

Summary of the IT Services and Systems Committee (ITSSC) meeting; November 2nd, 2020

- Members were welcomed by Dr. Scott Midkiff, VP for Information Technology/Chief Information Officer
 - The ITSSC reports up to the Commission on University Support which reports to, University Council. This is the third year of the ITSSC's existence.
 - Dr. Midkiff is an ex-officio (voting) member of the Commission on University Support and attends all University Council meetings.
 - The ITSSC is meant to have broad representation; there are Faculty (T&R and AP), as well as staff, and students (Undergraduate and Graduate)
 - The committee will cover most functions of IT performed centrally.
 - We can touch on distributed IT units' functions. The Division of IT sponsors an IT Council made up of technical representatives from various colleges and administrative areas to address areas of overlap and to ensure departmental concerns are raised.
 - Four subcommittees for the ITSSC exist, but can be refined. (See below for details.)
 - Dr. Midkiff and the subcommittee chairs, all of whom serve as functional area leaders, are looking for insights on issues from members; both current – more tactical – as well as longer-term -- more strategic -- issues are open for discussion.
- Current subcommittees and chairs
 - Debbie Fulton, Assoc. V.P. for Enterprise Systems-Admin/Enterprise Services subcommittee chair
 - Dr. Terry Herdman, Assoc. V.P. for Advanced Research Computing (ARC)-Research subcommittee chair
 - Dale Pike, Executive Director for Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Services (TLOS) -Teaching and Learning subcommittee chair
 - Suggestions for topics for T&L Subcommittee
 - Possible topics for teaching and learning subcommittee:
 - Ready index of available tools and resources for technology-enhanced learning
 - Guidelines for accessibility of instructional materials
 - Outfitting of virtual teaching “spaces”
 - Preparation assistance for instructors
 - Learning activity planning & design
 - For all the above:
 - How to get the word out?
 - How to involve graduate students?

- How can we best line up with faculty needs in regards to these issues?
 - William Dougherty, Executive Director for Network Infrastructure & Services (NI&S)-Infrastructure subcommittee chair
 - A suggestion to add a User Experience (UX) focused subcommittee chaired by Dawn Zimmer was made and accepted.
- Issues for the remainder of the Fall Semester
 - Instructional support
 - Dr. Wynne expressed appreciation for the efforts shown for last Spring and the current Fall semester.
 - Members generally agreed.
 - Dr. Midkiff shared the EDUCAUSE Top 10 issues list.
 - <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/11/top-it-issues-2021-emerging-from-the-pandemic>
 - See also → <https://www.educause.edu/> for more general info on EDUCAUSE and its mission
 - Dr. Ball mentioned that Kaltura embedded quizzes are not working well and that faculty aren't taking full advantage of features (such as chat windows in Zoom, for example) in some of the software available.
 - He also raised the “vanished student issue,” where students are unresponsive during class and other times. This could be an indication of “pandemic fatigue” and/or other mental health issues coming up. ;
 - Dr. Ball also expressed concerns for the potential for students to miss concepts, particularly in labs.
 - As good as the technology resources may be, they are no substitute in the long run for face-to-face, collaborative engagement.
 - Dale Pike responded to the Kaltura issues which were a problem at the hosting service itself. January will likely be when TLOS will begin promoting Kaltura once again after the Amazon Web Services transition woes are resolved.
 - Tamarah Smith suggested that students don't like Zoom without more interaction; instructors just talking without a break or discussion can become tedious.
 - Dr. Leanna Hall asked about the proper length of attention span for online instruction. Are we going too long daily? Have we gone too long in a semester?
 - Dr. Midkiff suggested that the T&L subcommittee would be a good place to start this type of discussion.

- Jama Coartney mentioned that there is some disconnect among instructors, not just the students, as well.
- Issues for Spring Semester 2021
 - Instructional support
 - Are there improvements that can be made for teaching purposes by helping instructors better leverage the tools that exist?
 - The university pivoted into the online instructional arena quickly and in somewhat of an emergency without a real end in sight.
 - What's been learned that can help not only in the short-term (Spring and Fall of 2021), but also the long term?
- Topics for the committee to explore in 2020-2021
 - Home internet access: Can something be done to improve access and even out the disparities?
 - What are policy implications?
 - What about stipends for individuals who are facing increased costs due to work from home?
 - Should leases on off-campus space be limited? Will the university need so much space in the future? Will there be savings on utilities, for example?
 - Pandemic aside, what is the next issue that IT needs to be focused on to keep VT relevant and progressing?
 - What about recording lectures? Can this be improved? Many students would like to review lectures they've attended or attend on a different schedule.
 - The potential good news is that the pandemic has forced an increase in digital fluency for all the university community which can assist with progress once the crisis has passed.
 - Should business processes change as well? Becoming more efficient with time and effort will help the university save funds.
 - What about paper-based approval processes?
 - The future is more likely a hybrid where changes in culture and working style brought about by the pandemic response become more commonplace and accepted.
 - Announcements:
 - The University Data Governance Council is up and running so issues addressed by that body can be discussed.
 - A Cloud Strategy committee is also at work exploring university use of cloud compute and storage.
 - Other questions:

- A question was raised about Qualtrics; what's going to happen when the contract expires? There is slim hope for renewing due to a major price increase.
 - Alternatives do exist in Google and MS.
 - Which subcommittee would this be germane to?
 - Possibly Research?
 - **Added after the meeting:** Chair has contacted the Director of ITPALS for updates on this topic.
 - A corollary question regarding ownership of data that has been stored in the current service once the contract expires will also be posed.
- Cable TV contract and changes coming.
 - Affected parties, mainly the Inn, Athletics, and the Division of Student Affairs will be briefed first.
- Can the Data Commons be improved so the information is more accessible and granularity is better? There is some difficulty for departments to obtain permission and then to get the data they really want.
 - This is administered by the Provost's office.
 - The Division of IT supports the program with tools (such as the Data Lake and business analytic software), but does not set policy or define processes.