

# Faculty Senate

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## Computing Resources Committee

### CRC Annual Report for 2003-2004

This annual report begins with three important issues about information technology that the CRC has been dealing with over a number of years - (1) IT planning, (2) the selection and evaluation of IT tools, and (3) training for faculty in the use of IT tools. We then turn to some additional projects and issues that the committee has considered this year. At the end of the document is a list of recommendations and also a list of the committee members for the year.

#### IT Planning

##### Background

The CRC has been discussing Information Technology (IT) planning for OSU since Vice Provost for Information Services Curt Pederson told us that then President Risser had mandated an Information Services (IS) five-year plan some four years ago. During the CRC's discussions, it became clear that the colleges collectively spend much more money on IT than does Information Services. We came to the conclusion that it would make more sense to have some kind of university planning process for IT since the funding and implementation of IT is not centralized under IS. In the interest of getting the colleges and IS to coordinate and cooperate, we successfully lobbied for the creation of the Information Technology Coordinating Committee (ITCC) which includes among its members college computer administrators, IS managers and the Chair of the Faculty Senate (FS) Computing Resources Committee. We then advocated for the creation of an additional Planning Committee that would have created the organization to make IT planning at OSU possible and to then start the process of creating a plan. A good IT plan for OSU must involve feedback from the clients who use IT technology to carry out the mission of the university, i.e. teaching, research and service. This feedback would include, among other things, reports of problems and difficulties as well as views about emerging technologies to be investigated. As there was no existing organizational system to create or accept this feedback, a mechanism needed to be created.

We very nearly succeeded in having a planning committee created. However, Provost Tim White, acting in consultation with the Deans, decided that creating such a planning committee would represent too much centralization or too much work. Perhaps they were right about this.

##### IT Planning after the Planning Committee proposal.

Although no University IT Planning Committee was created, IS continues to work on producing an IS plan. We commend IS for continuing this effort. This IS planning effort raises all of the issues about the relation of IS to the rest of campus that may well have been the first item on the agenda of a Planning Committee. It is, however, not entirely clear what the process is going to be for involving the stakeholders outside IS in the planning process. Catherine Williams arranged for Jason McKerr, who is in charge of producing the IS plan, to inform the CRC about the progress he is making. At the time he met with us, however, he was just getting going and so there was not much to report. We expect to receive regular updates. At the final CRC meeting Jim Corbett remarked that the large addition of OUS people over the next couple of years is going to change IS significantly and thus slow down the planning process.

We would like to point out that the failure of the OSU administration to create a University IT Planning Committee is no reason to abandon the idea of IT planning in some form. The point then is to start thinking about what pieces and processes are needed and bringing them into existence in a piecemeal way as opportunity arises. What this really means, however, is that the Vice Provost for Information Services and others must have a clear idea of what sorts of pieces are needed to produce these optimal results so that, when the occasion arises, they can seize the opportunity to create or modify existing organizations to make the whole system more efficient, i.e., more responsive and effective in serving the real IT needs of those

carrying out the mission of the University.

We recommend that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee reaffirm to the administration its desire to see OSU make the most of its current and future IT resources by engaging in some reasonable form of planning.

The selection and evaluation of IT tools.

### Background

Over the past three years the CRC has considered the role of faculty in the selection of IT tools that have an enterprise-wide impact. As it is in part the faculty who end up having to use the IT tools selected to try to carry out the teaching, research and service parts of the mission of the university, they have considerable stake in whether the tools being selected really meet their needs. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee was particularly upset that the CRC had not been consulted in the acquisition of the Blackboard Portal. The President of the Faculty Senate at that time, Henry Sayre, directed us to raise the relevant issues with IS.

At the beginning of these deliberations we argued that while faculty did have some input into the selection process, it was largely ad hoc and that IS needed a better process of (1) utilizing relevant expertise among faculty in evaluating IT tools, (2) determining what the real needs of those carrying out the university's mission are and (3) determining which tools best meet those needs. We argued that a definite process with a definite beginning, middle and end, which began by determining needs and then evaluating IT tools against those needs would serve this purpose. This is in contrast with present practice, which is that IT selection is usually vendor driven. In the envisioned process, the role of faculty (and other stake holders) was clearly articulated. Faculty would serve on the selection committee, and the community-at-large would have a report from the selection committee about the needs and the products that would allow them to most efficiently comment on the aspects of the selection noted above during definite well-publicized periods. While this process was designed for large, enterprise-wide selections of IT tools, we expected that the common sense elements in the process envisioned would be applied proportionately and appropriately to lesser selections.

Vice Provost for Information Services Curt Pederson was cautiously receptive to our proposal. He worried that the process could not be carried out in a reasonable period of time. However, the following year, with Pederson's active involvement, the Provost established the Provost's Educational Technology Committee, one of whose jobs was to test the selection process we had described. The committee did, in fact, test the process. While the committee did a pretty spectacular job in accomplishing this mission, no final report by its co-chairs was ever written. This leaves the test of the process unpublicized and, so, of little use to IS or college IT managers. We expected that the University IT Planning Committee we had proposed would see the process the CRC had proposed as a perfect piece of the kind of IT planning process it needed to create at OSU and so drive its implementation. Since the report of the test of the process did not get published, and the University IT Planning Committee did not come into being, the current status of this selection process even in Information Services is unclear.

### Evaluation of IT tools

In the wake of the failure of the Planning Committee proposal, the CRC had to decide what course to take next. We decided that there are still some "best practices" that IS and the University need to adopt with respect to the evaluation, acquisition, and use of IT tools. One of these is the Selection process noted above. The other is the evaluation of IT tools to see if they are meeting the needs of those using them to effectively accomplish the various parts of the mission of the University. We noted that IT tools are simply not evaluated in any formal way at OSU. We also noted that the selection and evaluation of IT tools are intimately connected. Thus it made considerable sense for the CRC to go on from its efforts at designing an optimal IT selection process to consider the evaluation of IT tools.

There are two distinctively different forms of evaluation possible. The first is evaluation in the absence of the kind of selection process outlined above. This is going to be distinctly more difficult than evaluation for IT tools selected by the kind of process outlined above. The reason for this is that the selection process we proposed would determine what needs the IT tool is supposed to meet, the nature and number of those who are using it, its competitors, upgrade schedule and so on. With this information in hand, evaluation is a relatively straight forward process of determining whether the tool has, in fact, done what the selectors said it would do or not. With this information in hand, it then becomes possible to make judgments about how effective any given IT tool has been and to decide what to do next. Without this information, evaluators have to create the standard against which to measure the IT tool they are evaluating.

We decided that we would write an evaluation document. Having written this document, we decided that we could effectively combine this with the selection document we had already written and submit the whole

document to IS and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. This process has not yet been completed.

We believe that the Blackboard Portal and Teaching system is a prime candidate for such evaluation. We suggest that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee urge the Provost to use the Educational Technology committee or some other appropriate body to do such an evaluation. We contacted Jeff Hale, the chair of the FS Distance Education Committee to see if his committee might be interested in working with us on the design of the evaluation process, and advocating that the Blackboard Portal and Teaching system be evaluated. Jeff attended one of our meetings and his committee has endorsed both the idea of evaluating IT tools and evaluating the Blackboard Portal and Teaching system.

### Training

One of the chief recommendations of the Quinn satellite group in the OSU '07 planning process was that Information Services could maximize the use of IT resources at OSU for the least amount of money by providing training to faculty in the use of existing IT resources. The committee had a discussion with Jon Dorbolo, Mark Dinsmore, and Larry Pribyl on methods for improving the delivery of training to faculty. One possibility is for trainers to go to departments to hold workshops. We also discussed again the possibility of a faculty development lab. It is unclear, though, whether the benefits of such a lab will justify the cost. On a longer horizon, it would be desirable to have some forum where faculty could learn about, and inform one another on, emerging technologies and their potential impact on teaching, research, and service. The model for such a program might well be the WIC program. Again, the possible costs and benefits of such a proposal have not yet been analyzed, and no structure is now proposed.

### Additional Projects and Issues

In addition to the projects noted above, the CRC hosted a meeting with faculty from the school of Forestry and the Research Office to help coordinate efforts to automate the grant writing process. It became clear that faculty have one set of problems and the Research Office another. Faculty and the colleges are concerned about things like automating the formatting for different agencies, preparing budgets, and reporting grant accomplishments to sponsors, while the Research Office is concerned with monitoring compliance. The upshot of this discussion was that efforts to automate the grant writing process are going to happen largely on a college level and that coordination of the pieces as they develop will be important.

The CRC cooperated this year in a Faculty/Student/Staff IT Orientation working group with the Campus Information Technology Coordinating Committee. Bill Uzgalis and IS Manager Rick Brand served as co-chairs of the working group and IS Manager Tammy Barr arranged to get most of the work done. We expect that the new Faculty/Staff/Student IT Orientation web page will be in service by fall 2004.

The CRC invited Scott Kveton to come and talk to us about the creation of an Open Source Lab at OSU. This lab promises to provide at least one way for software development to happen at OSU and for OSU to be a leader in this area.

Last year the CRC was asked to look into the uses of Blackboard community sites for the use of the Faculty Senate. With the help of Frank Kessel, the chief Blackboard administrator, a CRC Blackboard site was created. The Blackboard Community sites are just like Blackboard classes, except that they are not connected to Banner. So, anyone familiar with the classes will have no trouble with the community sites. The system may be of some use to FS committees for posting documents that are not appropriate for posting on the official Faculty Senate web site. Obviously, maintaining a Blackboard site requires some work. This is also a factor that needs to be taken into account by any committee proposing to use such a site. The committee will continue to experiment with this. The control software for the system is, however, still not sufficiently bug free for general use, and Kessel thinks the system will not be generally available until next fall at the earliest.

Information Services has accomplished some very good things this year for OSU. Perhaps the most notable achievement is the completion of the project to build a 20-mile stretch of fiber optic cable to connect OSU to a Bonneville Power Administration network that has already increased the bandwidth at OSU to 2.5 gigabytes and will allow for additional expansion as the next generation of Internet 2 arrives. This is of enormous significance for the research, teaching and service missions of the university. We all owe our thanks to Curt Pederson, Jon Dolan, Shay Dakan and the others involved in this project. We would, however, like to add one note of concern. In addition to his duties as Vice Provost for Information Services, Curt Pederson was appointed interim Vice President for University Advancement. As a result of these increased responsibilities, Pederson was unable to attend only one of our meetings this year. This unfortunate situation is likely to persist. At the end of the year, CRC Chair Uzgalis suggested to Pederson that he appoint a deputy who would be responsible for running the computing operations at OSU and that deputy could then attend CRC meetings. Pederson said he was opposed to appointing a deputy, but would send Jim Corbett to CRC

meetings when Pederson was unavailable. Corbett serves as acting Vice Provost for Information Services in Pederson's absence. The FS Executive Committee could perhaps indicate a concern to the relevant administrators that the Vice Provost's increased duties and the burden on IS of absorbing former OUS IT personnel and tasks should not diminish their ability to serve the faculty and students of OSU.

#### Recommendations

1. We recommend that the Faculty Senate Executive committee reaffirm to the administration its desire to see OSU make the most of its current and future IT resources by engaging in some reasonable form of planning.
2. We believe that the Blackboard Portal and Teaching system is a prime candidate for evaluation. We suggest that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee urge the Provost to use the Educational Technology committee or some other appropriate body to carry out such an evaluation.

#### Committee Members for 2003-04

Bill Uzgalis '04, Chair	Philosophy
Kristin Barker (v. Gobeli) '04	Sociology
Edith Gummer '04	Science & Mathematics Education
Carol Brown '05	College of Business
Kathy Howell '05	College of Forestry
David Finch '06	Mathematics
Jonathan Kaplan '06	Philosophy
Todd Palmer '06	Nuclear Engineering

#### Ex-Officios:

Vice Provost for Information Services (Curt Pederson)  
Information Services (Catherine Williams)

#### Student Members:

Alex Polvi

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