Overview

As one of the many restructuring efforts necessitated by the current economic crisis, the Division of Social Sciences (DSS) is consolidating information technology staff and services from individual departments into a single service unit that will provide services to all departments within the division. This document seeks to answer some common questions from DSS faculty and administrative staff regarding the IT service unit.

Q: How will the new IT service unit be structured?
A: The IT service unit will report to the DSS Dean's Office.

A divisional technology committee composed of faculty, administrative staff, and other departmental constituents will be appointed by the Dean to provide oversight and steering for the IT service unit. The service unit will be headed by a manager, and the IT staff will be separated into three groups, and each group will have a lead who will report to the service unit manager. The leads will also be active members of their teams.

**Desktop Support:** This group will be dedicated to desktop support and help desk functions (i.e., front-line technical support). IT staff members in this group will be physically located in or near to departments, though they will also be working as a distributed team. This team will be the primary point of contact with the service unit for most routine business. Each team member will be paired with one or more student staff members. By specializing in desktop support and locating team members in departments, the goal is to improve the level and availability of technology support to everyone in the division.

**Systems Administration:** This group will be responsible for managing the servers and services for the division. Server hardware will be migrated from departments into better-equipped server rooms that have adequate air conditioning, power backup, and environmental monitoring. Team members will be located near those server rooms. Initially, this team will be working to consolidate the 150+ servers currently used in the division using virtualization and other technologies. Having a team specialized in systems administration will ensure that computing services run smoothly (less down-time) and provide the broadest range of functionality (higher quality).

**Software Development:** This group will be dedicated to developing software in support of administrative, teaching and research needs of departments. While this group is separate from the college development group, there are many opportunities for collaboration between the two. This team will work closely with the divisional technology committee to find the best ways to address faculty and staff administrative workload. A dedicated development team will allow the division to use our technology resources to address workload and business process issues strategically and systematically.

Q: What will happen to the existing IT staff members?

A: The dean’s office will work closely with central Human Resources to determine the best process. The division’s goal is to provide IT staff with opportunities for career growth. Those opportunities can be difficult to accomplish in a department-centric model.

Q: When will these changes happen?

A: As with the clustering of departments into units and the creation of the PPS service unit, the target for beginning the process is July 1, 2010. Given the complexity of the IT service unit, hiring of the service unit manager and appointment of the divisional technology committee will begin immediately. The goal is to have the IT staff reorganized into the new
service unit and services running at acceptable levels in time for the start of Fall Quarter 2010.

**Q:** What can I expect in terms of desktop support? Who will I call when I need help? How quickly can I expect help?

**A:** The intention in locating the desktop support personnel in or close to departments is to ensure that everyone in the division has rapid and efficient access to technology support services. The desktop support staff will be relieved from other job duties (systems administration, software development, etc.) allowing them to focus on providing support. Since the desktop support staff will be working as a distributed team, there will be other support staff ready to step in when the "local" person is not available. Given these factors, you can expect that technology support will be more readily available from the IT service unit.

The desktop support group will also be expanding the use of remote support technologies to enable remote software installation and upgrades, remote computer control for support, and remote monitoring and troubleshooting. These technologies will allow the desktop support staff to assist people working from home or working from other locations to which support personnel do not have rapid access.

**Q:** Will the support staff know enough about my needs to help me effectively?

**A:** During the transition to the service unit, IT staff who will be assuming desktop support duties will "job shadow" departmental IT staff with the intention of meeting each department's people and learning about their needs. One of the first tasks for the IT service unit will be to establish a shared helpdesk tool and other collaboration tools to enable the desktop support group to work as a distributed team, which means that when the local support person is unavailable, the other desktop support personnel will have ready access to the case history.

**Q:** Will the IT service unit limit my choices with regard to platform (e.g., Windows, Macintosh, Linux, etc.) or software?

**A:** No, there is no intention to limit choices with regard to platform or software. In fact, the wider range of available IT personnel expertise will enable a wider set of choices. For example, if your current departmental IT person doesn't have experience with Linux or Macintosh, someone else in the new service unit will have such experience.

There are two important caveats with regard to choice:

1. One goal in the reorganization is to reduce the number of servers maintained by the division. For instance, almost every DSS department is currently running one or more mail
servers. The service unit will look for opportunities to migrate to the best of the current services, so some services will be discontinued. However, there is recognition that the division is diverse and that one size does not fit all, so the IT service unit will work closely with the divisional technology committee and departmental personnel to ensure that needs are being met.

2. Leveraging the purchasing power of the division to obtain deeper discounts when purchasing computers and software licenses may provide financial incentives to departments and faculty members to choose one platform (or software package) over another. While the choices will remain with departments and faculty members, these financial incentives may influence the ultimate decisions.

**Q:** What if the service unit doesn’t meet my needs or the needs of my department?

**A:** By pooling a wider range of IT staff expertise and allowing IT staff to specialize, the hope is to provide better and faster technology support than is possible in a department-based IT support model. However, problems can and will happen. The service unit model will provide a clear escalation path to raise an issue to immediate attention (first to the team lead, then to the IT manager). Beyond that, a primary function of the divisional technology committee is to ensure that individual and departmental needs are met. Any issues that are not quickly addressed through the escalation process should be raised with the committee.

**Q:** How will the IT service unit save money?

**A:** Two primary goals of the service unit are to improve operational efficiency and to save money. Both of these goals is addressed in many ways, some of which include:

- Consolidating IT services across the division reduces duplication of equipment and software licenses. For instance, each department currently maintains many (between 10 and 30, more than 150 across the division) servers to provide a variety of computing services (websites, email, basic network services, software update services, etc.) Many of these servers are underutilized, so consolidation will allow the division to reduce the number of servers by half.
- Allowing the IT staff to specialize and share information and resources across departments will significantly reduce duplication of effort. For instance, each of the three teams will be responsible for only parts of a single annual CyberSafety report, rather than each department submitting a separate complete report.
- The service unit will be able to leverage the purchasing power of the entire division to obtain deeper discounts on computer hardware and software licenses.
- The overhead for running a recharge unit is significant, and the cost recovery is not enough to justify the overhead for most departments. The IT service unit will be able to run a single recharge unit for the entire division with the goal of recovering at least some IT support costs from grant funds and other sources.