

Information Resource Council
Minutes of March 4, 2005

Present: Jamie Aiello, Andrew Ashton, Joyce Casertino, Jeff Clark, Ruth Copans, Joanne Devine, Bill Duffy, Leo Geoffrion, Sarah Goodwin (chair), Dan Green, David Hamilton, Greg Howe, Bob Jones, Elizabeth Katzman, Tony Kowalick, Stanley McGaughey, Mary-Beth O'Brien (scribe) Patrick O'Rourke, Deanne Palmer, Tracy Riley, Lisa Schermerhorn, Justin Sipher, Kris Szymborski, Susan Zappen

On behalf of the IRC, Sarah Goodwin welcomed Justin Sipher, Skidmore's new Chief Technology Officer. Justin introduced himself and provided a review of his professional background. In his opening remarks, he emphasized the importance of implementing Oracle as the College's new student information system in order to provide efficient access to information for the entire institution. He stressed that the College's vision for technology needs to reflect the culture of the community and that he sees himself as a facilitator and communicator. The rest of the meeting was an open discuss of technology and information resources.

When asked what the biggest challenge of the moment was, Justin replied that it was to make the transition to Oracle as efficiently and quickly as possible. Other priorities are to ensure that the Strategic Plan outlines how technology serves the broader educational goals of the College. In seeking external funding for the Strategic Plan, Justin stressed that there are many opportunities to fund technology initiatives. He would like to make sure that we do not change the institutional goals to fit grants, instead we should look for funding that fits our needs. Individuals should be targeted along with companies and institutions. He will work with Advancement to look at gifts in kind (computer hardware) to determine whether such gifts are reasonable and will work for the College's needs.

Justin was asked to give some examples of the academic uses of technology that are particularly exciting. He mentioned that GIS is already being put to good use in academic areas, but it could also be used in administration, for example for demographics of potential donors or for parking. He also mentioned that e-portfolios were are important area, in which Skidmore will need to come to some common definitions as well as build the infrastructure and support necessary for delivery. He stressed that we should be careful not to let a pilot program or experiment become a commitment without sufficient evaluation and that we will need to set realistic boundaries.

In regards to smart classrooms, Justin brought up the question of expansion versus maintenance. He suggested that there is nothing worse than having something that does not work. The College needs to address the expectations everyone has for equipment and service. The smart classrooms that we have need to be reliable. Funding for new projects is often more readily available than funding for maintenance.

The issue of faculty computer placement program was addressed. Justin mentioned that a 3-4 year cycle is important for several reasons. Firstly, when purchasing large quantities we can take advantage of economies of scale and get more competitive prices. Secondly, routine replacement ensures compatibility for college-wide databases, operating systems, and learning

management systems such as e-reserves. Thirdly, routine replacement is important for maintaining warranties. Fourthly, the system helps to create an efficient set-up and exchange mechanism.

The question was raised whether the College should continue to offer modem access to college servers or whether this service should be outsourced. About 20% of the College still have dial-up service (28k). Other use local Internet Server Providers (ISP) such as CompuServe, DSL, Net Zero, Earth Link, or Road Runner. There are 350 Remote Access Server (RAS) accounts but only about 40 users use the service regularly. The costs for CITS involve the modems, line, and help desk.

The final area of discussion surrounded the question of whether the College should shift expertise from CITS to department-based specialists. Justin suggested that there needs to be interaction between min-tech centers (such as the GIS lab) and CITS. We should avoid a situation where one individual is responsible for an application. If only one person is dedicated to an application, what will happen if that person is unavailable or leaves the College? However, it would be inefficient to have departments hire staff to replicate services that CITS is already doing. One option would be to decentralize Information Technology. A second option would be to organize IT but to locate people physically at different sites (this would involve resources for office space). Since most applications cover more than one discipline (for example, Photoshop could be used in courses for photography, filmmaking, or art history just to name a few), it is essential to have several people who can troubleshoot across the disciplines. At a small institution, it is important to have knowledge redundancy.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary-Beth O'Brien