In Re: Draft IT Strategic Plan

Dear Jim,

Thank you for providing the Academic Senate the opportunity to review and opine upon the Draft IT Strategic Plan. Upon receipt, I requested that the Council on Planning and Budget (CPB), the Committee on Library and Scholarly Communications (COLASC), and the Executive Board review the matter. Although COLASC declined to review it, CPB’s response is attached. This letter serves as the response from the Executive Board.

Both CPB and the Board endorsed the underlying philosophy and the general trajectories outlined in the plan. The Board notes that a particular merit of the plan is that it does not strive for homogeneity as the path towards efficiency; rather, it preserves individuality and creativity where needed and, along with it, the capacity for innovation.

Both the Board and CPB have some concerns about the overall effort. While recognizing that this document is designed to provide a shared vision and roadmap, we felt that resource issues should be addressed more explicitly. Some specific concerns:

1. CPB and the Board believe strongly that a strategic plan of this nature ought to contain mention, even if preliminarily, of project cost estimates and funding models. Although there is some mention of costs (page 7, for example, estimates a $100M cost associated with the replacement of Central Administrative Systems), it is critical that overall estimates be provided in order that cost-benefit analysis can be conducted.

2. The Executive Board would have liked to have seen a section dedicated to disaster recovery, operations continuation, cyber security, and the like. The plan mentions numerous times various weaknesses (e.g., page 11 figure 2, states the “Inability to recover from disaster”). But the plan does not state as one of its goals a unified, campus-wide approach to addressing this.

CPB itemized additional insights that I am attaching for your consideration. Thank you again for the opportunity to review the draft IT Strategic Plan. Please let me know if the Senate can be of further assistance.

With best regards,

Robin L. Garrell
Chair, Academic Senate

Cc: Jaime R. Balboa, CAO Academic Senate
November 11, 2009

Professor Robin Garrell
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Re: UCLA IT Strategic Plan: 2009-2018

Dear Dr. Garrell,

The Council on Planning and Budget (CPB) has reviewed and discussed the UCLA IT Strategic Plan: 2009-2018. The content of the report is mostly conceptual in nature, and CPB members endorsed the principles outlined in the document. There are several concerns, however, that emerged from the standpoint of availability of resources to implement a plan that appears very extensive and complex, in times of extreme financial fragility experienced by the university. They are described below.

(1) Project Cost: very little is provided in the report with respect to the estimated cost of the entire project. It is stated that the replacement of the Central Administrative Systems (page 7) is estimated to cost $100M. CPB was not sure about what Central Administrative Systems encompass, but it appears to be only part of the whole plan. An estimate of the cost of the whole project should be provided before a decision is made to embrace it. Furthermore, that estimate should be contrasted with the projected costs of doing nothing major.

(2) Project Financing - A: given that the IT Strategic Plan may run into several hundred million dollars, how is the project being financed? Given the nebulous future of state funding to the UC system, increasing operational expenses at the campus level, and overall shrinkage of resources, CPB believes that the source(s) of financial support for the plan should be clearly identified and secured before the project is initiated.

(3) Project Financing - B: it is unclear how costs would be allocated (if at all) to individual units across the campus based on the benefit to be received from the implementation of specific components of the plan. As an example, the establishment of a robust, user-friendly grant management system would greatly facilitate the way by which principal investigators administer their awards and would, therefore, be a desirable component of the plan; on the other hand, units that typically do not receive
research grants would be reluctant to share the cost of such a project component because they would benefit little from its implementation.

(4) Project Timetable and Prioritization: even though the document states that this is a nine-year plan, it is unclear in terms of the sequence of steps to be taken in the progressive implementation of the project and how faculty will participate in such decisions. CPB believes that faculty members should be broadly represented in the decision-making process of the entire project.

(5) IT Infrastructure in Other Universities: CPB believes that consultation with other universities that are comparable to UCLA should be conducted in order to identify effective and efficient practices in IT infrastructure before and during the implementation of the various components of the plan. Learning from the experience of other institutions in developing their IT infrastructure would allow UCLA to identify and adopt the strengths of various models, saving time and resources in the process, and avoiding mistakes that are likely to come with developing a solution from scratch.

(6) IT Project Evaluation: if the new operating model for IT is adopted in stages as planned, an external evaluation should be conducted each year to assess IT project progress measured against its stated strategies, goals, initiatives and implementation plan (pages 45-53), as well as its planned versus actual costs and timetable - clarified in a revision similar to that suggested in our items 1-4 above. This evaluation should be conducted by an independent outside team with appropriate evaluation experience.

Sincerely,

Paulo Camargo
Chair, UCLA Council on Planning and Budget

cc: Jaime Balboa, Chief Administrative Officer, Academic Senate
    Michael Goldstein, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
    Ann Karagozian, Vice Chair, Academic Senate
    Linda Mohr, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Academic Senate
    Council on Planning and Budget Members