

June 20, 2006

To: Nadine Stern, Susan Albertine, Beth Paul
From: Felicia Jean Steele
Re: Year end report, Academic Computing Advisor

Tom Hagedorn's April 2005 report on the status of Academic Computing at TCNJ emphasized the "high level of hardware, software, and personnel support of the academic mission of the college" provided by Information Technology as a whole. In AY 2005-2006, I have found no evidence whatsoever to contradict Tom's claims and have, indeed, found IT "knowledgeable, helpful, and supportive" of the academic mission and committed to the process of self-study initiated last year. Over the last year, I have worked closely with IT and with faculty and administrators across the college to follow up on Tom's suggestions for improved communication and to assist faculty, staff, and administrators as they begin the strategic planning process. Two schools are near completion of their strategic plan for IT (Culture and Society and Nursing) and another (Library) is beginning the process this summer. In our current budget climate, this strategic planning process is more crucial now than at its inception. Appendices to this report include the strategic planning documents that I have produced for campus consumption, and the draft plans for Culture and Society and Nursing. This report summarizes my activities for the past year, recommendations that I offer based on those activities, my reflections upon the academic computing advisor position, and my plans for the AY 2006-2007. Any recommendations made within my discussion will be repeated at the conclusion of this report.

ACTIVITIES AS ACADEMIC COMPUTING ADVISOR

My experience as IT liaison for my own department has given me a starting point for this position. In my department, my main job has been to talk with my colleagues about what they want, need, and need to do with respect to IT infrastructure and personal research tools. I've taken the same approach as Academic Computing Advisor. To date, I've interviewed Chris Larthey, Pat Pasinski, Susan Albertine, Tom Hagedorn, Jeff Philburn, and Craig Kapp. I've also attended three meetings about school-specific communications plans. In addition, I have met with John Krimmel and the departmental IT liaisons in Culture and Society, who have formulated strategic computing plans for the both the school and their own departments, and with Susan Bakewell-Sachs and faculty representatives from the School of Nursing. At both NJEdge and in my own research, I've focused on strategic planning. At this point, I've examined most of the strategic computing plans for our peer and aspirant peer institutions, which I condensed and shared with the ITPC in January. In my own department, I piloted a faculty survey to gather information about anticipated needs for instructional technology among English faculty. Unfortunately, response was very disappointing and I decided to forego revising the survey and sending it to the campus at large. Face-to-face meetings with groups of faculty, even in my own department, have been considerably more productive and I plan to continue holding such meetings in the coming academic year.

Attending NJEdge was an enlightening experience that reinforced my positive attitude toward our campus computing environment. Perhaps the most important thing that I learned from attending the conference is that our homegrown course management system (SOCS) outperforms and continues to keep pace with both commercial and free course management systems. The courseware systems presented, including open-source systems such as Sakai, lack the functionality, ease, stability, and responsiveness to faculty need that SOCS offers the TCNJ community as a courseware system. SOCS is a tremendous asset to the campus and provides the campus with an autonomy in terms of courseware development that other NJ campuses clearly lack. I do see the possibility that faculty may begin to push SOCS toward becoming a portal rather than course management software, which I believe might endanger its stability and create some problems with respect to copyright and intellectual property rights. Nonetheless, I believe that Craig Kapp is cognizant of the strengths and limitations of SOCS and will advise faculty appropriately when they make requests that might endanger the stability of the system. Craig Kapp has extended the capabilities of SOCS considerably in the past year, including modules that allow podcasting and other types of content syndication. Moreover, SOCS has become a very important assessment tool for institutional research. It's critically important that Institutional Research communicate effectively with ITS about demands placed on SOCS. The session at the Spring Workshop on Assessment provided faculty and staff with support for SOCS based assessment, although the campus could benefit from the availability of continuing, perhaps targeted, training in that respect.

PROGRESS WITH REGARD TO TOM HAGEDORN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

I have been impressed with the swiftness of IT's response to Tom's recommendations. By the end of December, all of the schools had communication plans in place that met their needs, at least as they currently understand them. I think that the development of the plans, and the school responses to the plans, indicate that some schools felt very confident and sure of their relationship with IT, while others resented IT's control over school resources.

Instructional Technology offered a mid-year workshop in response to Tom's recommendations that combined demonstrations of new technologies with showcases of faculty/developer projects (as well as continuing training in SOCS). Unfortunately, faculty response to the symposium was less than expected, largely because faculty anticipated that it would repeat the content of the successful spring workshop. In the current budgetary environment, I recommend that the fall symposium be discontinued and replaced by widely advertised and targeted training. After attending NJEdge, I can see that faculty must be active participants who can articulate their own pedagogical and research needs to IT if we are to become a campus of "early" or "efficient" adopters as Tom clearly envisions. Most of the technologies on display at NJEdge were presentational devices or software packages that allow faculty to integrate content into courseware systems. If IT were to begin running "Lunch 'n' Learn" workshops such as those at Princeton, faculty would have to be a driving force in their orchestration. ITS has done a remarkable job imagining pedagogical uses for the technologies they provide and support, but faculty need to articulate pedagogical needs to them before they can recommend new technologies. Perhaps one strategy for running successful workshops in

the AY 2006-2007 would be to seek the sponsorship of departmental IT liaisons in the various schools who could pre-identify specific pedagogical needs for ITS.

ITPC seems to be addressing most of the other recommendations that Tom Hagedorn presented regarding Strategic Planning. The other issues he addresses are administrative and beyond my immediate purview.

RESPONSES TO PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS IN FALL 2005 REPORT

In my December 2005 report, I made a series of recommendations that have, for the most part, been addressed or acknowledged. Instructional Technology has been made more visible in the new library and seems to have its early traffic issues fully resolved. I recommended to Jeff Philburn that IT compile a publicly available list of site licenses and the locations where those software packages are available on campus. He assured me that such a catalog of licenses was possible and IT is working on two webpages: one describes "work-at-home" licenses available to faculty, staff, and students; the other webpage identifies the location of specialized software on campus. As IT receives licensed software, they will make it available through SAL, so that it might be available to any user on campus. I anticipate that we might be able to reduce overall budget expenditures with these resources and create a sense that faculty needs are being supported by current resources.

PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

In the fall 2005, I targeted two schools for progress on their strategic plans: the School of Culture and Society and the School of Nursing. After meeting with both deans, individual faculty within those schools began the process of strategic planning or continued ongoing efforts (in the case of Culture and Society). At the close of the spring semester, the School of Culture and Society has a full strategic plan for the school as a whole; three departments (English, Sociology, and Psychology) have completed individualized departmental plans. Nursing has completed a prose draft of a strategic plan that they have forwarded to me for feedback. In addition, I have met with faculty from Engineering twice in an attempt to address the strategic planning process in their school.

During the summer, I will consult with the Library concerning their strategic planning process. I have already contacted Dean Pavlovsky, and we plan to meet in early July to discuss their internal planning process. For AY 2006-2007, I plan to facilitate development for the schools of Science, Art, Media, and Music, and Business in the Fall semester and Engineering in the Spring semester. I anticipate that Science, Art, and Business will have completed strategic plans by the conclusion of AY 2006-2007. In addition, at the beginning of the Fall 2006 term, I will consult with Nadine Stern to reprioritize goals and produce a detailed description of strategic planning efforts for the year.

To assist schools and departments, I composed a number of documents, including two templates that were modeled on the college-wide planning grids. These templates seem to have been useful for faculty in the School of Culture and Society. I've distributed them to Nursing and Engineering. They are also included in an Appendix to this document.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT BUDGET CRISIS

According to current estimates, IT will lose approximately 25% of its anticipated budget for fiscal year 2006-2007. Since salaries are the most significant cost to the college as a whole, IT has followed the same guidelines for cost-savings as the college as a whole, including attrition of empty positions. At least two of the positions lost were those of specialists (cabling and Mac maintenance). Andy Brunetto, the support specialist for the School of Education, has stepped into the gap caused by the loss of the Mac specialist, taking on the responsibility for creating standard Mac images, maintaining a website for Mac users, and supporting a listserv for Mac users on campus. It may be more difficult for IT to share cabling responsibilities among qualified employees in other full-time positions. Thus, I would conclude that, as the budget situation stabilizes, IT will want to reevaluate positions that have gone dormant and consider hiring a cabling specialist, especially since building projects on campus (which are largely bond-funded) continue.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC COMPUTING LIAISON

Tom Hagedorn recommended, in his April 2005 report, that in the long-term a "highranking administrator, although not necessarily a fulltime position, should have responsibility for coordinating the college's academic computing plans." He envisioned the Academic Computing Advisor as a temporary step toward that more permanent administrative function. As I go into my second year as Academic Computing Advisor, I find myself disagreeing with Tom's assessment of the need for such a new administrative role. One asset conferred by my faculty status in the past year has been the willingness of faculty and staff to communicate freely with me concerning their expectations for faculty-staff interactions. Moreover, since strategic planning efforts must inevitably give way to other considerations throughout the academic year, I do not believe that academic computing concerns would be enough to occupy a permanent administrator, even one who served part-time in that role. Finally, the IT Planning Council (ITPC) has demonstrated its willingness to review the institutional strategic plan and is well-equipped to examine unit strategic plans as they are completed, reconciling the two together and ensuring their consistency. I do, nevertheless, recommend that the Academic Computing Advisor continue in the post for more than one academic year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My recommendations to IT are made with an awareness of our current budget situation and with the realization that it is unlikely to resolve spontaneously in the next three fiscal years.

1. Although communications plans are now widely available (I would like to applaud ITS for distributing communication plans to faculty at the Spring Workshop), they do need to be revisited at the beginning of the fall semester. Faculty, staff, and administrators in each of the schools should be asked to assess their effectiveness and offered the opportunity to revise or readjust the communications plans. This process should likely be undertaken annually.
2. Given the current budget situation, information concerning the impact of cuts on IT services and infrastructure (such as the replacement cycle, deployment of

wireless networking, help-desk turnaround time, or other projects) should be distributed to the campus community as soon as possible.

3. Tom Hagedorn's report suggests that there should be some enduring discussion of academic computing, facilitated by IT. I recommend that ITPC serve as a starting point for some of those discussions. Faculty, staff, and students serving on that committee this past year have immersed themselves in the procedural elements of IT administration at TCNJ and could serve as advisors to the campus at large concerning available and emerging technologies, such as Internet2 and wireless communications.
4. IT should become more closely involved with instructional opportunities on campus. Student workers are, in many ways, the lifeblood of IT services on campus, especially in the tech shop and User Support Services. If ITS were to adapt the model for student work instruction used in the Tutoring Center, they may be able to train a more qualified staff capable of relieving some of the increasing demands for instructional application development from Craig Kapp and John Kuiphoff.
5. Items in the communications plans identified by IT staff as meriting "campus wide initiatives" should be discussed and pursued at a high level. These campus-wide initiatives are summarized as the final element on the Communications Initiatives website.
6. The expectations of Institutional Research for Instructional Technology (particularly SOCS) need to be formalized so that Craig Kapp and ITS staff can prepare for demands placed on the system by assessment efforts.
7. ITS should seek the sponsorship of academic departments and the support of departmental IT liaisons in the various schools who can pre-identify specific pedagogical needs that workshops can target for AY 2006-2007.
8. As the budget situation stabilizes, IT will want to reevaluate positions that have gone dormant and consider hiring a cabling specialist, especially since building projects on campus (which are largely bond-funded) continue.
9. ITPC should review the preliminary report of the Teacher-Scholar task force, distributed to campus in February 2006, and formulate a strategy to address its concerns regarding the place of IT in the support of TCNJ teacher-scholars.