November 10, 2010

Dear Trinity Community,

The fall semester provides an opportunity to reflect upon the technology projects that were completed over the summer and look forward to those planned or underway for the academic year. The summer of 2010 saw changes in leadership as well as the completion of projects, as I arrived on campus early August to assume the role of Director of Information Technology. I have been overcome with the openness with which the campus has received me. My initial focus has been on learning about the technological environment and understanding the campus culture. I have spent much of my time just getting to know faculty and staff and formulating ideas about direction and changes that we may want to institute over time.

Fall is also a time to look at the technological make-up of the Trinity student population. We found that the incoming class of 591 freshmen brought to campus a greater percentage of Macintosh Computers (70%) as compared to Windows-based Computers (30%). In addition to almost every student bringing a laptop, they are also coming to campus with a variety of smart phones, Blackberry, Droid and iPhones.

We had a wonderfully smooth start to the academic year. Our helpdesk reports that this was one of the best starts to the academic year that they can remember. The helpdesk was prepared to handle lots of call about the change in the Cable TV, but the transition was smooth.

A late summer upgrade of our mail server from Exchange 2007 to Exchange 2010 took place shortly before the start of classes. The upgrade went well. As always with an upgrade of a system as far reaching as email, we were prepared for some bumps in the road. We uncovered some minor issues for the non-windows platforms that were resolved as identified. Overall it was a successful migration, especially keeping in mind the many different desktop configurations that need to be supported.

On the Academic front, after a year-long pilot project, the final transition to the Moodle Course Learning System took effect this semester as we ended our contract for the Blackboard course management system. The Academic Instructional Technologists offered many training sessions over the summer and at the beginning of the semester. They have made themselves available to work with faculty in helping set up sites for their fall courses. The initiative to move to Moodle has provided some budgetary relief, resulting in an on-going savings of $45,000 annually. This fall, Moodle is being used in 287 courses (out of 535), involving 155 faculty out of the 285 teaching courses this term. The transition to Moodle has been smooth and the faculty and students appear happy with the new system.

Every summer, we renovate the technology and furnishings in a select number of classrooms. This summer, 12 classrooms were upgraded. The most significant being the work done in Seabury

215 and Clement 105. We installed three fully-digital, high-resolution projector systems for side-by-side dual-projection and widescreen-projection and a ceiling-mounted document camera. I had an opportunity to see a demo of these rooms and it was quite impressive in terms of the quality of the images and the flexibility of projection options.

The College Bulletin is an illustrative example of the collaborative work being done between IT and the Communications Office. The initial step of the project was completed during the 2004-2005 academic year when IT introduced a dedicated SharePoint site to facilitate collaboration between communications and The Bulletin contributors. In addition, our Web Services team streamlined the process by automatically pulling course catalog information from our PeopleSoft system, thereby reducing the time and effort required of the academic departments to edit their contribution to The Bulletin content. This year they overhauled the production of the final PDF version of The Bulletin, producing a document ready for printing and distribution over the web. The new system automatically assembles all the various MS Word documents maintained by communications and the contributors on the SharePoint site and produces both a camera-ready PDF document and an html version made available on our web site.

Our web services team has also been working closely with the Communications Office on the web redesign project, which is two-fold, the new look and feel with refreshed content being foremost, but also a new Content Management System. This project has been underway for a little over a year. The initial phase of this project resulted in the selection of SharePoint 2010 for our CMS, a solution that was officially released May 2010. The Communications Office has focused on the web site design work in conjunction with mStoner, a web design consulting firm. The technical aspects of the project got underway in earnest in late spring with delivery of an initial environment occurring in early September. Inherent in working on the latest release of a platform are unanticipated challenges. Significant progress has been made recently on the project, but a large chunk of work remains on both the technical and the communications side.

The IT organization absorbed responsibility for two technologies in the last year; access control system and cable television. Cable TV was brought in house with a change in providers and a shift to in-house maintenance resulting in a reduction in expenditures of $70,000 annually. All dormitories, most classrooms, some offices, and many locations within the library are equipped with cable TV services. Until this year Trinity held a contract with Comcast to provide and maintain its own services and cable plant. Trinity TV is now fully “owned and operated” by the Trinity IT department. In addition to the 80+ channels of News, Sports and Entertainment 12 channels are reserved for the support of language instruction and we have several other “local access” channels plus an “Emergency Announcement System” for broadcasting alerts across all 88 channels.

Responsibility for the Interflex System / Access Control was moved into the IT organization last spring. A considerable amount of time has been spent by our systems folks in upgrading the servers and software to the latest releases. Our Enterprise Application group has been instrumental in streamlining the data feeds from PeopleSoft as well as changing the workflow to minimize the number of access rules needed with primary focus on the Academic Buildings. We will be working with Facilities to continue to improve the systems as we evaluate wireless locks to replace what we affectionately refer to as our "sneakernet" where student workers walk around updating the access rules on each lock as changes occur.

The Enterprise Application Group has also completed several PeopleSoft enhancements, initially working with the Registrar's Office to provide faculty the ability to use the waitlist feature and enriching the self-service module through the implementation of the manager self-service. Just released, is a new option for students to view their student account balances through TCONLINE! Looking forward, the group will be working with the Office of Institutional Research on changes in data collection and reporting for the new race/ethnicity requirements.

Introduction of "TrinFlix" took place at the beginning of the fall semester. "TrinFlix" is the new front-end interface to the college's video streaming server, a collaborative project between the Library and IT. The functionality introduced in the first phase of the project automatically constructs individualized play lists of videos based upon the class enrollment of the student or faculty member. Stay tuned for the next phase which will release functionality for faculty, staff and students to create and manage their own playlists.

I am impressed with the thoughtfulness and the prudence in which the IT team looks for continuous improvements in streamlining our infrastructure with an eye on reducing costs. One such example is the work being done by the system administrators in consolidating servers and applications via virtualization to lower licensing fees and hardware maintenance. In addition, we have also started to take a look at identifying ways to reduce our deferred maintenance and establish standard replacement cycles for our servers, work stations and network infrastructure. Looking forward our initial focus will be replacing the oldest switches to ensure system reliability.

An issue that many campus' wrestle with is the need for increased bandwidth. Bandwidth is an expensive non-discretionary cost and the number of devices our network needs to support continues to grow each year as the students bring more computers, game consoles and mobile devices to campus. Our Network and Systems group has addressed this issue with crafting a deal with our Internet Service Provider (ISP) to inexpensively purchase additional bandwidth during the evenings. The premise is that students will schedule high bandwidth downloads for the hours between 8:00PM and 6:00AM. During this time the size of a student's bandwidth allotment will be twice what it is during daytime hours. For example, a student currently maxing out at 2.5Mbps of internet access mid-day enjoys speeds up to 5Mbps between the hours of 8PM-6AM. The attraction for the students is of course the downloading of music, books and movies (legally of

course) is now twice as fast after 8PM. The attraction for us is that it reduces the burden on our network during the principal classroom and business hours. With this arrangement we are increasing our bandwidth by 1/2 for a10% increase in costs (120Mbs during the day, and 180Mbs at night).

On the Business Continuity front, work on an alternative data center for disaster recovery is well underway in the Mathematics, Computer Science & Engineering Center (MCEC). This facility now houses several servers, SAN storage, switching gear and other components needed for restoration of our most critical services in the event of a catastrophic failure in the LITC data center. The facility includes UPS, generator-backed power and alternate internet access.

There are a lot of great things that are happening in the IT organization, one example is the work being done with Trinity Faculty member, Jack Dougherty, Associate Professor of Education Studies. Jack recently notified us of an article that was published on the collaborative work that was done several years ago on the SmartChoices project in the current issue of Academic Commons, an online journal hosted by the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE) http://www.academiccommons.org/commons/essay/smartchoices-geospatial-tool . The SmartChoices Project resulted in development of a web site that provides a digital guide to public school choices in the greater Hartford area, a project that our Academic Computing group participated in. http://SmartChoices.trincoll.edu

Plans are already underway for this year's Winter Institute on Teaching with Technology (WITT), with January 19th as our tentative date. Keeping with the Center for Teaching & Learning's Millennial theme, we will have a panel of students who will speak about a "Day in the Life". The second portion of the program will consist of faculty presenting case studies, followed by a workshop and general discussion.

My first several months at Trinity have been wonderful. The campus has openly shared their expectations for great things to happen and I share their optimism. I have already begun to see a positive energy from the IT team. I have gained some insights into the strengths and opportunities of the organization and I am very excited to be a part of the Trinity Community.

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