

Faculty Senate Meeting | Monday, March 3, 2025
Questions for the CIO

Q: Has the Spring 2024 report from the Ad Hoc General Faculty Committee on Information Technology chaired by Dr. Swetnam been read and acted upon in UITS? Which of its recommendations are being acted upon?

- Yes
 - We have created the [IT Restructuring Advisory Council](#)
 - We have moved away from a one-size fits-all model
 - We will continue to use a combination of hybrid cloud, on-prem and HPC solutions
 - While UITS has been able to gain efficiencies through its past practices, we have already identified additional efficiencies in procurement, ticketing systems, and deployment of personnel.

Q: What does it mean for the 500 (?) or so Campus IT personnel brought into UITS March 4th, 2024? When might we expect “the concepts of the plan?”

- The IT restructuring process moved quickly, resulting in limited clarity of the roles and responsibilities of IT staff that transferred into the organization. We shared our current plans during the Faculty Senate meeting, which will help to clarify how all UITS personnel align with our goals and mission. More details will be shared as we continue to refine and build the organizational structure.

Q: What did we learn from months of discovery with nearly all Campus IT employees?

- UITS conducted a comprehensive discovery process, including surveys, focus groups, and individual meetings with 500 IT staff to understand their work and interests. This work took time to complete and now we have a better understanding of how to restructure our IT operations and services to create an improved user experience for our campus community.
- Some of the things we learned are:
 - The range of duties for most IT professionals is broad
 - There are many custom applications being created / maintained / supported
 - IT professionals feel aligned with the mission of the unit they support
 - Many IT professionals feel a need to be on-call, even when ill or on vacation
 - There are as many excited about restructuring as those who are concerned about it
 - IT Support is spread across many different roles and levels

Q: What have we learned about centralization that benefits academic units, instructional, and research faculty?

- As this program evolves, staff previously dedicated to system administration and basic IT support will be able to shift their focus to more strategic technology initiatives, such as AI and technology for teaching and learning.

- Departments with limited or no IT staff will benefit from dedicated support teams. Group purchasing power will reduce equipment and software costs, freeing up funds for other priorities.

Q: How is IT prioritizing homegrown creations that are integral to colleges like this [College of Med] and ensuring that there's backup on programs so one person isn't the only one with knowledge about a specific thing?

- We fully recognize that some units have custom applications and other technology platforms that require specialized skills and expertise. We will continue to support these efforts. The development of cross-trained teams will help to ensure that we don't have a single point of failure and a more balanced operational model.

Q: Why did they go away from an original organizational plan presented in Fall 2024 that emphasized Matrixed Service Teams?

- We have not moved away from this approach. However, we are taking some additional time to evaluate how to best serve the campus by meeting with many campus stakeholders and governance groups to listen to their thoughts, suggestions, and concerns.
- Our goal is to develop an organizational structure and IT operating model that meets the needs of campus and improves IT service delivery to faculty, staff, and students.

Q: Has an IT security risk assessment been performed since May 2023 internally or externally? How is risk being assessed and mitigated?

- Each year UITs and the Information Security Office works with campus units to conduct a risk assessment.
 - In FY24, the project goal required all academic units to complete at least 1 approved security plan, and we met this goal.
- Risk is being mitigated by helping colleges and departments migrate to centrally managed servers, ensuring 24/7 monitoring, logging, and patching to maintain appropriate levels of security. Centrally managed systems do not all have to be located in the cloud, however.

Q: At the beginning of this year (2025) a new student joined my research group, and I needed an account created for him on one of my research servers. In the past this kind of thing was quick and straightforward, and allowed research to move forward quickly and without hiccups. In this case, however, my request was unanswered for three days after which I went and did the work myself (I note, for the record, that almost two months later I *still* have not received even an acknowledgement of that request). This is very different from my experience with similar requests before the centralization effort, and it is unacceptable.

- Thank you for bringing this issue to our attention. We recognize the gaps in IT support across the university and addressing them is a key focus of our restructuring effort.
- To improve responsiveness and consistency, we are prioritizing the implementation of a new IT support model.

- We are also introducing a unified ticketing system for IT staff, enabling them to resolve support issues more efficiently and effectively. More information about the new IT Support model will be shared in the coming weeks.

Q: About two weeks ago, on Feb 13, the 2-factor authentication system for logging into UA accounts experienced an outage. I needed to log into UA's Box account to xxxxxx so this needed to be done urgently). When I tried to contact UITS's 24/7 support hotline it was clear that the support staff were completely overwhelmed — the live chat feature kept crashing, and there were several hundred people in the phone queue ahead of me). In the end I was not able to review the document in time.

- We are sorry this happened to you and disrupted your work. The two-factor authentication issues that occurred that day were due to a nationwide outage affecting Duo, the university's authentication service provider.
- Because of the severity of the outage, we received a huge volume of support requests, resulting in high wait times. We believe moving to a new support model will improve our response to campus users.

Q: I am concerned centralization is going to impact my ability to conduct my research. What is your plan for supporting researchers?

- We hear your concerns, and we are pausing any plans as it relates to research computing. We are working with the SVPR, ADRs, RCGC and others to assess the situation and to develop an effective strategy that supports the university's complex research needs.

Q: Have we secured and stabilized the funding for the high-performance computing project chaired by Drs. Russell and Schwartz so that annual and regular updates and upgrades are not cobbled together with last minute urgency like last year?

- We don't have a long-term solution at this time, but we will be meeting with the SVPR to discuss how we approach research computing in the future.

Q: If faculty are interested in engaging as it relates to research computing, how can they become involved?

- Please contact the CIO if you would like to be involved in this process. Additionally, you can contact the Research Computing Governance Committee or your unit's Associate Dean for Research.

Q: One of the main concerns of the faculty was the plan to replace local servers with AWS contracts that were deemed prohibitively expensive, uneven in accessibility of data, and dangerous to data preservation (upon grant expiration for example) and privacy. What is the status of the AWS contracting plan?

- We are moving ahead with a hybrid approach to servers. In the case where it makes sense to co-locate a server on campus, we have been doing that, and will continue to do that. In many cases AWS makes a lot of sense. The decisions are being made on a case-by-case basis.
- AWS contract costs are well-contained. Through the migration of some units to AWS, we can combine multiple services into one enterprise service. For example, for Windows domains, rather than 40 or so different domains, each requiring their own servers, we are migrating to a single domain to serve the entire University.

Q: How is UITs addressing the continuing and readily apparent “us” and “them” division of UITs employees, and those Campus IT employees brought in on March 4, 2024?

- Bringing together IT teams that are providing similar services across the university will increase collaboration and standardize processes and tools when possible. This also provides IT staff with opportunities for professional development, knowledge sharing across technical functions, and back-up support for staff on leave of absence or paid time off.
- As we integrate teams, we are also beginning a structured approach to onboarding and change management.

Q: Have we consulted with peer institutions models of IT governance as suggested in the Ad Hoc IT committee's report?

- Yes, I am engaged with other CIOs, and learning from their activities.

Q: "The new IT centralization will have a committee from outside UITs to provide some oversight of the process; does the Faculty Senate think this goes far enough?" What assurance do we have that the IT oversight will have elected representation, either from the senate or elected by the general faculty..?

- We cannot speak for Faculty Senate. However, our IT Restructuring Advisory Council consists of 12 members from various campus groups. Four of those members are faculty members, and one of those faculty members was nominated by Faculty Senate.

Q: Can you identify an RCUs that were operating (and continue to operate) at a high performing level before the centralization effort (e.g., CALES), and might it be helpful to use these as a model for how to successfully manage IT in a college or division.

- We are actually learning from all the colleges and divisions about how they are managing IT. Remember that we are maintaining the connections between the IT staff and the units that they originally served.

Q: What is the size of the UITs staff? How has that changed since 2019? How are we recruiting, training, and retaining? How do our salaries compare to UAGC's IT staff? How is AZ online IT support and staffing compared to UAGC?

- UITS before consolidation had approximately 400 technical staff plus some administrative positions. The total size of UITS is now over 1000 including technical and administrative staff. With a few exceptions we are only recruiting internally at this time. UAGC technical staff salaries were generally higher than UITS, and HR is working to align salaries going forward.

Q: Another issue was the centralized procurement of hardware which researchers feared would not meet their customized needs and was subject to bureaucratic delays and even kickbacks and other forms of corruption. What is the status of that plan?

- The majority of faculty and staff are well served by common hardware configurations, and our hardware supplier was selected through a rigorous RFP process with set costs. If unique configurations are needed for faculty research, etc., there is no issue going off contract for those unique needs. We encourage units to work with the UITS procurement process as it is generally cheaper and can be faster. We recently saved about a unit over \$50K, by purchasing the exact same equipment through this process.