Information Technology Committee 2008-2009 Report

**IT Committee Members:** Michael Reed (chair); Hugh Gallagher; Eric Miller; Austin Napier; Genevieve Walsh; Lee Minardi; David Proctor; Howard Woolf; Judy Stafford; Chas Morrison; Sam Wallis; **Ex Officio Members:** Jim Roberts; David Kahle; David Proctor (GSC Graduate Student); Chas Morrison (GSC Office Manager); Sam Wallis (TCU Senate Undergraduate Student)

As its main goals, the Information Technology Committee had:

1) Meet with the Learning Management System Core Strategy Team for update & discussion of Blackboard replacement

2) Overview of the different IT/UIT structure – who does what for whom?

3) Discuss status of wireless coverage; does it need to be expanded?

4) Start conversation about expanding statistical training and consulting for faculty and graduate students

5) File access and sharing from off campus – what are the alternatives, and their relative pluses and minuses (Remote Desktop, VPN, Wiki, others?)

The Learning Management and System Core Strategy Team is looking into Blackboard replacement software, with one goal of creating a single system across all Tufts campuses. They are looking at open source and commercial courseware alternatives to the commercial Blackboard Package. The goal is to have something in place by Fall 2011, and regardless of what is selected it will cost in the ballpark of $100,000 / year. Because of the cost, the LMS Team is carefully evaluating the alternatives.

AS&E and Fletcher schools' faculty, student, and staff focus groups were completed this past fall. Integrating the medical, dental, nutrition, and vet schools into the platform is being considered now since broader inclusion might translate into cost-savings and procurement of the best product for Tufts. As a result of the wider school scope, focus groups will need to be broadened in order to capture requirements and needs accurately. Following the completion of these focus groups, a year will be spent assessing how to best support the platform across the schools, and to manage the transition to the new system. The new implementation target is FY11. Members of the group raised questions about TUSK, Spark wikis, e-portfolios, and the ability of the systems under discussion to assess and track student knowledge and learning. One can go to the group to the LMS website: www.go.tufts.edu/LMS where more detailed information is posted and comments/questions can be sent.

IT has developed a strategic plan that we reviewed. The primary elements of the strategic plan are:

1) Expand and maintain a modern, robust and secure communications infrastructure.
2) Move administrative applications toward a mainstream online service environment, backed by a robust applications architecture and infrastructure that optimizes interoperability.
3) Maximize the benefits and impacts of educational technologies to enrich teaching and learning.
4) Develop and expand research services, including an appropriate IT research infrastructure.
5) Define and promote effective practices, standards, and policies to leverage institutional IT benefits.
6) Proactively develop, promote and implement information security and business continuity plans.
7) Improve Tufts’ IT support structure and service processes with a focus on client satisfaction.

This first IT Strategic Plan is viewed as a foundational document. The intent is to review and update the plan annually and republish major revisions every three years.

The issue was raised that some sectors of the university see an increased need for statistics training, teaching, consulting needed at the advanced undergrad, graduate, and faculty levels. Specific needs currently indentified include things such as intermediate and advanced statistics courses (applied statistics) in linear models, multivariate statistics, categorical data analysis, and experimental design, as well as software training in SAS, S+, and R. It was suggested that AT play a central role in this expansion (if it occurs), including provide more statistical consultation, which would require more people to act as consultants; advice on grant applications; research (faculty, grad students, undergrads); includes experimental design, and guidance on data analysis. We noted that the medical school has 7+ statisticians, and people whose job it is to do statistics teaching and consulting. The Medford campus has 1 consultant, and only one advanced statistics course (in Psychology, on advanced linear modeling). We raised the idea that there might be 1-day workshops on software training (basic use, and particular applications – such as different ways to tackle mixed model analysis), and that AT could coordinate mini-courses by outside experts.

What was not known, however, is how extensive the statistical needs are across the campuses. Until that is known, little will probably be done. Since this is an issue that keeps coming up, however, it should be pursued. We suggest that a simple questionnaire be sent out via email university wide – to faculty, grad students, and post-docs – to assess statistics needs. The type of questionnaire most likely to be responded to will have 10 or fewer basic questions, and have radio button choices. For example:
– In the last 5 years have you sought advice on data analysis or experimental design, or wished you had?

There also was brief discussion that we are continuing expansion of wireless coverage on campus. Wireless was installed last summer in two dorms that had been identified by the deans. Wireless installation throughout most of AS&E will be phased in over the next few years. Jim Roberts stated that faculty could request wireless for their class, but that campus-wide classroom wireless was not viewed as a priority. Additionally, there are concerns about student wireless abuse during class time.

It appears to be not widely known that there are a variety of tools for file access and sharing from off campus. It is likely that this will occur only through visits to departments during department meetings, where alternatives can be presented, followed by training.