

# Instructional Services Task Force Report

## Introduction

The Instructional Services Task Force was established jointly by Anne Mayhew, Associate Vice Chancellor, and Brice Bible, Interim Chief Information Officer.

### Charge to the Task Force

1. Identify and catalog the goals, resources, reporting structure, specific offerings, and funding levels/sources for all instructional services currently provided by scattered units on campus. These services include those provided through ITC, the classroom upgrade projects, room scheduling, provision of instructional equipment in the classrooms, programs that assist with teaching improvement, early alert systems for grades, and so on.
2. Develop a near-term plan for integration and coordination of all of these services.
3. Develop long-term goals for further enhancement of instructional services.

## Methodology

The Task Force, chaired by Faye Muly, met with Anne Mayhew and Brice Bible on January 28 to discuss the charge and process. Four subcommittees were formed to address individual aspects of instructional services: Faculty Services, Student Services, Instructional Space, and Administrative Support. The subcommittees were asked to identify current instructional services and identify gaps, overlap, and funding models. Each subcommittee drafted findings and recommendations for presentation to the full Task Force on March 3.

**Faculty Services:** Julie Little (Chair), Chris Cox, George Hoemann, Jeff Kovac, Jeff Mellor, Jane Row, Richard Strange, Gretchen Whitney

**Student Services:** Jane Row (Chair), Norma Cook, Ruth Darling, George Hoemann, Missy Parker, Richard Strange

**Instructional Space:** Faye Julian (Chair), Michael Burke, Smiley Clapp, Betsey Creekmore, George Hoemann, Margie Russell, Mike Sherrell

**Administrative Support:** Linda Painter (Chair), Monique Anderson, Betsey Creekmore, Joel Reeves, Rhonda Spearman, Kathy Warden

## **Executive Summary**

Subcommittees were formed to focus on four aspects of the charge: faculty services, student services, instructional space, and administrative support. The discussion of the subcommittees was broad and constructive. Seven common themes emerged.

The members of the task force represented varying perspectives on the needs and opportunities for instructional services. All, however, demonstrated dedicated support for the teaching, learning, and technology environment of the university.

Although the findings of this task force are significant, more needs to be done in defining issues and developing solutions. Administrators and faculty, along with students, should continue this dialogue.

### **1. Instructional Space**

Instructional space includes lecture rooms, laboratories, and seminar rooms. Opinions differ regarding central scheduling for instructional space, but there is consensus that an accurate inventory of this space is essential to efficient utilization. Currently this inventory does not exist. Because the rooms are constantly undergoing change for individual user needs, surge space, and renovation, maintaining an accurate database is a challenge.

Facilities Services maintains the official repository of campus space: the IRIS based Real Estate Management Database. Faculty cannot, however, easily search it, nor does it include the important attributes of technology equipment and configuration. The Ad Astra system will interface with the IRIS system to serve those needs.

The Classroom Upgrade Program has been a major success in providing a centrally maintained and scheduled standard installation of technology in the classroom. All classrooms, however, need improved maintenance.

### **2. Advising (Academic Planning)**

Effective advising is critical to the success of our students. Advising affects retention rates and diversity of the student body. Yet teaching and advising are often seen as not having equal status with research. Decentralized academic planning has resulted in uneven quality of the advising among the colleges and the special interest groups.

Advisors need improved training and faculty need better access to information of student records and degree audit requirements. Advising can be a significant burden on faculty, and in particular, plans for an early alert program will affect faculty in large classes.

The web-based DARWIN application is expected to be an effective new tool for advising. Before its final configuration, both faculty and students should test its interface.

### **3. Campus Portal**

The ideal is for a single, integrated, robust portal with accurate information. In practice, there are concerns with scalability during periods of high volume use, granularity of security, multiple layers to accessing information, and the single point of failure of a single portal. Multiple entry points to coordinated information may be the most effective structure.

Significant effort is necessary to maintain accurate information on web sites, avoiding conflicting information. Responsibility should be assigned for regular review and update of information available on the university's web site.

A recurring theme in all aspects of instructional services is the need for improved communications so that faculty, students, and staff know what is expected of them and where services are available. Appropriate configuration of the portal can help solve this problem.

### **4. Distance (Distributed) Education**

During the past decade the definition of distance education has changed as electronic communication tools have matured. The accessibility of these tools has encouraged fragmentation of the distance education program, causing an uneven university product and different funding models.

Access to university administrative functions, advising, library, and other resources poses a challenge for off-campus students. As the distance education program expands from graduate to undergraduate, these largely non-traditional students need support. In addition, the faculty has special support needs for online courses. On-campus students are taking advantage of the "distance education" classes, which often offer a blended pedagogy of online and in-class instruction.

A systematic review is needed of the funding model for distance education classes, along with a review of its value to the university, i.e. more students, opportunity for service to the state, and broader recognition of the university. If this function is central to the mission of the university, then coordination of offerings and faculty and student support need attention.

### **5. Support Expectations**

Online functionality implies anytime, anywhere availability. This is true for both administrative applications like COEUS and IRIS, and academic systems like CPO and Blackboard. While the need for 24x7 support services is recognized, the limited resources to provide it must also be recognized, and user expectations must be set appropriately.

Emphasis on intuitive web interfaces and easy navigation within web sites will help to minimize the round-the-clock support needs. The interface should be organized, not from the service provider perspective, but from the user perspective.

## **6. Administrative Support**

Because records have moved from paper to an electronic format, establishing a full list of official student records and the associated retention policy is needed. In addition, faculty and staff need greater awareness of the student privacy requirements of FERPA and other federal and state laws. Procedures and responsibility for archiving student data, electronic or paper, need to be established.

The Student Information System (SIS) upgrade project will bring the core student information system to a more integrated technical platform, reducing the risks inherent to the legacy systems and the need to support disparate systems and interfaces. As the SIS upgrade project nears completion, an effort should be initiated to determine the future direction of the University's student information system. Web-based information systems are a platform for user input of information and for user access to information, and they should be exploited to the benefit of the institution and the user.

The Blackboard (Bb) course management system is a comprehensive tool for organizing the content of academic instruction and supporting communication. As faculty and student use grows, effective teaching and learning and efficient use of time and resources demand greater functionality within the Bb application. To meet this need, collaborative planning should prioritize functional enhancements for two-way integration of student data with the course management system.

## **7. Funding and Coordination of Instructional Services**

Funding for instructional services is dispersed throughout the university in departments and administrative offices. Thus it is critical to clearly identify university priorities, which may be translated into funding decisions at the local level to ensure maximum service to teachers and learners.

Appropriate changes in processes must be designed as we move from paper to electronic record keeping and transactions, e.g. redundant manual entry of data available electronically. To benefit from the improved tools and opportunities that technology provides, processes must be viewed with a clear delineation between technical issues and campus cultural and policy issues. Priorities must respect the limited staff resources and preserve the valuable resource of faculty time.

Recognition and effective instructional services for faculty are essential to achieve the goal for excellence in teaching and learning. Providing a single campus contact point for instructional services is imperative. As traditional models of instruction and learning environments have changed, so must funding models and organizational structures.

# Findings and Recommendations

## FACULTY SERVICES

### A. Faculty Development and Instructional Needs: A One-Stop Shop

#### *Observations & Comments*

- Faculty need someone who has a sense of all the options – where to go to get whatever is needed. It is perceived the University does not value faculty time because there is no “infrastructure” to help faculty do what they need to do in an efficient manner.
- There is (and has been) a need for an instructional services unit – a “Teaching & Learning Center” (similar to Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching) that focuses on and provides consultation and/or support for:
  - Pedagogical innovation
  - Strategies for effective teaching and learning
  - Assessment strategies (learner, faculty teaching, curricular, program)
  - Classroom instruction (where requests for hardware and multimedia resources are made and someone appears at the prescribed time/location to provide and support – similar to UC-Davis model)

#### *Recommendation*

There needs to be a “four-pronged” approach to supporting faculty development and instructional needs:

1. Building Theoretical Knowledge about Teaching & Learning
  - To address the question: “How do I do things differently? Efficiently? Effectively?”
  - That generates awareness to drive and implement the needed services
  - Educating the faculty about the process of teaching & learning
  - Where are various strategies valuable in the teaching & learning process
  - What is good teaching for whom (addressing diverse learner needs)
  - An active campus-wide discussion about teaching and learning
  - Change the campus culture and examine reward structures, so that teaching is recognized as a form of scholarship to be engaged in as rigorously as research, i.e. creation of a Teaching Academy of Distinguished Faculty (similar to U of Wisconsin model)
2. Production – To perform a task for faculty
  - Addresses: "Do it for me"
  - Offer services to digitize pictures, make videos, make copies, develop databases, create web pages (of any kind), reformat a videotape lecture series, create multimedia products, develop course materials, etc.
  - Course management, at both the faculty and program levels
  - Creation and analysis of assessments

3. Consultation – To take faculty from theory to practice
  - Addresses: “What are my options for doing.... Help me figure it out....How do I.?”
  - Offer services focused on teaching and learning strategies ranging the full instructional design model (analyze, design, develop, implement, evaluate)
4. Training – To develop faculty practice
  - Addresses: “I know what to do, show me how to do it.”
  - Support for faculty wanting to learn new skills, on and off-site

## **B. Classrooms**

### ***Observations & Comments***

- Centrally supported classrooms are not well maintained. Faculty need a set of standards for classrooms so they can "plug and play" rather than "plug and pray" with various laptops and/or instructional/media-based needs (i.e. screens).
- It is virtually impossible to locate available classrooms, their resources, scheduling procedures, and contact information needed to schedule. Faculty who do not have a "regularly" assigned classroom, particularly those who are "nomads" find it very difficult to get what they need.

### ***Recommendation***

1. There needs to be a baseline of services within each classroom from non-technology (chalk and whiteboard markers) to technology (projectors and smartboards) that are regularly maintained and serviced.
2. There needs to be a central clearinghouse for classroom-based resources that includes an up-to-date inventory of the type of resources available in classrooms and how to schedule/access a particular classroom/meeting space.

## **C. Faculty Development: Role of Effective Instruction in Promotion and Tenure**

### ***Observations & Comments***

- Faculty development is particularly important in developing junior faculty become better classroom teachers. We need to remove the stigma so junior faculty can go to senior faculty mentors and get help; and similarly if senior faculty do not know the answers, where they can direct junior faculty for help.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Fold this into faculty development and information vehicles

## **D. Advising**

### ***Observations & Comments***

- This is one of the most important jobs on campus. There is a real need for long-range planning. Advising is not done consistently and often performed by graduate students or instructor-status staff. Students are provided inconsistent information.
- Current degree audit system (DARS) interface is unmanageable to navigate and printed reports extremely difficult to read.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Faculty need required training on how to be advisors as they need to know about the curriculum as well as human relationships to help students make course of study decisions when they don't know what they want to do.
2. Recognizing DARWIN, the new web-based degree audit system will replace DARS (per the SIS project, due to launch in June or July 04), faculty should be involved, as appropriate, in user testing. Faculty will require training on the new system.

## **E. Student Information Systems: What faculty want**

### ***Questions & Responses***

- Degree audit? *Yes*
- Class Rosters? *Can get these from Blackboard*
- Grades? *Submit online, particularly to submit a spreadsheet*
- Room scheduling? *Yes, particularly what's in the room.*
- Additional issues addressed in Subcommittee D: Administrative Services Report

### ***Recommendation***

1. Add Faculty Senate Information Technology Advisory Committee and Instruction with Technology Subcommittee Chairs to the SIS Steering Committee to increase faculty input regarding access to student information.

## **F. Course Management Systems**

### ***Observations & Comments***

- Faculty want course management at the individual course (faculty-level) and department (program-level)
- Desire to manipulate grades and roster data for department/program needs.
- Based on 2000 and 2003 Blackboard Advisory Board Faculty focus group feedback, additional functionality has been requested. Please see the Appendix "Faculty Services: Requests for Blackboard Functionality" for list of requests, outcomes, and status of requests.

***Recommendation***

1. Explore continued customization of the Blackboard system to meet faculty needs (see Subcommittee D: Administrative Services Report).

**G. Pay-For-Print**

***Observations & Comments***

- Faculty will have to rethink class requirements through training/forum channels.
- A pay-for-print program will need to be communicated widely to inform faculty of implementation, available training, etc.

***Recommendation***

1. Communicate with faculty and provide training to rethink effective use of online print-based resources (links to e-reserves, pdfs, web sites, etc).
2. Provide parallel student training re: need to print everything.

# Findings and Recommendations

## STUDENT SERVICES

### A. Advising

#### *Observations & Comments*

Faculty, administrators, and professional staff at UT consider advising both a responsibility and an opportunity for improving each student's pattern of undergraduate education through informed academic advising and career information. The goal of academic advising is to help a student at each stage to define the choices that must be made and to give any needed guidance. Advising centers in most colleges handle all freshman and a substantial amount of sophomore advising; major advisors with the college, working closely with the advising center, advise those students who have declared a major. Students who have not yet declared an interest in a specific college are advised by the College of Arts and Sciences. At all levels, campus-wide guidelines for good advising are supplemented by specific college standards, guidelines, and evaluations. The Advising Committee of the Undergraduate Council coordinates this effort. (See Attachment for College Specific Information.) Currently, policy dictates that all students must see an advisor each regular term for an advising session previous to registering for the next term. Beginning fall 2004 students with less than 30 hours at UT and who are on Academic Review (academic probation) must meet with an advisor each regular term. Students are encouraged to meet with their advisors as needed to discuss their academic plans and specific issues.

The UT advising community utilizes the following technology based systems. SIS (such as Circle Park On Line, drop/add, admissions, advisor/ advisee assignment, major assignment, departmental enrollment, SAMS (academic history and all associated screens and reports), and DARS (degree audit and all associated screens and reports). Within individual college units, computer and web based systems have been developed to help manage advisor/advisee appointments, petition/substitution processes between departments/colleges and the registrar's office, and the very large amount of information needed to adequately support faculty advisors and students as they engage in academic planning (such as advising guides, curriculum guides, referral resources). The effective and efficient use of technology is needed to assist all advisors in the difficult task of communicating timely and accurate information to the large number of students needing to engage in academic planning.

Faculty in the sub group commented that scalability is a problem with advising. Concern was expressed for the approximately 6000 undecided students who are not assigned an advisor and thus have no continuing relationship with an advisor. The system at times breaks down with numbers. The challenge is to get the 6,000 undeclared students connected with a system that can meet their needs. Faculty in large departments are often over burdened with advising duties with up to 50 students

assigned to them in some cases. We have to get the numbers under control. Both faculty and students are not getting what they need. An additional problem with advising is the difficulty students have with the dropping and adding of classes. The degree audit is helping the situation but the availability of it is still a problem. Currently only students and certain individuals in departments can get the audit. Students also seem to have a hard time reading and understanding the degree audit.

### ***Recommendation***

1. The degree audit should be easily available to all advisors. Current policies and processes make it cumbersome for faculty in their offices to access and print the report.
2. The current degree audit is text heavy and complicated to read for those who have not received instructions. DARWIN (web based audit) should help with easier interpretation and access. The implementation of DARWIN should not be delayed.
3. Current information concerning advisor assignment and major assignment is not reliable. Data input and reports need to be in “real time” and accessible for all units, advisors, and students.
4. The Advising Committee should consider guidelines that will address the advising needs of students who are pursuing degrees through distance education. A type of “virtual information” will be needed to facilitate good academic planning.
5. Because many systems are needed by advisors, advising units and students in the academic planning process, a type of “academic advising suite” should be developed that would provide easy access to the various systems from one web based site. The site would include an “advisor” menu and a “student” menu.
6. Departmental and college units should consider the opportunities presented by Blackboard to assist in the communication and management of specific groups of student advisees.
7. Currently, an on-line web-based advising evaluation is being piloted in 2 college advising centers. This pilot should continue and be monitored by the Advising Committee of the Undergraduate Council to ensure compliance with original guidelines approved by the Undergraduate Council and Faculty Senate.

## **B. Course Management System**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Distance Education no longer operates Blackboard Course Management System (Bb) system for credit classes; this instead has been consolidated with the ITC’s central sever. Distance Education does provide the technical and pedagogical support for synchronous teaching using the Centra software. ITC provides the technical and pedagogical support for Blackboard (for both totally online and blended course uses)

and other instructional technology-based tools. In addition, the ITC offers all academically recognized student organizations the ability to host an organization site using the Bb enterprise system and training for using the system. Printing is a problem. There is a need to educate faculty on how to put materials into the right format for efficient printing. PowerPoint presentations with color backgrounds use incredible amounts of toner. The system's ability to provide email, discussion forums, synchronous chat, and whiteboard capabilities is seen as being very useful. Blackboard is cumbersome for some faculty while others just prefer to do their own web pages. Bb averages over 1000 faculty and GTA's per fall or spring semester that use the system to host course materials for an average of 2600 sections per semester. Most faculty that take ITC's web page development courses are doing so to develop content-specific resources that are shared across many courses and linked to within Bb. Currently some programs have requested Bb organization sites to facilitate the advising process in their programs (this is used on an adhoc basis).

### ***Recommendation***

1. Explore the possibility of allowing students to sign up for advising on the Blackboard system.
2. Explore the possibility of advisors signing up on Blackboard.
3. Inform and educate faculty and students on the best use of Blackboard focusing on the problems of printing. This will be particularly important when we move to a pay for print environment.

## **C. Early Alert**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Early Alert (Academic Progress Report) is currently being designed by IT and funded through the Chancellor's Office. The web-based system will provide academic progress information during the regular term to specific advisors and students. Students will request the information and designate the "advisor" Students will register based on class sections, which will generate an automated inquiry to the instructor. The response will be sent to the designated advisor. Instructor participation is encouraged but is optional. This process could be burdensome to faculty who teach large sections and there is some concern about buy-in from those instructors. Specific groups on campus that require academic progress information for participation include: AAIG, AAS, ROTC, student athletes, fraternities, and sororities. The Black Cultural Center currently coordinates a voluntary early alert program for all.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Consider expanding the system to include at-risk freshman and transfer students.
2. Continue the development of the pilot instrument and reporting system.
3. If an **Advising Suite** were developed, the early alert system should have a link on the student menu.

## **D. Library Resource Access and OIT**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Positive comments were made related to the broad offering of services to assist students in utilizing library and information technology resources for their instructional program.

See attachment for summary overview of library and OIT services offered to students.

## **E. Degree Audit (DARS)**

### ***Observations and Comments***

DARS is an automated record of a student's academic progress toward degree completion in his/her major. The DARS audit is a two-column report that contains all requirements for a specific degree program. Because the system is currently being developed, DARS audits are not available for all majors and are cumbersome to acquire for faculty advisors in their departments. Students obtain a report in the Registrar's Office or in his/her advising center. DARWIN, a web based version, is currently being developed but is not yet available.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Continue timely development of Darwin to ensure easier access readability for both advisors and students. Responsibility for granting authorization to access the database must be established and monitored.
2. DARWIN should be a link on both advisor and ADVISING SUITE student menus of the proposed.
3. All degree programs should be encoded as soon as possible in the current DARS program.

## **G. Online Faculty Evaluations**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Student participation has dropped from approximately 80% to 30%. It is believed that this decrease is because the process has been taken out of the classroom. This evaluation is included in the Promotion and Tenure review, and thus broad participation is needed to produce a valid result. The Teaching Council has discussed a variety of remedies.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Consider keeping the evaluations in the time framework of the class. Incentives such as prizes for doing evaluations, or penalties for not doing evaluations are not in keeping with the spirit of an institution of higher education.

## **H. Additional Issues Discussed**

### **Printing**

#### ***Observations and Comments***

As more instructional materials have been made available electronically, faculty and students have a greater need for printing. ITC is providing assistance to faculty in limiting the amount of printing that is necessary. A Pay for Print program is planned for fall 2004.

#### ***Recommendation***

Continue to educate faculty and students to alternatives of massive printing.

### **Registration (Drop/Add)**

#### ***Observations and Comments***

Currently CPO (Circle Park Online) is used for web based student access to registration and drop/add. The system is overloaded during the semester registration period. It is expected that the new Student Information System program will replace this system in fall 2004 and be ready for spring 2005 registration.

### **Classroom Assignments**

#### ***Observations and Comments***

The nationalization of classes has not gone well from the perspective of many students and faculty. There are double bookings and faculty and students are not getting into the right classrooms with the technology needed for the course. The current system is causing faculty and students to waste time and resources.

#### ***Recommendation***

1. Fix it

### **Distance Education**

#### ***Observations and Comments***

Any student service that is campus-centric and 8-5 oriented will tend to create problems for distance education students. Forms, processes, etc. that require going to a specific office do not work for students who never come to campus. Current drop/add forms are cumbersome. There are problems with registration or fee payment when only a non-toll-free number is provided and when the phone is habitually busy (or just not answered).

This also applies to Knoxville-based students who are adult learners and who cannot take off from work during the middle of the day to deal with these sorts of issues

## Findings and Recommendations

### INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE

#### A. Physical Space

##### *Observations and Comments*

**Inventory of instructional space:** The existence of multiple, unconnected and incomplete databases of classroom facilities significantly hampers the ability to schedule instructional spaces efficiently, and renders almost impossible faculty and administrators' access to information they need. Currently, the Facilities Services database, which is designated as the official repository for classroom facilities, is being transferred into the IRIS system, and the Student Information System is populating a room scheduler application (Ad Astra). Additionally, a database of instructional spaces is maintained by OIT Engineering Services because of their work with Technology Enhanced Classrooms, while a database is maintained by the Registrar's Office to enable the CARS registration process.

##### *Recommendation*

1. A single official database should include information about the actual space and number of seats, an inventory of installed technology, and other attributes, and be easily searchable by faculty and administrators.

**Classroom Upgrades:** A successful classroom upgrade program has funded the renovations for infrastructure, furnishings, and information technology for 72 rooms over a three year period, and the committee anticipates renovation of at least 12 more rooms for the current year (scheduled for summer 2004). In addition, individual academic departments have funded varying degrees of technology upgrades in approximately 80 classrooms over the same period. Continuing support for these rooms is provided by OIT Engineering Services.

##### *Recommendation*

1. Continue this program.

**Video Conferencing:** OIT supports fifteen video conferencing rooms on the Knoxville campus and twenty additional video conferencing rooms across the state.

##### *Recommendation*

1. Sufficient rooms are available.

**Classroom Support:** Technical support for technology enhanced classrooms is provided by OIT Engineering Services; student assistants in the ITC START program provide first

level support dispatched by OIT Engineering Services. Classroom technology training for faculty is provided by ITC. Expansion of support services (especially help desk) beyond the traditional time schedule is needed since more classes are scheduled before 8 AM and after 5 PM. The Distance Education Department in Outreach and Continuing Education provides direct support for classes registered with them during all class hours

### ***Recommendation***

1. As Distance Education classes adopt a “combo” model (i.e., simultaneous on-campus students with a distance students), gaps in support may need to be filled.
2. Establishment of a point of contact for faculty who need assistance with resetting hardware/software configurations necessary for a class’s instructional style or mode needs to be identified and communicated widely.

### **Classroom Scheduling**

Currently the Registrar schedules only 180 classrooms on campus. This office must physically survey these rooms prior to each semester due to the inadequacy of their database.

### ***Recommendation***

1. To utilize effectively existing classrooms on campus, the Registrar must be assigned responsibility for scheduling all available instructional spaces.
2. Adequate procedures must be determined and implemented for purposes of responding to temporary changes in availability of classroom space, changes in capacity due to renovation, etc.
3. A valuable resource would be two-way communication for encoding information into the database and for allowing queries by users of the space.

## **B. Virtual Space**

**Distance Education:** During the past decade the definition of distance education has changed considerably as the tools have matured. Nuclear Engineering, Information Sciences, and Statistics work closely with the Distance Education Department, but because of the increasing accessibility of technological tools, not all distance education classes are coordinated by the Department. Differences in administration and support for distance education, depending on the mode of interaction include: synchronous, (2) asynchronous, and (3) blended in-class and online instruction. DE courses with materials that use Blackboard are now hosted on the ITC Bb server. Complementary in nature, ITC and DE have worked and continue to work closely together on support for both faculty and students with technology questions. DE provides technical support for Centra during classes, regardless of scheduled meeting time. ITC trains faculty to use online tools, providing an operational environment for course management, and supports new methods of pedagogy for the online environment.

***Recommendation***

1. If Distance Education is a priority for the University, all distance education classes must be coordinated.

**Synchronous Audio (VoIP) Tools:** Currently, Centra is supported by the DE Department for synchronous delivery of distance education courses. The Faculty Senate's Information Technology Advisory Committee has requested an evaluation of synchronous electronic classroom tools, and ITC is preparing to conduct the evaluation.

***Recommendation***

1. Proceed with the evaluation.

# Findings and Recommendations

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

### A. Student Records and Retention Policies:

#### *Observations and Comments*

A student record is defined, in *Hilltopics*, as “information or data maintained in University, college, school, or departmental files which relates to a personally identifiable prospective, current, or former student.” Academic records are maintained by the Office of Enrollment Services. These records reside within the academic history, academic review tracking, demo-bio, advising, term grades, and degree audit student information systems.

The University’s policy regarding the use and release of student records is governed by Public Law 93-380, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the Tennessee Public Records Act. Guidelines for access to and the release of student data are described in *Hilltopics*, as are policies related to the destruction of educational records and the custodians of these records.

#### *Recommendation*

1. The University should establish a full list of official student records with the associated retention policy.
2. Faculty and staff must be informed of their responsibility to maintain records and their responsibilities established in FERPA and UT Policies.
3. As requests for access to student information increase, responsibility must be established for controlling access rights.
4. A policy and plan for archiving student data, electronic as well as paper, must be established.
5. Policies related to archiving and/or destruction of course materials should be established and a plan for implementation developed.
6. The responsibility and retention policies for grade books, electronic and paper, should be established.

### B. Student Information System (SIS)

#### *Observations and Comments*

Twelve major systems or applications are generally considered as Student Information Systems or Student Software Applications: Academic History (SAMS), Admissions, Central Services Accounting (CSA), Curriculum, Degree Audit (DARS), EPOS – Voice Recognition Units (VRU), EPOS – Web, Financial Aid, Recruiting, Registration, Student Records System (including Grades), and Timetable.

The Student Information Systems (SIS) Upgrade Project is a campus initiative to continue consolidation of legacy applications into a functionally integrated student system using a database management system. The EPOS – Web system will be replaced; the EPOS VRU will be eliminated. The rewrite/upgrade of five of the most at risk legacy systems, Student Records (including Academic History, Advising, Term Grades, Degree Audit, Demo-Bio), Curriculum, Timetable, Registration and Admissions, will bring the core student information system to a more integrated technical platform, reducing the risks inherent to the legacy systems and the need to support so many disparate systems and interfaces. Consolidating the applications in this integrated database will allow for expansion of web-based services, enhancing our ability to be more responsive to students, faculty and staff.

### ***Recommendation***

1. The current SIS Upgrade Project allows for limited functional enhancements and web-based services, and does not include plans for integration to the course management system. Requests for additional enhancements and interfaces should be prioritized within a master plan for accessing and securing information officially residing in the SIS.
2. The University needs policies regarding the storing of student information off-site by third parties that adhere to the same policies and guidelines required by the University. When off-site third party storage is permitted, rules must be established that ensure the reliability, availability and security of the information and systems.

## **C. Course Management System – Blackboard (Bb)**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Course Management Systems are tools used to facilitate creating web-based learning environments. A CMS incorporates many online tools into one seamless and integrated environment that encompasses synchronous and asynchronous communication, display of multimedia learning materials, course level grade book, tests and surveys, and the ability for students to submit assignments and work in collaborative groups. Blackboard is an academic portal for the University, offering centralization of those online services supporting instruction. Like Circle Park Online (CPO), it is a gateway to a subset of the campus's online information services.

An electronic interface of information to and from the Bb system and the official registrar information is needed to facilitate access by faculty and students. In all cases the Registrar's Office is the office of record. There is a need to provide an e-syllabus structure, with links to educational policies, to provide consistency within departments and colleges. The Blackboard system is currently hosted off-site, with implementation of all requisite security measures. This arrangement is under continuous evaluation and review.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Policies regarding what information should be replicated in the course management system are needed. Issues related to providing this information to the course management system from the appropriate administrative systems should be explored.
2. Assuming widespread use of the online grade book, a future procedure for interfacing Blackboard to SIS as an official source of grade collection would have to be established.
3. The University should review the advantages of establishing multiple entry points for instructors and students to access needed data.

## **D. Portal Integration**

### ***Observations and Comments***

Multiple portals exist at the University, e.g. CPO, MyUT, Bb, resulting in redundancies in the user interface to administrative information and instructional services. The portal is a powerful tool, used by faculty, students and staff, and thus effort must be made to create a single structure, incorporating all of the information, that is logical and easy to navigate. There is inconsistency in the information available on the web, which refer to conflicting policies and procedures. With proposed increase in data available at MyUT, the University must insure a robust system accessible to many users in a timely manner and establish policies and procedures regarding services available via the portal.

### ***Recommendation***

1. Regular review and update of information available on the university's web site is important to the contract between student and university.

## **E. Support:**

### ***Observations and Comments***

The electronic environment for student information and for the course management system improves access to student and faculty, but introduces expectations of round the clock access and support. There is a special need for expanded hours of support for off-campus students. This strains the current staffing level and resources of the university, but must be addressed in the future.

## Appendix

1. Faculty Services: Chart(s)
2. Faculty Services: Requests for Blackboard Functionality
3. Student Services: Chart(s)
4. Student Services: OIT Services
5. Student Services: Library Resources
6. Student Services: Advising Review
7. Instructional Space: Chart(s)
8. Instructional Space: Classroom Upgrades (Year 1-3)
9. Instructional Space: Classroom Technology Upgrade Review 2004
10. Instructional Space: Classroom Upgrade Committee Report
11. Administrative Support: Chart(s)
12. Administrative Services: Requests for Blackboard Functionality
13. Admin. Services: Bb Advisory Board – Faculty Student Focus Group Information