

August 10, 2007

To: Nadine Stern, Beth Paul, Susan Albertine, Pat Pasinski, Lynn Braender
From: Felicia Jean Steele, outgoing Academic Computing Advisor
Re: Academic Computing Advisor Report

ABSTRACT

The role of the academic computing advisor has developed and changed gradually over the last three years from that of an investigator and external analyst to a researcher and planning facilitator. Each role has posed its own challenges and offered its own rewards. As I complete my term in this position, I conclude that the role of an faculty advisor to Information Technology administrators and staff continues to be a beneficial role, but that the new academic computing advisor should work more closely with the newly created Center for Institutional Effectiveness in order to work most effectively on planning efforts and should work more closely with the office of Grants and Sponsored Research as an advocate for continued and improved funding of innovation in information technology at The College of New Jersey.

PROGRESS ON PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Information Technology Administrators and Staff have continued to prove themselves responsive to recommendations issued in previous advisor reports. IT has formalized its process for revisiting communications plans and has revised communications plans with each school and with each leadership change in the schools. I am certain that Craig Kapp will continue to keep these communications plans as up to date as Pat Pasinski did over the past two years. IT has distributed information concerning budgetary modifications in the previous fiscal year and kept the materials concerning budgetary principles and planning up-to-date and clear. ITPC took on a new leadership focus this year, drafting, soliciting, and awarding mini-grants focused on IT innovation. ITS created a formalized training unit for student workers that will serve as a model for training and retention for all of IT. Pat Pasinski has taken a new role in IT administration and will coordinate high-level planning and communication efforts in the office of the Vice President for Information Technology and Enrollment Support Services. IT has reevaluated positions that have gone dormant due to budgetary constraints and has hired a cabling specialist and will hire an NTS security specialist. Nonetheless, three recommendations remain from the AY 2005-2006 report that need continued discussions either within IT or within the new Center for Institutional Effectiveness:

1. The demands of institutional assessment 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

ACTIVITIES REPORT

Over the last two years, as IT Academic Computing Advisor, I've determined that the best strategy to encourage innovation in academic computing on campus is to facilitate continuing faculty development. IT Staff have excelled at presenting academic computing opportunities to faculty through the ITS workshop and through Support Specialists. IT cannot devote extensive resources to examining emerging academic computing technologies and presenting these to faculty unless faculty will adopt them. Thus, at the ITS workshop I convened a number of faculty interest groups to bring together groups of faculty who shared particular interests: podcasting, open-source technologies, geographical and statistical applications, social computing, academic gaming, and Internet2. I encourage subsequent academic computing advisors to continue to facilitate such meetings between faculty, either through regular meetings, or brown-bag workshops facilitated by individual conveners. Informal discussions that encourage faculty engagement will pay dividends. I recommend that the next academic computing advisor convene a meeting early in the fall term of the faculty who led these discussion groups (perhaps inviting them to a lunch paid for by academic affairs or the Vice President for Information Technology and Enrollment Support Services) to debrief them on the discussions and seek their recommendations for pursuing such interest groups across the academic year. The greatest successes of academic transformation came out of groups of academic leaders who facilitated both informal and formal discussions across the three years of academic transformation. If the Academic Computing advisor, perhaps assisted by the IT Planning Council, began the same effort in earnest to facilitate meaningful discussions of the role of technology in learning, teaching, and researching, I anticipate they could reap similar results.

Over the last year I conducted multiple interviews to seek information on strategic planning and attitudes toward technology on campus; in addition, I followed discussions led by Educause and the Teaching and Learning with Technology group. The most significant results of these interviews came from those conducted with Taras Pavlovsky, dean of the Library. Dean Pavlovsky has taken a leadership position with the VALE consortium in its efforts to formulate an open-source solution to the cataloging challenge faced by member institutions. Corporate consolidations in the library cataloging industry have created an environment where institutions must either take on support for cataloging products entirely or shift to new, more expensive products. With licensing costs ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000 each year, member libraries make a substantial investment in cataloging products that threaten obsolescence or cancellation of company support. VALE has applied for a collaborative planning grant to investigate options for open-source library software development. The Georgia Library system, PINES (gapines.org), provides one model for open source library catalog construction and maintenance ("Your Homegrown ILS," *Library Journal* 12/06, p. 38-41). Open Source projects such as these provide an interesting and exciting opportunity for institutions such as ours. Although the comparatively smaller financial investment would allow TCNJ to divert financial resources elsewhere, the institution would be required to devote substantial staff time to development and maintenance. In my opinion, the promise of open-source technologies lies in the opportunity for us to create and foster a community of information technology developers who might serve as a resource to faculty, staff, and administrators and who might be able to fuel an engine of innovation on campus.

The most successful effort this year that I have participated in has been the completion of the mini-grant proposal, its approval, and the solicitation of compelling mini-grant applications from multiple schools. Many of the mini-grant applications were linked to other on-going projects on campus, most notably investigations into open-source library cataloging. In my estimation, this drafting and consideration of this mini-grant proposal has cemented ITPC's position as a legitimate, highly functioning planning entity on campus. The mini-grant process proceeded smoothly, especially so given the fact that the process proceeded from the idea-stage to grant awarding in six months.

Given the turnover in high level leadership in the schools, it has been difficult to create continuity in strategic planning. Strategic planning has progressed with fits and starts throughout the institution, and Cabinet-level leaders have taken productive steps to move forward with institutional planning. The recent creation of a Center for Institutional Effectiveness will eliminate many of the difficulties that I have faced as I have worked with academic leaders on IT planning. While individual academic leaders have been able to articulate a vision for IT in their schools, they have not been able to communicate that vision to faculty and staff constituencies who might be able to translate that vision into a strategic plan. In the future, the Academic Computing advisor should coordinate strategic planning efforts with Ellie Fogarty so that deans and other academic leaders can address strategic planning in technology in a fashion consistent with their other planning efforts. It has been difficult for me to help facilitate planning efforts in technology without a sense of other planning initiatives going on with respect to departments and schools. The most successful planning efforts have been those where there has been the greatest continuity of deans and the most buy-in from departments. As a result, the most complete strategic plans for Information Technology remain those completed by the School of Culture and Society, the School of Nursing and Health and Exercise Science, and those drafted by the Library for the purposes of the IMLS grant competition.

The restructuring of leadership in IT should have positive effects; both Pat Pasinski and Craig Kapp have continuously demonstrated their leadership and creativity as well as their responsiveness to faculty and administrative computing needs. Pat Pasinski's efforts to create usable and responsive communication plans for the various schools of the college has prepared her well for the needs of high level communication and planning. Craig Kapp will certainly excel as he moves into additional responsibilities.

As a faculty observer, I can foresee one issue that will cause problems for the interface between faculty and IT as a result of this change. Faculty have grown accustomed to calling upon Craig Kapp for development needs (for the creation of small applications for particular classes or for the adaptation of SOCS for instructional or assessment purposes). In addition, John Kuiphoff's move into Enterprise Applications creates a further development void in Instructional Technology. The most successful faculty led information technology initiatives at other institutions seem to be the result of partnerships between faculty and IT developers. If we are to create a culture where faculty can innovate and imagine productive instructional technology applications, especially those that exploit the full resources of the World Wide Web, the college must create some structure that would provide faculty with access to development expertise. In the past, many of the most successful IT staff members were students who worked through the

ranks of IT. I recommend that the college create some clearinghouse for students to share their expertise with faculty. If students were registered with the college as developers, perhaps individual departments, faculty, or "principal investigators" on grant-funded projects, could use student-work hours to pay students for their work.

Recommendations for IT/ITPC

- IT has been responsive to all concerns brought forward by Academic Computing Advisor in last two years and must continue to be vigilant in order to make deans/schools aware of willingness to work with academic side.
- IT Workshop continues to be a good forum for discussion of academic computing issues; ITPC should ask to report to Staff Senate, Faculty Senate, and SGA at final meeting of fall semester to encourage discussion.
- IT needs to work with Academic Affairs and with other constituencies (such as Student Life and Financial Aid) to create opportunities for a vibrant and talented pool of staff or student developers who can support continuing and increased development needs of faculty using Web 2.0 or open source technologies,

Recommendations for Next Academic Computing Advisor

- Efforts to continue to create a supportive community of faculty interested in IT innovation should continue, either through brown bag or more formalized events.
- Strategic planning efforts need to be coordinated with the Center for Institutional Effectiveness.