETC and Senate Committee on Technology, representatives from the Banner Steering Committee, the Web Advisory Group, and other functional areas within administration, and representation for off-campus and/or distance learning needs.

This group will meet with the leadership of IT and any subordinates required for specific issues, offer guidance and opinions on prioritization of services, broad areas of purchasing, and strategic planning. The group should formally report to the Vice President of Finance and Administration, with some direct mechanism for keeping the Provost and academic Deans aware of activities and advisory decisions.

We believe this new group should supersede and replace the current Technology Steering Committee, which regularly involves three faculty from ETC and the current Directors of the two IT groups.

4. Take steps to improve communication and cross-training among IT staff and IT users across campus.

Combining the two major IT groups will foster communication and cross-training between those groups. In addition, we see benefits in broadening the scope of this effort to include IT end users across campus. Currently, our software training function is highly underutilized while a significant need for training exists. A more formal approach to IT end-user training should be implemented across the campus. This training should be two pronged: increasing basic competence with necessary software and other technologies through on-campus training, and building a stronger self-help culture among our users. Self-help materials need not always be created locally- the large amount of self-help materials available online should be explored.

5. Retain position of IT security administrator, reporting to the Chief Security Officer.

The function of IT security has at its root the combination of strong integration with the details of IT services, combined with the responsibility to oversee and rule on security issues within IT operations. While the IT security function must work hand-in-hand with IT personnel, it should report outside the IT management structure. We propose that the IT Security Administrator continue to report to the Information Security Officer, currently the VP of Finance and Administration.

6. Ensure long term exploration is not impeded by maintenance needs.

The TLTC currently serves as both a support function for faculty and as a hub of exploration of new and future technologies useful in higher education. In a combined IT operation, it is crucial that this long term "basic research" not be impeded by the maintenance-needs-of-the-day. Moreover, this function should expand to include innovation in IT areas more central to administrative functions. This will not require a separate organizational area, but does require a clearly stated policy emphasizing its importance.

7. Explore moving Web Development under the Director of Communications with other creative media services.

There is significant concern with the apparent understaffing of our web development function. We employ an "open" model for web development, where we have a small number of trained web developers (1-2) who support many end users making their own websites. Changing to a model where a fully staffed web development office creates all websites would require a large number of hires and is not feasible. The training mentioned in Recommendation 4 will help but not fully. To this end, we make two suggestions.

7a. Move towards greater uniformity of Web design and functions by those creating web pages. Provide recommended potential designs and functionalities for campus web pages, which would improve their appearance, maintenance, and reliability, in addition to limiting the work required in creation.

7b. Move web development from the IT group to the Director of Communications. The Creative Media Services function is rapidly moving from a print operation to a video and online operation as our promotional materials move in that direction, and, as such, web development would be better positioned under the Director of Communications.

8. Timing

We feel the campus now has sufficient information to take wise action. Moreover, our current degree of flexibility affords a special opportunity to implement changes that can significantly benefit the college.

Summary

The Information Technology groups at SUNY College at Oneonta are providing fine service to the college community. While the breadth and depth of past service is to be commended, we have every expectation that a combined operation with strong leadership will position us to move forward with renewed vision, leading to greater efficacy in concert with greater efficiency.