

# College of Communication Information Technology Vision Plan

2002-2003

## Introduction

The College of Communication sees information technology as a means to enrich the educational experience and invigorate emerging areas of scholarly research and education. IT is also a mixture of tools that can improve the nature and efficiency of our business. As such, considerable investments are made in support of instructional technology initiatives and solutions to ease daily operations.

Information Technology in the College is no longer a special area, limited to certain disciplines. Rather, it enhances every area of our curriculum. Classrooms, computer facilities and even our hallways are enhanced to provide a pervasive technology presence. We provide state-of-the-art networks, instructional computer labs, special-purpose equipment, media production facilities, and technology rich classrooms. We have a professional staff to support and maintain these facilities and services. We provide our faculty with direct support for developing Instructional Technologies in their coursework. These efforts highlight our commitment to our students and their success as Communication graduates.

## Funding

The College of Communication received \$335,276 from the University-wide Information Technology Advisory Committee fee. We also generate approximately \$1.1 million from the College's Information Technology Fee (ITF). Other instruction-related projects, most of which involve a great deal of IT resources, are funded through a \$1.1 million Communication Learning Equipment Fee (CLEF).

The bulk of ITAC fee is spent to operate the Communication Computer Center (<http://www.utexas.edu/computer/labs/ccc/>), a joint-use facility open to Communication majors during traditional business hours, and to all registered University students after hours. Management of the facility is provided by Instructional Technology Services, at a cost of approximately \$140,000. ITAC funding support for this facility remains our primary concern.

We have also used ITAC monies to fund a building-wide Wireless Area Network (WAN) using the University's Public Access Network service. Already, over 50 laptops are used daily in "mobile computer lab" scenarios, allowing greater flexibility in realtime collaboration. Information is found at <http://communication.utexas.edu/wireless/>.

Other ITAC-funded upgrades include enhancements to our building network, upgrades to classrooms and our auditorium, and licensing of operating systems and application software used throughout our facilities. We have also improved our data processing abilities by enhancing servers that provide day-to-day operational capability.

The principal use of the ITF remains professional and temporary staff. We employ 16.5 FTEs in IT-related positions, with duties ranging from instructional media production to audiovisual systems support to computer facility and faculty/staff systems support. Instructional Technology support falls

mostly in three areas. The Technology Team Help Desk provides network and systems support for student labs, faculty and staff. The Instructional Design Group assists faculty in the development of instructional media. The Media Services unit provides assistance for classrooms and audiovisual equipment, as well as providing duplicating and media archiving, playback and checkout. We also employ professionals to support highly-specific technical areas, such as our digital audio and video editing facilities. Our mission statement places student needs above all else, and our support priorities reflect this.

For 2002-2003, we have requested an increase in the CLEF. It is likely to bring approximately \$1.45 million. We do not anticipate capital expenditures beyond levels seen in 2001-2002. The additional monies will go towards increasing our professional staff and their resources, particularly as our support needs become more specialized and complex. We also anticipate funding partnership arrangements with other technology providers on campus.

This year, CLEF expenditures provided everything from digital cameras and editing suites for our Radio/TV/Film sequences to laptop computers for Communication Studies courses. This fund provides for department-specific needs and is distributed based on competitive project proposals. The next round of proposals will begin in February and awarded before the end of the Spring semester.

## **Our Vision and Current Status**

Much of our technology vision depends upon the facilities and services we provide. These are described below, and present URLs for additional detail.

### **Instructional Computer Labs**

The College supports over 1000 networked computer systems, ranging from faculty and staff workstations to computer lab stations to those providing special-purpose services such as video streaming or file storage. Our facilities include general purpose instructional computer labs, course-specific computer labs, computer classrooms, and technology classrooms and auditoriums. Information about our lab facilities can be found at [http://communication.utexas.edu/techteam/tech\\_labs.html](http://communication.utexas.edu/techteam/tech_labs.html).

### **Technology Auditorium and Classrooms**

We continue to spend considerable money and effort on enhancing our classrooms, meeting rooms and auditorium. These currently employ a wide range of audio and video reproduction equipment, from LCD projectors to multi-channel audio processors. Each room is designed to provide almost everything an instructor would need for a presentation. Our classrooms and meeting rooms are described at [http://communication.utexas.edu/room\\_resv/index.html](http://communication.utexas.edu/room_resv/index.html).

We also maintain a standards-compliant Distance Learning Facility. This is connected to the UT System Video Network, but can also participate in point-to-point conferences via ISDN or H.323 over TCP/IP. Additional information about the facility is found at [http://communication.utexas.edu/room\\_resv/distance\\_ed\\_room.html](http://communication.utexas.edu/room_resv/distance_ed_room.html).

This year, we will request funds to replace projection equipment purchased five years ago and upgrade each classroom, studio and seminar/meeting room in the CMA and CMB buildings. This will bring them in line with standards around campus, including control systems, video playback and computer interfacing. *See attached Project Requests (\$527,210).*

## **Instructional Design**

While our faculty are pioneers in the use of technology in their academic work, they often lack the skills to produce new and inviting content or programmatic support for their work. As such, we provide a staff to help develop their instructional media. The Instructional Design Group currently consists of 4.5 FTEs and various student assistants. They work closely with other units on campus, including the Measurement Evaluation Center and the Center for Instructional Technology. More information is found at <http://idg.cocomm.utexas.edu/>.

## **Networking**

The College maintains a network of nearly 1000 hosts, spanning four buildings. We work closely with the University's Telecommunication and Internet Services unit (<http://www.tis.utexas.edu/>) to ensure minimal downtime and optimal service. We are scheduled to replace our entire CMA/CMB network in March 2002, at a cost of nearly \$200,000. This is primarily to eliminate soon-to-be discontinued components, so we can avoid a situation in which there are no spare parts on campus. However, we can also expect improvements in bandwidth and availability.

## **Servers and Related Systems**

We maintain a number of file servers, as well as systems that provide special purposes. Among these include systems for automated radio/TV production and scripting, video streaming servers and collaboration tools ("groupware"). This year, we replaced a number of aging, small capacity servers with high-density units that provide simplified administration and enormous capacity. This, combined with our network upgrade, should provide increased availability and faster access, primarily for our instructional computer labs.

## **Media Services**

In addition to the classroom facilities mentioned above, we maintain a large inventory of checkout equipment, available through our Instructional Media Center. Items range from camcorders to computer/LCD projector bundles. We also maintain an audio/video playback room, a library of instructional materials and audio/video duplication services. More information is found at <http://communication.utexas.edu/IMC/>. This year, we plan to offer web-based reservation and browsing capability of our entire inventory.

## **Partnerships and Initiatives**

The College has been working together with other units at the University in a number of areas. Our goal is to reduce duplication of effort with regards to Information Technology, and increase the IT resources available to our faculty, staff and students. The following is an incomplete list of the collaborative initiatives we are undertaking:

- **"First Response" Help Desk** – We will work with Information Technology Services to provide a customized help desk phone number and email address. Routine questions should be handled by ITS staff, then escalated to our professional staff as needed. This will reduce our internal staffing requirements, as well as provide faster response times for our clients.
- **Centralized System Administration** – We rely on campus-wide resources, such as courseware delivery and communication (email, messaging, etc.) systems. We will also seek to outsource

administration duties for our special-purpose systems, such as collaboration tools and digital asset management server. We support ITS initiatives to deploy standards-based Enterprise-class Directory Services solutions to facilitate this.

- **Intercollegiate Audio/Video Production Network** – We hope to build a campus-wide network dedicated to high-speed connection of digital A/V production facilities on campus. This will allow students who participate in intercollegiate programs to easily migrate between facilities. It will also encourage increased interdepartmental collaboration at the curriculum level.

We are requesting funds to implement the first connections between Communication, the College of Fine Arts and the TACC Visualization Lab in the ACES Building. *See attached Project Requests (\$260,000).*

- **Digital Asset Management System** – We have been investing in a digital asset management service internally for almost two years. We are working with ITS, the Texas Advanced Computing Center and the CIT to scale this to support the entire University. As additional Colleges and Centers join the initiative, the number and variety of digital assets made available for instructional purposes will explode. Once the content is available, it will be simple to add this media to any number of instructional delivery methods, from web sites to CD-ROMs.

A campus-wide working group has been established to discuss issues related to the Digital Archive, from rights management to establishing efficient production workflows.

- **Campus Streaming Service** – Working with ITS and Liberal Arts, we have developed a strategy for providing streaming video capability to the entire University. The service will support the delivery of thousands of hours of instructional media, at little to no cost to each department. Funding has been procured through grants such as the Telecommunication Infrastructure Fund. The College has also invested heavily in the equipment and architecture. ITS will maintain the service, with faculty and IT staff support possibly provided through the CIT. The TACC is also a critical partner in providing the multi-terabyte storage systems required for this service.

In support of this and the Digital Asset Management System initiative, we are requesting funds to augment the storage system at TACC's PRC facility. *See attached Project Requests and TACC Storage Plan (\$64,000).*

- **Student Production and Classroom Experience Archive** – We are developing techniques and resources aimed at preserving student works in digital form. These range from radio and television programs produced in Broadcast Journalism to creative content produced in Advertising. In addition, we will augment our classroom facilities to enable every classroom experience (lectures, student presentations and symposia) to be captured and made available in digital format for later review or scholarly use. This will integrate directly with the Campus Streaming Service and Digital Asset Management System above.

We are requesting funds to implement a solution for six CMA classrooms. *See attached Project Requests (\$81,780).*

- **Visualization Lab Partnership** – We are working with the TACC Visualization Lab to provide advanced 3D rendering and animation support for our Convergent Media program in RTF. They will provide highly technical support for the advanced systems made available to our students and faculty. These range from high-end visualization computers to “render farms” on multi-server clusters. In

addition, our RTF production students will help produce videos for various research projects also supported by the TACC as part of their coursework. Our students will have access to their advanced production resources, while TACC clients will receive specialized video production help they may not otherwise have access to.

## **Conclusion**

The College of Communication will spend considerable resources towards providing a rich educational experience. Information Technology resources will include staff support, equipment and services designed to improve every aspect of our curriculum.

A primary focus of this year's IT initiatives is collaboration between our College and the numerous technology providers on campus, as well as the other Colleges and Departments. In order to ensure our success, we must come to expect a certain level of investment in University infrastructure. Funding of campus network infrastructure and Internet access should be a top priority, and considered as necessary to our mission as water or electricity. Funds raised through centralized fees and income should be dedicated to this need.

The IT community at the University should be regarded as an enterprise service provider. Funding should therefore reflect this. Increasing staffing levels and benefits will ensure the enormous amount of money spent on IT equipment and services will not be wasted. As we add more resources, we must also add staff. We must also seek to improve the skills and abilities of IT staff, so training and certification plans must be developed. Our students, faculty and staff deserve the best IT environment we can provide.

Finally, new IT initiatives should be developed at the College level. These can be funded through ITAC awards that target initiatives, rather than specific departments. Such a change could encourage collaboration between departments. Once a service or technology has been developed to a level that it should scale to a campus level or greater, it should be migrated to a central provider for maintenance and administration. The University can then work towards providing continued availability through grants and central budgets.

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*ITAC Project Funding Requests attached*