Chapter IV

Reorganizing Information Technology Services in an Academic Environment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Primarily due to ongoing changes in available technology and financial constraints at a four-year, private university, the Information Technology Department has gone through several iterations of organizational restructuring over the last 10 years. The need for IT support for both the academic side of the University and the administrative side has been met by two different structures during this time. At times, the technology needs for the entire University have been supported by one common department that reports directly to the President. At other times, the support has been provided by two separate departments-the academic side reporting to the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and the administrative side reporting to the CFO. Because of advantages and disadvantages of each of these structures and turnover of the President, CFO and CAO positions, the use of these two structures has alternated several times. The most recent president has emphasized a technology-friendly and up-to-date campus as one of his primary goals. This emphasis precipitated an analysis of the existing systems with recognition of the need to keep IS strategies in line whether supported by one department or two.

BACKGROUND

Changes in upper administration and changes in technology caused the administration of Cranton University to question the present organizational structure of their information technology (IT) function. The IT function had gone through several restructuring efforts during the past ten years due to changing perceptions of the role of technology at the University.

Cranton University is a small, privately funded institution located in the downtown area of a large city. As an urban university, Cranton University has both day and evening students as well as a relatively large MBA program. The University has a reputation as being very student oriented with a mission that emphasizes excellence in teaching. Class sizes are small, averaging about 20 students per class. The student-faculty ratio is correspondingly small. As a result of the emphasis on teaching, Cranton University enjoys a nationwide reputation as being a high-quality teaching institution.

The University has approximately 3,000 students. Of these, about 1,800 are traditional undergraduates. However, most of the part-time students are older and, due to work obligations, are typically unable to take classes during the day. As a result, there are a large number of classes offered in the evenings, and there is a move under way to expand into weekend class offerings. While this provides for greater utilization of physical resources, the Academic Computing Department must provide support during these expanded hours.

The nature of the students' backgrounds also places an additional burden on Academic Computing. Being a private university, tuition at Cranton University is expensive, compared with state-supported institutions. Because of this, Cranton University has what they refer to as a "bimodal" student population. Many of the students come from quite wealthy families and typically have a fairly broad exposure to computers. There are also a large number of students who receive significant financial aid. These students are often from less financially secure families and may not have enjoyed the luxury of having access to a computer at home. Hence, the expectations from students vary greatly.

Cranton University is organized into two colleges, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Business, each of which has its own dean. In addition, there are five centers. See Figure 1 for a partial Cranton University organizational chart. Note that some functions that are not relevant to the case are omitted.

In the past, the two colleges have had their differences in their view of technology. The majority of the Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty prefer the Apple Macintosh platform, while most of the Business faculty prefer the Windows-based PC platform. Since there is little hope of reaching agreement on a single desktop platform, Academic Computing must support both.

Most employees—faculty, administrative, and staff—generally feel that Cranton University has a very friendly, collegial atmosphere. The University enjoys a relatively low turnover; many employees have been with the University for over a decade. In addition, the employees seem to enjoy each other's company socially. For example, there are informal groups that meet regularly for social activities, such as a gourmet group, a wine tasting club, and frequent golf outings.

Currently, the IT function is organized into two departments. Academic Computing is responsible for all instructional and research-related computing activities, while Administrative Computing includes all of the computing related to the administrative

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