Faculty Senate IT Committee during 2015-16

(From Faculty Senate president **-** Plan to present a "wrap-up" of your committee's accomplishments from this year along with ongoing projects, with projected completion dates.)

Co-chairs: Mangala Krishnamurthy (UA Libraries) and Clark Midkiff (COE)
Ajay Agrawal (COE), Meredith Bagley (A&S), Sheila Black (A&S), Kim Andrus (ELI), Patrick Kung (COE)

The committee met three times during the year (3 times) and the committee communicated via email as there were no pressing issues to discuss/attend to.

1. The committee met with OIT staff and received a brief overview on OIT and their work/efforts to support campus with IT needs.

   - John McGowan led a discussion on campus research. He has formed a Technology Research Advisory Committee which will be focused on resources and need for the research community
   - Ivon Foster-McGowan discussed the need for standardization of classroom technology.
   - Scott Montgomery talked about the campus network improvements.
   - Ashley Ewing discussed some services that OIT is using to protect UA. This includes log analysis tools, network segmentation, research protection plan, and secure email.
   - Patty Benton stated that part of the network improvement project includes network switch replacement and non-standardized wiring replacement. Telecom is in the process of deploying VoIP to all new construction, large renovation projects and buildings where copper is damaged or being relocated.
   - Cathy Rainey announced the campus wide agreement for Office 365, Endnote and Nvivo. Cathy will be working closely with Dr. Sobecky to determine and create a process to request and get software licenses.

2. The committee was able to look at the responses by OIT about the climate survey comments.
   - Response from OIT to comments from Faculty Climate survey - (see below*)

3. IT committee was being charged with addressing Task Force Report #3 in 2014-15 and this was carried over to the committee in 2015-16 – after discussion it was assigned to another group by the faculty senate president.

4. Overview of New classroom buildings - Ivon R. Foster-McGowan, Assistant to the Provost for Special Projects & Academic Technology, and Chris Walston, Manager of Audio/Visual Solutions was presented to the committee.
5. Co-chairs of the committee gathered the comments and/or clarifications raised by Senate members and shared that with John McGowan and received the responses from OIT staff. (see below for details**). This was shared with IT committee as well as with the steering committee and in the senate.
6. Communicated with the committee via email during spring semester to keep all members in the loop.
7. No ongoing projects

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Faculty Senate Technology Committee
Request for response to items in Faculty Climate Survey

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OIT Response:

1. Help Desk-nice but not knowledgeable The ITSD is staffed with 5 FTE and several student assistants. The student's responsibilities include handling walk-ins and answering the telephone. New student employees start a few weeks prior to the start of the Fall semester so they can receive adequate training before the rush. All ITSD employees have access to training documents they are kept up to date. Improved communication process has help all ITSD staff to know when issues occur and when they are resolved. This allows the ITSD staff to inform callers confidently of the issue.

   When a call is received by the ITSD, it is important to get specific information to provide to a Tier II level tech for resolution. This can include data such as IP address, computer make and model, time problem occurred and whether others in the building are experiencing the same issues. While these questions are a nuisance to some callers, they are necessary to properly triage the problem so it can be assigned to the correct area. We also encourage people to send an email to ITSD@ua.edu to create a ticket and attached screen shots if possible.

2. Evening/weekend hours -- We are constantly working with the company providing after hour support. High turnover of their call center staff and inexperience seasonal employees add to poorly documented tickets and failure to escalate when necessary in some cases. OIT is looking at other options in this area.

CIT Response:

1. Help Desk-nice but not knowledgeable
   a. CIT-Audio/Visual Solutions (AVS) relies heavily on student assistants for answering phone calls and "triaging" calls from the 200+ classrooms supported by AVS, but there is always a full-time staff member nearby and students are trained when to get other AVS staff involved. Some calls are too complex to solve on the phone, although more than 60% of calls are successfully resolved this way. We continue to add remote access/support capability to classrooms so we can troubleshoot systems remotely. While not all equipment can be accessed remotely, all AVS imaged classroom computers (~200) are able to be managed this way.

   b. Faculty Resource Center (FRC) -- IT Service Desk requests related to Blackboard and other instructional technologies are forwarded to the FRC where the FRC graduate student assistants and professional instructional technology support staff resolve questions as quickly as possible when they can be solved at the local level. We forward complex application or system questions to vendor support staff when necessary. One way to receive help with instructional technology applications more quickly is to include the course number and the myBama user name for those who are experiencing the issues.

2. Evening/weekend hours -

   a. CIT-AVS offers classroom support until 6:30pm. Over the past three weeks there has been one call between 4:45 and 6:30, and over the course of a year we average 25-30 calls after hours. In 2010 AVS began staffing the classroom help desk until 9:00pm Monday through Thursday. Signs were posted near the classroom phones and on the podiums. Due to the limited number of calls received after hours in the first 1.5 years, by spring 2012 the classroom support hours were reduced to 6:30pm to account for the beginning of evening classes. These hours remain in effect.

   b. The FRC seldom has voice messages left after hours or on the weekend (2-3 per semester). Some of these calls are related to online courses and we forward the information to CCS Tech Support.

3. Variation in equipment across campus - This is in reference to classrooms, primarily the difference in the user interface. Yes, equipment will constantly change, but it shouldn't matter whether we use a NEC or Panasonic projector. We need to focus on the user interface. There are several reasons for the wide variation across campus:

   a. Classroom technology has been implemented over at least the past 10 years. Technology changes, fast.

b. Initially each college designed and installed their classroom technology. It wasn't until Dr. Bonner promoted more centralization by funding classroom technology that this began to change.

c. Even with the greater focus on centralization, the funds went to the colleges and some colleges wanted to stretch their funds by installing Extron control systems (push button) instead of the more modern and flexible, but costly, Crestron systems (touch panels).

d. Lastly, in 2010/2011 UA adopted the high definition/digital video capabilities. All new classrooms and any room installed since 2011 meets new standards for this technology. However, rooms prior to that point (about half of all rooms) will have to be completely upgraded to do so. This year we will be upgrading 15 older classrooms. We continue to roll out a simpler user interface as we upgrade older rooms and install new classrooms. AVS is also currently upgrading manuals in classrooms and including a simple troubleshooting guide as well. See attached example.

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We have a few issues that we would like to bring to the attention of OIT. In addition to those listed below, I would add that OIT generally needs to turn up its volume and presence in communicating with faculty and staff. Below are some other issues we would appreciate that you consider:

1. Training software access using IE/Chrome – the OIT people often use Chrome when they are presenting things. But since we live in a world dominated by Microsoft, our training software ought to work on Internet Explorer, and should not be sensitive to which version of IE or Java is installed. Or there should be clear up-front instructions on which software should be installed with links to the downloads.

OIT - SkillPort can be assessed using most browsers. It does prefer the most current Java version which can create problems with other campus applications. Human Resources is the coordinator of SkillPort and has engaged OIT to work with the vendor. While most issues have been resolved, we recommend that if it can't be accessed from one browser, then try another without upgrading Java.

2. We need more prominent announcements on the website about shut down for maintenance - regarding displaying a message on OIT website or on UA website whenever the system is down for maintenance.

OIT - OIT's new website will address this concern and will be released in the next few weeks.

3. Why does only a chair or dean need to make a request for VPN access- why not a faculty member?

OIT – All Faculty and Staff have access to download the VPN client. The VPN clients are found on myBama – Tech Tab. Students enrolled in "VPN Enabled" courses will automatically have access to download the VPN client. VPN Enabled is an attribute that is set in Banner by the departmental staff when adding the class information. Graduate students will need to have the faculty sponsor send a request to ITSD. Only non UA employees will need to have a Dean, Director or Department Head send the request to ITSD.

4. We need better off-hour IT service. For example, over the Christmas break some faculty in Engineering suddenly could not connect to the COE email server- the password was found to be incorrect. When the OIT help number was called, it was apparently answered by a phone answering company. The operator dutifully took the information down and promised to get a response back, but there was not response until a week or two later when campus operations resumed in early January. Having access to email and other UA provided IT services available 24-7-365 is critical for faculty.

OIT – If more information is provided about this incident, we can research and pull records to see what occurred. We are continuing to improve the after hour service provided to the campus and would like to be notified of issues so they can be addressed with the service provider.

5. Suggested by Co-chairs of the IT committee - OIT generally needs to turn up its volume and presence in communicating with faculty and staff.