

# **April UAF-Statewide IT Consolidation Report**

**Steve Smith, UAF CITO**

## **1 Narrative**

### ***1.1 Bethel Visit***

I had a positive series of meetings with Bethel campus staff and faculty following the April Board of Regents meeting there. The BOR meeting provided an opportunity for IT staff from both statewide and UAF to work together to prepare the technical support for the meetings.

I also met with other organizations in Bethel with whom the campus there has on-going relationships. There are opportunities to partner with the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health organization, the school district and KYUK broadcasting for both future sharing of network infrastructure costs and university program delivery.

The campus is anxious to resolve legal issues to connect to a local fiber optic network in Bethel that would facilitate some of the above partnerships. I have followed up on this with General Counsel's office.

Overall it appears the campus has made smart investments in technology for both general infrastructure and instruction from grant monies and other sources. They use a variety of technologies to deliver courses and have some excellent support staff, particularly Jerry Dominic.

They are thin on back-ups, both technically and in staff. I discussed with them the idea of rotating Fairbanks IT staff out to the campus when their single IT support person is out for vacation or training or otherwise unavailable. I think this will both provide critical back-up and better familiarize Fairbanks staff with local IT challenges that should result in better support overall. I will pursue this idea with Bernice Joseph.

### ***1.2 Feedback on Reorganization Plan***

Very little feedback has been received from other campus constituent groups, nor from other MAUs; however, I didn't not anticipate a significant reaction from other groups or individuals in the campus community. The UAF IT Council is comfortable with the draft.

We also received external review of the plan from Sally Johnstone, Executive Director of the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications.

The IT internal transition group met and worked on detail and cleaning up inconsistencies in the first draft and added in changes from any suggestions from the campus.

A second and final draft was posted to the consolidation web site at the end of the month and constituent groups across UAF as well as relevant system wide councils have been notified of this final draft for review. Notification will also be sent to the UAF campus and Statewide in general to give any faculty, staff or student an opportunity to comment. Various meetings will also be held with faculty senate, staff alliance and other constituent groups to bring them up to date, answer questions and invite feedback.

By mid-May the second draft will be revised as necessary and turned into a final plan, kept in draft since we anticipate as the full implementation moves forward, we will find areas to modify. Specific transition teams will then be assigned the task of the detail work of integration with a goal of having that plan ready to go with the start of the new fiscal year.

Work will now begin in earnest to fill the top management tier in the consolidated organization. I anticipate these will all be new positions. I will sit down with UAF and Statewide HR to make sure we do the personnel processes as uniformly as possible. We have used the consolidation of administrative support as the forerunner for this process.

The internal Review and remediation of critical systems process progressed on schedule and by the end of April there had been internal review of all the reports and the revised reports were distributed for external review. All managers were informed year end purchases should reflect the areas identified in this exercise needing immediate attention. The process has been as important as the final results as it has brought statewide and UAF staff together to discuss the results.

### ***1.3 Telephone Operator Services***

An incident occurred where erroneous information was provided to a community member who called telephone information. The community member was Jeff Cook and he was told Wendy Redman does not work at the university. UAF telephone operations are provided by Wood Center. Telephone Utilities, part of the consolidated IT operations, provides some of the funding for this operation but no direct oversight. It turned out part of the problem in the Jeff Cook call is that the call was routed to the Wood Center front desk and a student employee who had no computer to check online directory information.

Investigating this revealed to me some procedural issues that may warrant review. Apparently there is a staff person in the back Wood Center offices who handles UAF operator duties during the day. Evenings and week ends the operator calls ring out at the Wood Center front desk, normally staffed by student employees. I was informed Wood Center was not planning to have any operator assistance this summer on week ends, allowing voice mail menus to be the only recourse for callers looking for UAF information. Summer Sessions, which is staffed on week ends in the summer has apparently volunteered to handle those week end information calls. Finally, it appears there is no data on calls being maintained (total calls by day and time, nature of calls by subject, etc).

It may be that the volume and nature of UAF information calls is not great enough to warrant more attention. However, considering that an information call to UAF may be the only interaction someone may have with the university and, thus, inform their opinion of the university, it seems a haphazard way to provide this service.

Since Telephone Util provides some of the funding for this, I also feel it appropriate to take a more active view in this issue.

Telephone Utilizes has provided resources to place a computer at the Wood Center front counter so in future the staff there can look up information online. I've asked the phone technicians to see what data they can collect on basic volume, date and time of UAF Operator assistance calls. I've scheduled a meeting with the Wood center director to discuss this and other IT needs in Wood Center.

## ***1.4 Research Networking***

When a local carrier contacted the central network staff about terminating a circuit for use by the Geophysical Institute, that was the first time in the process of an external network connection, that the central IT network department, with responsibility for network operations, stability, security and availabilities, were aware of this. This is not an uncommon occurrence with many of the UAF research institutes. It is not uncommon for those maintaining the central telecommunications to receive a call from a carrier that a new circuit is ready and that is the first indication they have of any new connections. They don't know who the circuit is for, how it is to be used, or what service expectations there are.

There are several reasons this is not a good practice.

- It represents a potential security risk for all online university resources.
- It does not allow the university to take advantage of lower pricing by aggregating this demand and negotiating a lower price for this and future circuits.
- It may or may not be consistent with the overall university network architecture and may result in additional, unnecessary expense to accommodate needs.

## ***1.5 Psychology Program***

I met with Psychology Department Chair Jim Allen on anticipated needs for a joint Psychology PhD between UAF and UAA. We toured the facilities and discussed the nature of the program and how he envisions faculty and students interacting between campuses at UAF and UAA. The program as described will take the next step in transparent interaction at a distance. Jim and I agreed the technical needs of the program will probably require a full time technical support person housed in the department. We will need to work out whether that is a person on the staff of the psychology department or the IT department. Similar arrangements will probably be necessary at UAA.

Following the meeting IT staff were assigned to work with the department to develop technical needs specifications and budget for this anticipated new degree offering.

## ***1.6 IT Council***

The UAF IT Council has continued its work under the leadership of Wayne Marr, stepping in to chair when John Lehman took leave for extended foreign travel. The council provided excellent feedback on the draft reorganization plan and spent the rest of April working on an IT priorities list. Communication with the council remains excellent.

## **2 Follow-Ups**

### ***2.1 Telephone Billing***

The vacant billing clerk position was hired and was trained on the billing process for the March telephone bills. Telephone billing is now current. April telephone bills should be out by the middle of May. We've dug out of the hole. Now we will begin a complete review of the billing process to re-engineer for long term efficiencies.

### ***2.2 Consolidation Director***

First, I reassigned one staff member - Lori Merdes who was Manager of Help Desk and Training at Statewide - to handle consolidation coordination and report directly to me. This provides much needed attention to detail and communications. Her reassignment lasts through the end of the fiscal year. She is being paid out of Statewide funds.

At the same time, discussions continued with Glenn Wilde, current University of Idaho CIO, to work as consolidation director. He officially retires from Idaho at the end of the fiscal year. He is negotiating some details on his retirement but I believe he can work for us on a consulting basis. We are making enough progress that I think this will work out better for us now. We won't have to deal with a hire or benefits. We can manage his time to get exactly what we need. I believe he remains the best person to do this work. He has a professional career of experience in higher ed and IT so knows both the internal working of a research university as well as technology management. As a retired CIO his recommendations and decisions will not be suspect of someone trying to create a position for himself.

I hope to get a contract in place in May so he can begin some work for us by June.

### ***2.3 Review & Remediation of Critical Systems***

The department review and remediation work was turned in at the beginning of the month. The UAF reports were given to Statewide departments for review and comment and the Statewide reports given to UAF departments for same. This provided internal review, an opportunity for statewide and UAF departments to further familiarize themselves with one another, and provided an opportunity for additional interaction between departments. Each department was then given an opportunity to amend their report based on this feedback. The amended reports are now being reviewed externally and final reports should be done by mid- May.

Based on areas identified as single points of failure, year end purchases are being made with those priorities in mind.

## **3 Meetings**

- 4/1 - Transition Team Meeting
- 4/5 - Mtg w/SFOS Denis Weisenberg
- 4/8 - Conf Call w/Sally Johnstone/Merdes
- 4/11 - Mtg w/President & Chancellor
- 4/15 - Mtgs @ Bethel
- 4/22 - Transition Team Meeting
- 4/27 - UAF IT Council
- 4/28 - Mtg w/ Psychology Jim Allen

## **4 Recommendations**

### ***4.1 Telephone Operator***

Review the entire process for handling UAF operator assistance calls and begin collecting data on call traffic. Based on the review, it may be advisable to re-engineer this process.

### ***4.2 IT Priorities***

Use the IT priorities list developed by the UAF IT Council to determine which areas to focus on first in the transition process. Publish these priorities across the campus and feedback should be used to amend them as needed. The priorities should be discussed in Chancellor's Cabinet with the CITO with some emphasis on resource implications.

### ***4.3 MIT Industrial Liaison Program***

Share the format of this program with Wayne Marr and explore possibilities for adapting this for UAF. Share with a broader audience if it seems appropriate to pursue.

### ***4.4 CRA Campus Support***

Get resolution on the local fiber connection in Bethel from General Counsel's Office. Explore with Bernice Joseph options for back-up of local campus support with Fairbanks campus resources.

## ***4.5 Research Network Circuits***

**Develop draft procedures for review by the UAF IT Council that will provide better coordination and consolidation of multiple external circuits needed for UAF research. I anticipate these will not move forward without some spirited discussion.**