Special Issue: Update on Technology

Your humble correspondent, who routinely calls the Help Desk each morning for instructions on how to turn on his computer, had not planned to produce a special issue on technology. But given the absence of this journal's editor, he had no choice given that on March 24, the Information Technology Planning Committee (ITPC) held a retreat attended by about 40 faculty and staff to discuss technology at GSU. And since he has a fondness for typewriters, carbon paper, and mimeograph machines, he decided after three days of frustration to eschew the new electronic format introduced last week and revert to the old format of GSUniverse. He apologizes for the delay in producing this issue of the newsletter, and like the gallant Quixote, promises to make a virtue of necessity.

Technology at GSU: Rollin’, Rollin’, Rollin’ Like a River

Several months ago, Faculty, Dean’s Council, Administrative Group, and the President’s Cabinet signed off on a comprehensive plan for information technology at GSU. The plan, developed by the Information Technology Policy Committee (ITPC), ties the application of technology to the implementation of GSU’s strategic plan in areas of excellence in teaching and learning, quality of student experience, administrative and productivity quality, and personal productivity. Together with the Long-term Master Facilities Plan, it provides the roadmap to the university’s future.

From Blackboards to PC’s

The retreat began with a discussion on the ways technology is currently integrated into instruction and where GSU wants to be in the future. It was agreed that technology support and training is needed for both students and faculty. The On-line Program Development team under Gary Fisk is working with faculty developing courses as part of fully on-line degree completion programs. The first such program will be CBPA’s Business and Applied Sciences program, developed under the leadership of Dean Bill Nowlin. It was also emphasized that with the coming of smart and genius classrooms, faculty will need training in how to make the most effective use of this technology. ITPC will appoint a taskforce to develop a plan in this area. In addition, the use of electronic portfolios was highlighted as an assessment tool for evaluating student learning outcomes and as a possible means of streamlining the faculty evaluation process for promotion and tenure.
Progress Reported in Many Areas

Despite the budget pressures and cuts in appropriations, GSU is moving forward on applying technology more rapidly than many at the retreat first realized. With the re-wiring of the main building three years ago, “GSU has, what I believe, is the best wiring interface of any public university in the state,” Pete Mizera, executive director of information technology services, said. He noted that there was considerable capacity for expansion. In addition, wireless internet access is already available to faculty and students in the University Library and the cafeteria. Access will soon be available in areas of the Faculty Office Center. John Tuohy, vice-president of administration, reported that ITS will map the campus to determine where to locate additional wireless access points. Obsolete equipment is being phased out and replaced on a systematic, planned basis, although the budget cuts clearly have slowed the replacement program. ITPC will be revisiting the Computer Cascade plan to assess its effectiveness. It was also reported that faculty will soon be able to submit grades electronically to the Registrar’s Office; that the time now required to produce a student’s transcript is being reduced; and that the university will soon be able to accept on-line payment for the graduate application fee. ITS is actively exploring on-line tuition payment.

Issues Discussed

Retreat participants agreed there was a critical need for ongoing training, given the growing number and variety of software programs GSU is buying and applying. Dates Casey said the University Library is and will offer training in a number of programs from Word to Outlook to Excel to PowerPoint to CMS 200 – the last sure to be a popular course for those who may use CMS for the new university web site and the new GSU intranet. The external auditors found that GSU needs to develop official policies in some areas related to information technology. ITPC will begin work immediately on these policies and will send them through the appropriate university approval processes.

We Don’t Need Stargate, Just a Portal to GSU, Maybe

More and more colleges and universities are looking to web portals as a way of easing access for students and faculty to the myriad of applications and databases which hold information relevant to the teaching/learning experience. What types of applications? Email! Internet access! University calendar! Online grade submission! What types of databases? Personal student information! Student schedules! Student advising! Library subscription databases! Instead of trying to remember dozens of different usernames and passwords, the web portal allows the student or faculty member to use one username and one password to access all of these different types of applications and databases. Even better, the user can customize the portal interface to reflect personal preferences and use. Finally, we will be able to throw out all those post-it notes on our computer screens reminding us of which usernames/passwords go with which applications/databases.

May Day, May Day

A call for help? Hope not. Dates Casey and Mizera announced that the new GSU website would go live May 1. (Your humble correspondent bit his tongue, although he believes this long running enterprise is coming to an end.) All changes, fixes, tweaks must be to ITS by April 15. Those who are late: You know who you are!
Internet Goes Live May 1 – Intranet Goes Live, Too

If the internet site is our public face, the intranet is the face we show each other. The intranet will be accessible only to faculty and staff, not the public or students. Pages will include policies, procedures, calendars, job postings, and all other information the GSU community needs to know. The intranet, also using CMS, is scheduled to go live May 1.

Replacing CARS May Be on the Horizon

About four years ago, CARS was purchased by Jenzabar, a portal company, which also bought three other companies serving higher education. It was reported that Jenzabar recently told GSU that over the next five years it plans to upgrade CARS and add new features and components. “There will be license issues, I’m sure,” Mizera said. “Depending on what they propose, we may have to go to bids,” Tracy Sullivan, director of procurement and auxiliary services, said. Dates Casey and Tuohy said the time has come to begin planning for a migration to the new CARS or to another system. “That’s not to say we’ve made any decisions,” Tuohy, said later. “But if we’re going to move into the new system CARS has promised or migrate to something else, we need to begin planning for it now. And ITPC should take the lead in that planning process.”

Protect Me from Creatures that Go Bump in the Night, or Anytime for that Matter

At the retreat, Mizera pointed out that ITS does not censor e-mails, nor clear them for content. To do so would be a violation of academic freedom. Tuohy told the group that Outlook has filters that can eliminate ads for people don’t want to receive. He and Dates Casey agreed that a workshop on the subject might be in order.

Next Steps

With the strategic plan for information technology at GSU in place, it was agreed that to move forward, multiple plans need to be developed in areas ranging from financing to policies concerning the internet and intranet. That process of planning for implementation is just beginning. ITPC will be looking for students, faculty, and staff to participate in the process.