

Information Technology Support Services Review

Primary Services

The Information Technology (IT) Department of Austin Community College focuses on technology infrastructure, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), technology planning, application development, support and system services, institutional records, and information security. The department provides a secure data center at ACC's Service Center that houses over 140 physical and virtualized servers with redundant A/C, electrical power, and offsite backup and storage. IT maintains the 10-gigabit backbone inter- and intra-campus networks including data, IP-based voice, and wireless services. IT provides desktop and laptop support as well as file and print services for the majority of ACC faculty and staff. IT develops and supports over 35 in-house applications and over 30 third-party applications. The department provides college-wide Help Desk support, responding to over 530,000 customer requests (email and telephone) annually, and partners with Financial Aid and Admissions & Records to answer tier-2 calls.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Knowledgeable employees
- Do high level of work with very limited resources
- Strong Institutional knowledge of ACC
- Well-documented processes and procedures
- Good customer service
- Quick response time

Weaknesses

- Lack of sufficient resources/funds/staff
- Lack of ownership on some processes
- Lack of communication/siloed information
- Lack of security

Opportunities

- Align resources to meet needs
- Improve workflow
- Fully implement change management
- Adopt business process improvement
- Encourage administration buy-in for technological solutions

Threats

- Budget not meeting infrastructure needs
- Poor disaster recovery capability
- Increasingly technical users put more demands on technology
- Unfunded legislative mandates
- New project assignments without commensurate time/resources to complete competently

Planned Improvements and Analysis

The primary challenge that must be met by the Information technology Department will be to maintain a stable operational environment for ACC while at the same time incorporating and adapting to rapid technological change. The college faces new opportunities in 2011 that were barely conceivable just 5 years ago. For example, iPads and other mobile devices are not just a passing fad, they have made fundamental changes to the way students, faculty, and staff utilize information resources. Similarly, “cloud” computing has shifted the balance of power back toward centralized, aggregated data services hosted, in some cases, by completely separate third-parties. To respond to these and other challenges, IT has three primary areas of focus for planning in the next five years.

Analyze Core Systems

ACC often customizes systems to match current (and possibly outdated) workflows instead of adhering to industry standards. As an institution, we need to examine the college’s processes and operations and compare them with available ERPs and other core systems. We need to look at best practices followed by other, similar institutions and adopt a system, or set of systems, most closely aligned to ACC’s requirements. Carefully choosing a long-term direction will allow ACC to pursue a streamlined, unified platform, rather than constantly customizing and rewriting applications for each department. At the same time, the college needs to balance the need for a unified system with the danger of locking in with a particular vendor or technology (e.g. our current dependence on a Unidata database, or The University of Texas architecture based on an in-house ERP constructed using Natural). The college should adopt a toolset flexible enough that we do not have to constantly go out to find third-party providers for solutions to narrow problems. Instead, we should innovate with what we have, customize only where necessary, and write code when there is no other choice.

Plan Infrastructure for the Long Term

The College's investment in technology has not been matched by an ongoing commitment to maintaining that technology; rather it has been funded in fits and starts as failures occur. ACC needs to look at each technological purchase in light of a long-term strategy to support and replace that technology as systems age and become outdated.

A Unified Security Milieu

ACC currently has a patchwork of security and authentication systems quilted together from a variety of operating systems, applications, and departmental controls. A clearly-thought-out

security structure for federated identity management across all college systems needs to be developed and maintained in such a way that it provides safety for the college's data, but appropriate compartmentalization and control for departments.

Conclusion

Information Technology, much like electricity or plumbing, is often viewed as a utility, noticeable only when it is not working. But as with other utilities, technology must be maintained and routinely evaluated to ensure that it is, and will continue to, meet the institution's needs. If IT can meet the challenges of the three goals laid out above, then the department can provide an improved level of service to faculty, staff, and students who need to access the college's information systems.