

# Key Questions for Faculty

## IT Tactical Plan for the next 3-5 years

from Dr. Jerry DeSanto, VP for Planning and CIO

In collaboration with CTLE and IR, TAG distributed a survey to all faculty, both full- and part-time, soliciting responses to the questions posed by Jerry DeSanto to TAG in regards to the IT Tactical Plan. The questions were slightly modified from those originally posed in order to more appropriately appeal to the broad faculty audience. This document represents a summary of the answers received.

There were only 19 respondents, but the majority were thoughtful and earnest. The paucity of responses is likely due to the survey format: 4 open-ended questions, followed by two short demographic questions. Thus, there was significant intent necessary to answer any of the questions, and we were pleased with the response.

Only one part-time faculty responded. There were 11 responses from within the College of Arts and Sciences, one from the Kania School of Management, and seven from the Panuska College of Professional Studies.

In what follows, TAG, in collaboration with IR, compiled and condensed the responses into a single answer, specifically geared toward informing the IT Tactical Plan. The raw data is available upon request.

- **How can IT better support faculty teaching and research?**

*We break up this response into three sections: teaching, research, and general comments.*

*Teaching:*

The quality and functionality of classroom computers and mediation continues to be a concern for a number of faculty. A near majority of responses (9 of 19) comment that classroom equipment is unsatisfactory, slow, or incomplete. Some respondents mention long boot-times classroom computers, where even a few minutes is important given the ten to fifteen minute time interval (excluding travel time) between classes. While this may certainly be relegated to individual cases, the responses suggest an investment in classroom mediation, upkeep, and support.

Technology can be very beneficial in the classroom, but if faculty are to rely upon it, they need to be convinced that it is reliable. An effort through the Help Desk to assure rapid response, as well as ease of reporting a problem during the moments before class, may help ameliorate such faculty concerns.

*Research:*

For the comments that mentioned a research need, a surprising number (three out of four) mentioned the need for remote access to university resources. Many faculty now work on research projects from a home office and would like access to, at a minimum, software available to them on the university network. Direct access to their office computer would be preferred. Cloud solutions are occasionally a solution to this problem, but it should be noted that some responses indicated that local data storage is, at times, necessary.

*General Comments:*

A number of respondents were unhappy with the level of support given by the Technology Support Center. In terms of the IT Tactical Plan, and how one may use these comments to help instruct future IT decisions, we note that many of the frustrations result from insufficient communication between the Help Desk and the Faculty making the report. The survey suggests an investigation of the ticket process, as well as the flow of information and the transparency of the process to both sides, may be needed. Navigation of the ticket submission process is also confusing; it may be worth focusing on streamlining the process in order to encourage more faculty to report the problems they encounter, especially in the classroom.

- **How do you see the classroom experience changing over the next several years, and how can IT assist in this evolution?**

The majority of responses here target the inclusion of technology within the classroom experience. Beyond simply smartboards or mediated classrooms, the “classroom” experience is now extending far beyond four walls. This can extend in two separate directions: CyberSpace or RealSpace.

By CyberSpace, we mean the hybridization of coursework. Providing learning experiences both in the classroom and online. Sometimes termed “blended learning” or “hybrid classes”, these are brick-and-mortar courses that often include components commonly seen in distance-learning or online courses. Such courses need more online resources than are available in the current LMS. Indeed, as smartphones and tablets (which are all but minimally compatible with the current LMS) become commonplace they may become key platforms for such an experience.

By RealSpace, we mean the inclusion of synchronous long-distance communication as a significant course component. Some faculty already use tools such as Skype to conduct interviews with prominent professionals in their field during class. With the potential of satellite campuses on the horizon (as mentioned in the final question), such tools take on an increasing importance.

Many faculty classrooms in the near future will blend the current brick-and-mortar format with distance and online learning, and it is important for the University of Scranton to welcome and facilitate the use of these technologies.

- **What new academic programs do you see developing over the next five years, and how can IT help?**

Respondents mentioned the planned expansion of programs that require digital production, including the composition of large multimedia projects. Such projects (student homework) may be large audio or video files that can easily reach 500MB. Thus, faculty will need a platform where students and faculty can store, upload, and retrieve large files of this sort.

- **The President has stated intentions toward a globalized University; how do faculty expect this to impact web-based education, study abroad, and the potential for satellite campuses?**

The trend towards globalization and expansion of our brick-and-mortar campus is often met with significant resistance from our faculty. That being said, if we were to embrace such ideas, respondents mentioned a number of requirements to successfully implement such a concept. The primary among them is communication. Respondents feel that a robust and reliable audio/video connection would be key. This will be more complicated given the long distance communication, and would likely require significant assistance, training, and support from IT.