SAC Executive Seminar, Snowmass, August 4th, 2002
Building an Action Agenda for the Coming Year

SAC Executive Seminar—Next Steps for each of the participants

IT is listed now as a strategic imperative in the near final draft of the University Strategic Plan. The IT Strategic Plan was finished three months ago and it will align all ongoing and proposed projects with the University Strategic Plan. Now I need to put this project in the ongoing communications with VPs and Deans.

In light of budget constraints and overhead initiatives, I am going to make sure my IT decisions and conversations with key stakeholders focus on moving forward with the mission. The institution can’t afford IT investments that do not focus on the goals and vision of the organization. Use this as a way to justify not doing things that don’t add value in that way. This will help with sorting out and prioritizing limited resources.

Seek connections by involving key stakeholders in strategic planning goals. Seek personal, creative, high quality contributions. Aim for positive feedback at the highest common denominator, not the lowest. Ensure adequate support. Review emphasis on importance of communications. Emphasize mission and vision. Become an advocate.

Work with teaching faculty and deans to address the “inevitably will happen” problem of what we do when an online teacher is unable to complete an online course that has already begun.

Re-energize and help define and publicize our Teaching and Learning and Technology Roundtable, our university-wide IT planning, advisory and best practice publicity organization.

Build performance assessment metrics for instructional technology initiatives. Leverage the existing strategic plan to align staffing, projects, funding and academic mission. Help initiate the process of evaluating the interplay between central and unit-based IT organizations on campus. How: Articulate the problems and their consequences to the institution. Communicate with CIO and deans. Investigate how I can integrate some of the function and services of our central IT organization with specialized services offered by discipline based support groups. Identify and communicate the benefits of doing so to shareholders and develop appropriate SLA’s.

Bring to the university IT board the question: is there a need for a virtual campus linked to PeopleSoft. Work with campus tech group to establish a network advisory board which focuses on cooperative network security with SLA’s and standards, middleware rollout, network redesign and TII upgrade. Begin to offer consulting services for network and application support.

Write up a proposal regarding the future of utility concept in light of needed funding, increased demand, and services provided. Ignore names and personalities and focus on
concept of services. Start initiating discussions surrounding concept of enterprise systems instead of academic systems and administrative systems. Conduct survey of “utility” users to determine satisfaction or dissatisfaction, needs and wants, and their desires for future directions.

Create a transition plan for people with older technology skills that don’t directly apply with the advent of new administrative systems.

De-silo library services, move to integrate directly with faculty, IT organization and curriculum. I must come up to speed on traditional library functions as well as short and long term future directions. Will need to engage other institutions as models. Will need to find faculty who are willing to drive change. Will need to find library staff who want to participate.

Engage key VP to move ahead on committee recommended actions to reorganize selected administrative units. Identify base savings that could be used for ERP related needs now and other strategic needs later.

Move discussion and activities about IT to the enterprise level. Engage others by identifying and tackling quick wins. Engage our adversaries on tough issues and strategically plan to address their concerns. Rise above the growing acceptance of mediocrity on the service and technical levels that plagues the entire campus.

Extend the central IT strategic plan to encompass IT leaders in the schools. Build a relationship with the provost to get more visibility for IT planning and get him excited about the possibilities. Share our expertise with other institutions around middleware and infrastructure delivery.

Steal sacred cow and barbecue idea from Stanford. Do inventory of services and skills, again copying Stanford’s idea. Both with goal of getting cast-in-stone staff to be receptive to change.

Move IT from its traditional role as a reactive support organization and establish it as a change agent within the organization.

Engage current opponent to change in discussions about how to make the change better for all. Engage the provost and CFO in discussions about consolidating all IT expenses into one budget on campus. Build more central/decentralized teams for IT projects on campus.

CTO is involved in executive level discussions. IT strategic planning for and with the college. Internal alignment to position IT more strategically. Create partnerships around campus with key constituents. Mobilize IT staff for change. Take care of the stone statues. Work with IT on who we are and what we want to be. Look at what we want to be and ignore personalities while looking at the most effective organizational structures.
Establish the “sacred cow” initiative mentioned earlier. Even though budget is not as big an issue as in other institutions, operate as if it is. Collect comprehensive baseline data on faculty use of IT in courses to replace current reliance on impressions and assumptions. Engage faculty and chairs to overcome attitude that information gathering equates to interference.

Develop an assessable IT strategic plan that complements toe campus and system strategic plans. Separate strategic vs. operational. For each major item in the plan, develop a consulting group to engage in an executive seminar like a consulting activity to achieve buy-in and assist with implementation.

Identify five outcomes I can achieve by leveraging constrained budget environment by partnering with five individuals.

Identify administrative processes that can be streamlined using technology and present the solutions to cabinet.

Meet with deans of other schools to discuss sharing student IT support services. Generate economy of scale and enlarge student experiences by working in different schools.

Integrate the IT strategic plan with the college’s general strategic plan. As provost, I will work with the CIO to assure a workable coordination between the plans and help him identify the key action items for the next two years to present to the President’s Council.

Integrate and enrich our academic planning process with the lessons learned from our administrative and infrastructure projects. Involve provosts and presidents along the way to make explicit connections between the academic and administrative environments.

For use with budget groups which allocate cuts and money for the university and during the budget cutting process remember this from Susanne: “Don’t forget that in good financial times or bad, the job of a leader is to build the organization.” Therefore in bad financial times, it is better to cut or downsize programs/services than to take away the tools needed by the people who remain to do the work. It is also essential to protect the core of a strategic function/service even if you have to temporarily downsize it; it will then be ready to grow once good times return.

Work with three colleagues to develop a brief questionnaire to send to presidents of the colleges with which I am working. The focus of the questionnaire will be on the kinds of issues involving information and technology which would be of interest to the presidents.

Within the next six months, develop a new organizational structure that supports our strategic directions. Define the positions necessary to implement the directions. Utilize a variety of incentives and educational opportunities to fill these positions with existing staff. Reengineer the people and jobs.
Revitalize our SLA processes and thinking to apply integration of SLA into our IT Strategic planning processes. Make some assignments to staff to review practices on staff skills (services) inventory.

Be proactive in meeting with key leadership in other colleges and universities to help shape a more coherent/efficient set of IT processes. Starting with planning assumptions; need to start from a shared agreed-upon set. Proceed until apprehended more so than trying to obtain any clarity re specific from my dean, other deans, Provost.

Training—embrace the request to do HR training as the new system goes up. Consider WebCT as a tool once initial training is completed. Think about budget differently. Encourage pursuit of WebCT as an enterprise system. Continue to build topical teams.

Starting an IT strategic planning process. Identify our core competencies that we must protect and pockets of excellence that can be leveraged through outside funding opportunities.

Share information and ideas more broadly. Reach out to others who have already done what we are doing. Change the way IT is run in education.

Return some resources to the academic units—either in actual resources or assuming costs traditionally funded in the academic units.