Minutes

General Technology Committee

October 25th, 2017

RPL 325

In attendance: Dr. Phillip Bridgmon, Ken Wester, Brent Etzel, Dr. Michael Davis, Karen Riddell, Steve Milligan, Wyatt Watson, Carol Adkison, Billy Reeder, Donna Rankin, Dr. Loretta Cochran, Dr. Christine Austin, Dr. Mary Gunter, Bruce Sikes, and Beth Gray

Absent: Clay Moore

Guest: Alex Manly

1. Call to order and review any prior business from September 2017
   a. Minutes –Dr. Bridgmon asked for a motion to approve or any edits needed on the minutes from the September 20th meeting. Dr. Cochran wanted to clarify that the SAP mentioned at the meeting was an enterprise resource software. With that edit, the committee approved the minutes by consensus.
2. Recommendation on Blackboard Upgrade – Dr. Bridgmon asked Alex Manly to speak to the committee regarding the Blackboard SaaS system. Mr. Manly gave the following pros and cons on the system:
   a. Pros –
      i. Improved Services
         1. Quality: Blackboard can deliver maintenance and fixes to production faster than ever, as well as enhancements and new features.
         2. Change Management: With the Continuous Deliver option, more frequent, modest releases allow for easier change management. This is versus their Flexible Deployment option that allows update releases to be applied once or twice per year.
      ii. Improved Uptime
         1. Zero-downtime updates: Thanks to the cloud environment, Blackboard can update instances without any interruption and users won't (or rather shouldn't) experience any downtime.
         2. Elasticity: The new platform allows the ability to scale in response to load.
         3. Resilience: Cloud platforms are designed to deal with hardware failure quickly and seamlessly.
      iii. Improved Server Management Experience
         1. Blackboard manages all
            a. Software Updates, Technical Settings, and System Performance Monitoring and Settings.
            b. Allows me to focus less on the tier 3 technical aspects of running the system and more on being the liaison between the users and the technology.

      iv. Disaster Recovery
1. Business continuity: via redundancy of connectivity. Blackboard is using AWS with multiple data centers to keep the system running. Without moving, our BbLearn system remains local – meaning any disruption in the Tech Networks or its feeds causes it to disappear – internally and externally.
2. Data protection: via off-site servers.
      v. Ultra Experience: The "Ultra experience" is the new design approach that improves workflow efficiencies and provides a modern, intuitive, fully responsive user interface. SaaS is required to utilize the "Ultra experience"
      vi. Cost Effective: when considered against a hardware refresh.

b. Cons –
      i. Lack of Access
1. Command-Line tools are not supported
2. Database access to the database is not supported. However, the Direct Data Access (OpenDB) option will provide a near real-time replica of the db so that pretty much negates this one.
3. Log files are only available through a GUI tool without an agreement setup to have logs shipped.
4. B2 Incompatibility: Some building blocks may not be compatible (i.e. Starfish).
5. "Zero Downtime" sales pitch does not necessarily mean no downtime according to a few colleagues. WE would want to make sure that the 99.9% Uptime SLA has accountability in the contract.

Mr. Manly said there are 223 schools currently on SaaS, 68 are scheduled for a Winter break migration and 43 are currently evaluating. All of the reviews he has gotten have been positive reviews.

Mr. Wester asked Mr. Manly if he had heard any negative comments. He said the only negative comments he had heard were in regards to the migration. Mr. Watson asked if any of our historical data would be lost. Mr. Manly said they would be able to download the data and save it in a table. The committee then discussed that the Direct Data Access element to the program was an additional cost of $12,000, but that cost had already been added in and was a part of the $68,000 cost. They also discussed what would be lost if we could not get the log files. Mr. Wester said that it would mostly be the web access history. This history is important because it can be used as evidence in some issues. The log files could still be accessed through their GUI tools, but it would be best if we had our own access since we don't know how long they keep their data. This log access is also included in the $68,000.

The committee then discussed what kind of savings the university would see with this upgrade. Mr. Wester said most of the savings would be in data storage instead of a monetary savings, but he would look at the budget and see what might be absorbed with this purchase. Mr. Wester said the agreement we have is for a three-year lock-in with 1% year to year increase. Dr. Bridgmon asked if there was a

downtime penalty in the agreement. Mr. Wester said there was not and that a renegotiation would take about a year, but we might be able to add an addendum to the agreement.

Mr. Sikes wanted to know whether this system would support thin clients. Mr. Milligan told the committee that we currently have two cluster servers – one of which is used for the thin client machines.

The committee then discussed the Disaster Recovery Center being housed at the Ozark campus. Mr. Wester said that we need to be in a position to have our online courses "on" at all times. This SaaS system would house everything in the cloud meaning we would not lose everything if there was an emergency of some kind that took out the physical location. He said most colleges are going this route now.

Dr. Gunter asked if the cost of this upgrade would cause a need for a raise in the Technology Fee. Mr. Wester thought that most of the cost of this could be absorbed without having to raise the fee.

Mr. Reeder wanted to know if there were any differences in what we have now and the SaaS as far as security. Mr. Wester said that in some cases this system was stronger and in some cases they were the same. This system would probably improve accidental log-ins where someone logs out and back in and then gets logged in to someone else's session.

Dr. Bridgmon asked about the features that faculty would have with this upgrade. He was concerned that faculty would not want to use it if it was harder than what we have currently. Mr. Manly said the only difference would be in the way it is delivered. The committee then discussed whether faculty would be able to access previous year's data in this new system. Mr. Manly said that OIS would keep an archive of the files/courses from previous years that faculty can request. Dr. Cochran mentioned that faculty can also export their files to their computer and save them.

Ms. Gray asked the committee if they wanted to discuss the Canvas LMS any further. She said she could have some graduate assistants look at it and put something together if the committee wanted. Mr. Wester said he had no objections to that, but they had looked at it before and it would take more resources (manpower) to run than the Blackboard SaaS. He also thought that if we purchased a different system, we might have to run both Blackboard and the new system for a while.

Mr. Wester told the committee he needed to check to make sure we could move ahead with SaaS using the current three-year term agreement that we have or if we would have to get a new one.

Dr. Bridgmon asked for a motion to go ahead and move forward with the recommendation to approve the purchase of the Blackboard SaaS system. Mr. Watson made a motion to move forward, Mr. Sikes seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.

3. Round Table –
    a. Dr. Bridgmon asked the committee to think about what they thought this committee needed to accomplish. They thought getting the greatest value for the universities IT expensed was important. Mr. Wester commented that, in the past, this committee had been an "information" system more than anything else to let people know what had been done, but it is now a recommendation and decision committee.

b. Dr. Gunter wanted to put a university-wide license for the Avatar program on the table for a discussion.

c. Ms. Gray thought the committee needed to be sure and look at the university holistically.

d. Mr. Etzel said that he saw a benefit of the committee still being used for information purposes too as there is a need for everyone to know what others are doing technology-wise.

e. Mr. Wester told the committee he has asked for white papers for academic needs so that he can see what is coming in order to anticipate technology needs.

f. Mr. Sikes thought there needed to be a way for everyone to know exactly what software the university has that can be used by everyone. Mr. Wester said that there is an evaluation form that everyone has to complete before purchasing any software and he could use that to make a list of all software that has been approved and publish that to the website.

g. Ms. Gray mentioned that they had created an intranet within Blackboard, but that their students did not like to use Blackboard and did everything they could to avoid it. Dr. Cochran said that it was the opposite with their students. They complained if things were not put on Blackboard.

h. Dr. Bridgmon thought we needed to assess what users are getting from our technology. Mr. Sikes thought that technology knowledge needed to be one of our goals for the university.

i. Dr. Cochran suggested there needs to be more technology type trainings for faculty. Mr. Wester said there is some training for new faculty through the New Faculty Academy, but not much for current faculty.

j. Mr. Wester reminded the committee that the IT Prioritization Committee meets on November 13 and the Budget Advisory Committee on December 11th so any items that need added to those agendas will need to be added soon.

k. Mr. Sikes commented that he felt the university was very blessed to have this committee and the technology staff that we have here at Tech.

l. Dr. Bridgmon told the committee that he would like to start holding these Technology Committee meetings using some type of technology, such as Zoom, that would allow everyone to participate in the meeting from their offices.

4. Adjourn – 1:59 pm