Meeting Minutes from Friday, October 4, 2002

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, October 4, 2002
Rebecca Crown Center, Crown Conference Room
Evanston Campus
10:30 am - 12:00pm

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT
William White, Chair
Charles Douglas
Timothy Krauskopf
Jerry Pearlman
Benjamin Slivka
Sona Wang
Gary Thompson (via phone)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT
Henry Bienen
Lawrence Dumas
Marilyn McCoy
Morteza Rahimi

STAFF PRESENT
Steve Beck
Gary Greenberg

Bill White called the meeting to order and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved. He asked Mort Rahimi to review the Northwestern University Information Technology Strategic Plan 2002-05 and Program Review 2002-03 Strategic Issues for Information Technology.

Northwestern University Information Technology Strategic Plan 2002-05 Mort Rahimi reviewed items from the NUIT Strategic Plan for 2002-05. He explained that each year NUIT reviews current projects and University needs and revises recommendations for opportunities to pursue for the next three-year window. Tim Krauskopf asked how recommended projects are prioritized against each other across the five areas and what is actually funded. Mort explained that the recommendations are not prioritized and NUIT's implementation depends on funding. The very costly items, like replacing the Financial System and the Student Loan Application, cannot be done without new monies, while other projects might be funded through reallocating resources, charge back or grants. Henry Bienen added that funding and priorities are not necessarily NUIT's decision. The Committee suggested that a clearer presentation of funding sources for the recommendations would be helpful.

Mort Rahimi explained that an underlying philosophy of the Strategic Plan is to enable customers to transact business on their own. For example, people need information about NUIT services and the ability to initiate and track orders and transactions. In order to automate its own processes, NUIT has defined specifications and selected a vendor for an order/problem tracking system (CONDUIT) that includes a Web interface for customers.

Mort Rahimi said that even though a common vision of information technology is emerging, central planning is a challenge. Some issues might be pursued because they are important for the University as a whole, even though they may not seem to be issues to schools or faculty. School decisions can have an impact on services and support. Bill White asked how the Strategic Plan might address Kellogg's future international needs. Mort Rahimi replied that Kellogg has a freestanding model where the overseas institutions currently take care of the administrative services and faculty teach on-site. Larry Dumas added that Kellogg has reached the limits of being able to send faculty out to support
programs with overseas partners and will need to use technology to expand further.

Mort Rahimi explained that NUIT is looking at new approaches to supporting research needs. Ben Slivka asked what is involved beyond supporting local PCs. Mort Rahimi explained that new models, like GRID computing, and how to access, use and support them are becoming increasingly important. Tim Krauskopf observed that High Performance Computing is important to a small subset of the overall research community. Mort Rahimi said that rather than invest directly in high-end computing, NUIT’s focus is on helping faculty through other mechanisms. NUIT is identifying and anticipating research group needs. He described the benefits to the Chemistry department of sharing a position with NUIT and to research groups of having NUIT manage their servers. Larry Dumas added that some units use faculty and graduate students to do things that could be done more efficiently by NUIT.

Network and system security are becoming very important issues. New federal legislation demonstrates how essential it has become to the health and well-being of the country.

**Program Review 2002-03 Strategic Issues for Information Technology**

Bill White asked if there are any additional issues for NUIT Program Review.

Tim Krauskopf asked how the issues identified relate to customer satisfaction. Ben Slivka asked if Program Review focused on customer satisfaction. Charles Douglas asked how we know the unit has identified the right issues. Marilyn McCoy explained that the President, Provost, and administrative officers review the issues identified by NUIT. Issues can be added before the internal committee begins their review and outside reviewers come onto campus. Surveys are used to help identify issues and assess customer satisfaction. Mort Rahimi added that NUIT does targeted surveys throughout the year to gauge customer interest and satisfaction. Recent surveys have included piloting and deploying Entertainment TV and faculty feedback on using smart classrooms.

Bill White asked why there was nothing about the quality and future of the NUIT team. Mort Rahimi explained that while those were issues for the review seven years ago they are no longer issues.

Sona Wang asked about faculty input or a faculty survey on technology like there is for incoming students. Mort replied that given the diversity of interests and experience, surveys are more useful if they are targeted for specific user groups. There is a standing faculty advisory committee, University Committee on Information Technology (UCIT) to review issues and provide feedback. Ad hoc committees and task forces are convened each year to address specific issues, such as last year’s Social Science Research Computing Committee. Some issues go beyond NUIT and may be schools' responsibilities. Marilyn McCoy noted that schools make different policies on what is and is not funded that could affect faculty expectations for central services.

**Recent Activities and Accomplishments**

All 28 smart classrooms now have current technologies. Faculty members are using digital media in teaching and taking advantage of network-based video conferencing. An Access Grid node was recently opened in MEAS to support large, multipoint collaborative science and engineering meetings.

This fall, a new student media production facility, Media Works, was opened. NUTV now provides 20 channels of entertainment TV to student residences over the campus data network.

Digital archive projects include the Vesalius' Fabrica (1543 human anatomy), an on-line audio archive of 1930-40 BBC WWII radio broadcasts, and the Online Encyclopedia of Chicago History.

Three new buildings were fully wired. There are service contracts and partnerships with the School of Communication, Kellogg School of Management, and the Feinberg Medical School.

**Discussion**

Ben Slivka asked if NUIT expects to identify one knowledge management tool for all different problems and if it has been determined what the problem is and what tool can address the problem. Mort Rahimi explained that the goal is to identify problems across the University that might be addressed by a common Knowledge Management tool. For example, NUIT is looking at tools that could be used to support Web content management.
Bill White asked how the University is preparing to replace the financial system. Larry Dumas replied that staff in financial operations is suggesting that the University can invest in the existing system and improve service. Others warn that there are things the University cannot do without a contemporary financial system that will become increasingly important. These two perspectives raise the question of how much the University would gain by trying to improve the existing system (at what cost?) and what the University cannot do until it has a new system. There are many issues and tradeoffs that need to be clarified. The financial implications, especially with today's economy, will encourage caution. Henry Bienen added that every time a new system has been introduced, it has been more painful, more difficult and more expensive than anticipated.

Mort Rahimi noted that staff would have to give up their shadow systems, as was the case with the introduction of the new HR system. Even though there was no shadow Student Systems to move people from, people want to do more as add-ons to the new system. Henry Bienen added that the result of more demand is added costs. Mort Rahimi noted that the increases in costs are the result of people being able to do more with a new system than they could with the old. Doing more would increase costs regardless of the system. Ben Slivka wondered if most of the customers are unhappy with having to support their own shadow financial systems and would be attracted to the efficiencies of a new system. Jerry Pearlman asked if we know what the new systems would be able to offer and what they cost. Mort Rahimi replied that unlike earlier systems the University has deployed, modern financial systems are already running at other universities that can provide models and information about their experience.

Ben Slivka suggested that the University should look ahead to when the breaking point for the existing financial system will come and determine when it must start planning. He suggested bringing in an outside consultant to review the situation and the different perspectives. Bill White indicated his sense that the Committee could provide this review. The Committee agreed and welcomed the opportunity to contribute in this way.

Sona Wang asked if the University is continuing to explore distributed learning strategies. She asked about the University's objectives in terms of the number of courses, etc. and how success would be measured. Mort Rahimi replied that NUIT provides the technology infrastructure to improve teaching regardless of if it is on- or off-campus. He said planning for courses should come from the deans as part of their school planning. Henry Bienen said the University should be providing the capabilities in a decentralized teaching environment, but should not worry about goals like a specific number of courses, because the measure of success is the number of courses and increased demand that will be met, as needed.

**Follow-up**
The Committee would like to follow-up on the following items:

- Clarify priorities and funding sources for the NUIT Strategic Plan
- Develop a procedure for the Committee to review issues concerning the future of the Financial System.
- NUIT customer satisfaction and operational reports.