IT Governance Proposal
Consultation Report and Recommendations

Report to the Information Services Committee (ISC)

January 2007

1. Background

Over the course of the Fall 2006 semester a consultation team engaged key groups and committees about the IT Governance Proposal that was reviewed by ISC. The group consisted of:

- Michael Ridley, Chief Information Officer
- Vicki Hodgkinson, University Secretary (representative of the President’s Executive Council)
- Peter Conlon, Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, OVC (representative of the Information Services Committee)
- Dave Wilson, Manager of Information Systems, Office of Open Learning (representative of the Information Services Committee)

In order to involve as many faculty, students and staff as possible, an invitation to participate in the consultations was distributed widely. Arising from this, meetings were held with the following groups:

- Library Council
- CCS Management Committee
- Office of Open Learning
- Teaching Support Services
- Senate Committee on University Planning (SCUP)
- IT Student Advisory Committee (ITSAC)
- CME Dean’s Council
- Senate
- IT Special Interest Group (ITSIG)

Each group was provided, in advance, with the IT Governance Proposal and was given a short introductory presentation. Not all consultation group members were able to attend each session. However, at a minimum, two members attended each consultation.

In addition to these in-person discussions, the Proposal was distributed to VPAC and VPAT for comment and feedback. It was also posted on the websites of the CIO and ISC.

2. General Observations

The consultation process allowed for input from a wide variety of groups with significantly different interests, responsibilities and obligations. Given this diversity it was
gratifying to receive very positive reaction to the idea of more effective IT governance and to the proposal in particular.

3. Specific Comments and Feedback

The following comments are not attributed to any particular group or individual.

- many groups expressed concern initially that this decision making process would create a bureaucracy that will be a barrier to timely action. In each case where this arose the consultation group was able to explain and demonstrate that this was not the intent of the process nor was it how it would operate in practice. Groups were reassured but this does speak to a need to augment the description of the process to reflect this.

- the consultations with Senate (SCUP and the full Senate membership) highlighted the special use of the word “governance” in a university setting. To avoid confusion with the overarching process of university governance it was recommended that the IT governance process be referred to as the “IT Decision-Making Framework.”

- the importance of open, transparent and interactive communication and feedback processes was raised by many groups. These processes need to be conducted in a timely manner and clearly defined to ensure that groups consulted are aware of decisions and the rationale for those decisions. Similarly, it was noted that information interchange around IT issues was a key benefit from the decision-making framework.

- the proposed IT Portfolio Management Office (PMO) was the focus of many of the discussions. Groups requested more information about its role and mandate. This additional information was received very positively. The PMO was seen as a key vehicle to support awareness, communication and community building. It would provide a forum for the university to seek common solutions and to act as a guide through the IT decision-making process. Silos around IT support and decision-making were identified as both common and problematic.

- at both SCUP and Senate the issue of IT in support of research was raised. It was not clear from the proposal that this application of IT would be adequately considered in the model. Based on this feedback, the framework needs to more fully articulate this role taking into account some unique characteristics of IT related to the research environment (e.g. the role of funding agencies and collaborative initiatives with other universities).

- a challenging comment from one group was for a working definition of “information technology.” What is IT? What types of things or services are included under this proposal and what would be excluded? Given the nature of IT and its expansion into new areas this is proving to be an important but difficult issue. However, it will need to clarified to ensure the decision-making group are clear about their mandates and accountabilities.
• some groups asked about how this process will be approved and by whom. Since this is a University operational policy it will ultimately be approved by the President.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the feedback received it is apparent that the IT Governance Proposal was widely encouraged and accepted. As a result, while some modifications and clarifications are required, it is recommended that the IT decision making framework defined in the proposal be operationalized.

The following two areas required specific actions:

1. A working definition of “information technology” will be articulated as the committee mandates are formalized. When the decision making framework is fully enable the Executive IT Subcommittee of the President’s Executive Committee (PEC) will be asked to review this definition and clarify as needed.

2. The process for IT decision making involving the research enterprise needs to be more clearly articulated. The mandates and memberships of the key committees (e.g. ISC, architecture and infrastructure) will be drafted to ensure the voices of all aspects of IT involved (e.g. academic, administrative, research and service).

In order to sustain the momentum towards the implementation of the IT decision making framework, it is recommended that the existing consultation team continue and that it focus its efforts on the following next steps:

• prepare the IT decision making framework as a University policy to be reviewed by PEC and approved by the President
• create mandates and memberships for the following new committees:
  1. the Executive IT Subcommittee of the President’s Executive Committee (articulating IT principles and approving IT investments)
  2. the IT Architecture Committee (defining technical standards and technology choices)
  3. the IT Infrastructure Committee (defining campus wide, shared IT services, centrally coordinated)
• clarify and re-assert the roles of ISC, IT SIG, VPAC and others who are identified as key participants in the decision-making framework.
• define and establish the IT Portfolio Management Office.

The overarching objective is to have the new IT decision-making framework effective by April 2007.