

INTERIM EVALUATION OF
THE UA/UAF OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (OIT)
CONSOLIDATION PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

Conducted and Reported

by

Glenn R. Wilde
AGWilde and Associates, LLC
435 West Brigham Road
St. George, Utah 84790

November 2006 – January 2007

INTERIM EVALUATION OF THE UA/UAF OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (OIT) CONSOLIDATION PROJECT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Evaluation Framework and Summary of Findings	3
Recommendations	4
 Section 1 Conducting the Interim Evaluation	 6
 Section 2 Findings and Observations	 8
Operational Performance of OIT	8
Fiscal Performance of OIT	10
Leadership and Technology Planning	10
Office of the CITO	11
Executive Leadership Team (OIT)	11
OIT Managers and Staff	12
Technology Planning	13
OIT Alignment with UA and UAF Strategic Goals and Objectives	13
Other Constituent/Stakeholder Observations and Recommendations	14
 Section 3 Recommendations and Follow Up	 15
Recommendation 1: Complete Business and Operations Plan	15
Recommendation 2: Implement Team Building and Professional Development for the OIT Leadership and Management Team	16
Recommendation 3: Develop an OIT Communications Plan and Process	16
Recommendation 4: Engage Stakeholders in IT Planning	16
Recommendation 5: Determine Costs for Entrepreneurial Projects and Impacts on OIT	17
 Section 4 Postscript to External Evaluation	 17
 Appendix 1 Key Informants for Evaluation Report	
 Appendix 2 OIT Documents Consulted for Evaluation Report	

**INTERIM EVALUATION OF
THE UA/UAF OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (OIT)
CONSOLIDATION PROJECT
November 2006 - January 2007**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2006, an external evaluation was conducted to assess the progress being made by the consolidated Office of Information (OIT) to serve UA System and University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) requirements for information technology services. The evaluator was charged to:

- Review consolidation progress and provide feedback on consolidation performance
- Review and document perceived OIT performance with UA faculty, students, staff and administrators
- Recommend modifications for the OIT Business and Operations Plan
- Provide brief written report and recommendations concerning the OIT operations.

The CITO further asked the evaluator to document and report demonstrable weaknesses in the OIT operations and successes that have been achieved through the reorganization and restructuring of the Office of Information Technology.

Evaluation Framework and Summary of Findings

The evaluator employed a key informant framework to gain relevant information from internal and external stakeholders and constituent groups about the perceived performance of the consolidated Office of Information Technology. The evaluator elicited informed comment in four areas:

- *Operational performance of OIT units and operations:* there seems to be *cautious optimism* that the consolidated OIT operation is performing as intended. Network reliability, improved help desk services and the reliability of the email were cited as successes. Although some problems were experienced with the Blackboard system at the beginning of Fall Semester, improved performance was noted between the Fall Semester and Spring Semester. There also seems to be improved internal and external communication with end users, as well as improved operational performance of OIT units.
- *Fiscal performance of OIT units and operations:* There is agreement that the OIT Business and Operations Plan be completed and that key UA and UAF administrators be engaged in the approval of the plan. Key actions to complete the fiscal plan and OIT assessment have been worked on in January 2007. Fiscal assumptions have been reviewed and approved by key UA and UAF administrators.

- *OIT leadership for technology planning:* Although the appointment of the OIT Executive Leadership has been slower than anticipated, the processes are being concluded. The appointment of the new OIT Executive Officer and Senior Project Manager assisted the articulation of priorities and monitoring processes. The completion of the appointment of the Executive Directors will complete the leadership team. Engagement of the OIT Leadership Team with UA/UAF administrators, faculty/staff and students will enhance end-user ownership in IT strategic planning processes. Recent activities of the OIT Executive Leadership and Managers to define and clarify priorities will have a positive impact on OIT services.
- *Alignment of OIT goals and objectives with UA and UAF strategic plans:* The alignment of OIT goals and objectives with UA and UAF strategic plans is an on-going process; however, OIT has recently emphasized the development of organizational priorities, assessment processes and performance metrics within the context of the UA and UAF strategic and compact planning processes. This will better enable OIT to monitor, measure and report outcomes supportive of UA and UAF missions.

General stakeholder input was also elicited. Some of these comments are expanded on in the evaluation and the recommendations; most, however, fall within the four areas stated above.

Recommendations

Based on information gained from key informants, the evaluator made five recommendations to further the gains already achieved by the consolidated OIT organization:

1. *Recommendation 1: Complete and Gain Approval for the OIT Business and Operations Plan.* These processes are underway and should result in fiscal discipline, organizational assessment, and UA strategic alignment to further the educational, research and outreach goals of the University of Alaska.
2. *Recommendation 2: Implement Team Building and Professional Development for OIT Leadership and Management Team.* These team building processes are being implemented in OIT. The Leadership Team and Managers have gone through project management training and have been engaged in defining and setting organizational priorities. Other professional development and training programs will be identified and implemented through the Office of the CITO.
3. *Recommendation 3: Develop an OIT Communications Plan and Process:* Internal and external communications have been identified as a critical component of the consolidation processes. Other consolidation efforts may have developed some models that are appropriate for OIT to emulate. The CITO is anticipating the appointment of an individual to coordinate and implement an internal and external communications plan. Keeping decision-makers informed and "in-the-loop" is critical throughout the consolidation processes.

4. *Recommendation 4: Engage Stakeholders in IT Planning:* There was no stronger admonition from the UA stakeholders than they want to be engaged in understanding and planning for IT services. Engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning processes, in developing policy and practices and in reporting results will engender understanding, support and success of OIT.
5. *Recommendation 5: Determine Real Costs for Entrepreneurial Projects and Impacts on the OIT and other Service Organizations:* Great ideas and innovations should drive a university, and given the kinds of innovative projects that have been funded, that is the case at the University of Alaska. But associated with those projects are short-term and long-term costs and impacts that need to be addressed during the planning to avoid “fiscal and support surprises.” Engagement of OIT and other service units are critical in planning and implementing entrepreneurial projects. Processes should be developed to identify real costs for projects and mitigate misunderstanding about support and maintenance.

**INTERIM EVALUATION OF
THE UA/UAF OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (OIT)
CONSOLIDATION PROJECT
November 2006 – January 2007**

**1
CONDUCTING THE INTERIM EVALUATION**

Nearly one year after the consolidation and reorganization of the information technology units of the University of Alaska System (UA) and the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), an external evaluation has been conducted to assess the progress that was being made by the Office of Information Technology to serve UA and UAF needs and requirements for information technology. The rationale for an external evaluation, developed during the year-long reorganization planning processes in Fiscal Year 06, was to provide an assessment of the progress being made by the new organization, the UA Office of Information Technology (OIT), to meet institutional and statewide IT needs and requirements and to document recommendations to enhance OIT's performance to fulfill its mission and role for the University of Alaska. Specifically, the evaluator was charged to:

- Work with the Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO), OIT Management and staff to review consolidation progress and provide feedback on consolidation performance.
- Meet with faculty, staff, students and administrators outside the central IT organization as needed and directed by the CITO concerning the IT consolidation.
- Work with IT management to review the OIT Business Plan and recommend modifications.
- Provide a brief written report at the conclusion of this contract that will include observations and recommendations on the consolidation.

In an initial meeting, Steve Smith, the CITO, further amplified his expectations for the interim assessment for the OIT organization. He directed the consultant to evaluate what is working in the consolidation—the successes that have been achieved. He also asked that the consultant evaluate where OIT has demonstrable weaknesses or has failed to provide critical services to constituents/end-users and how well OIT responded to resolve those service issues when and where identified. The CITO also directed the consultant to provide some assessment about the transformation taking place in a new OIT organizational culture—whether the transformation is taking place, what issues in OIT are affecting OIT services and operations, what recommendations can be made to improve organizational performance. It was also noted by the CITO that the consolidation and reorganization of the UA Office of Information Technology was only one of the reorganization initiatives taking place in the University of Alaska statewide and University of Alaska Fairbanks to improve performance of both academic and service units. The CITO indicated that

this external evaluation will be followed up by an intensive and independent UA/UAF internal evaluation to be conducted in summer 2007.

The evaluator employed a key informant framework to gain information from internal and external stakeholders and constituent groups about the performance of the consolidated UA Office of Information Technology. The rationale for this evaluation was to provide an external assessment regarding the progress and to make recommendations to enhance the OIT organization to fulfill its mission and role for the University of Alaska. This evaluation included the following areas, among others to be identified:

- ***Performance of OIT Units:*** OIT units serve identified UA constituent groups and stakeholders who discussed and compared OIT performance improvements/needs; these perceptions included analysis of comparative services prior to the reorganization under OIT and the after the OIT organization. Factors included problem solving, responsiveness, training/support for IT services, etc.
- ***Fiscal Performance of OIT Units:*** Factors included cost-containment, cost reductions, value of services provided, new services and support, cost for the services/support, impact on the UA and UAF, ability to get allocate funds for equipment upgrades, software and get new appropriations for new services required by the UA System and UAF.
- ***IT Leadership and Technology Planning:*** Campus/statewide communication with constituent and stakeholder groups; IT planning; special IT initiatives, including partnerships with vendors for new services, technologies, upgrades, etc; and an assessment of the leadership team formed to guide OIT.
- ***Alignment of OIT Goals and Objectives with UA and UAF Strategic Plans:*** The evaluator elicited responses from stakeholders about how OIT's goals and objectives were aligned to support the UA statewide strategic plans and objectives and the UAF strategic plan and objectives. Alignment is perceived by the administration and faculty as the value of OIT services to assist and facilitate the UA/UAF to achieve its teaching, research and outreach missions.
- ***Other Stakeholder/Constituent Observations/Recommendations:*** The evaluator encouraged input about observations and recommendations not covered in the above questions. Stakeholders were also encouraged to email additional information and to follow-up with telephone or conference calls.

Based on a list of identified key informants (individuals and groups), OIT scheduled a series of meetings with individuals and groups to provide input for the evaluation. The evaluator took personal notes concerning the discussion, sometimes complemented by a mini-tape where there were group participants. Following the on-site review in December 2006, the evaluator has reviewed his notes and recorded discussions and has reviewed the documentation leading to the consolidation of the UA Office of Information Technology. The observations and the recommendations sections of this report reflect a synthesizing of those internal and external stakeholder perceptions about organizational performance and the evaluator's recommendations to

be considered by the leadership for implementation to enhance the performance of the OIT organization. Most of the information used by the evaluator is derived from the current perceptions held by the key stakeholder and constituent groups—both internal and external. Data concerning organization performance was not provided to the evaluator most likely because it has not been systematically developed by the OIT leadership; this issue will be discussed further in the Recommendations Section of this report. (See *Appendix 1* for a listing individuals and groups that were consulted in preparing this report.)

An internal review draft was submitted to the CITO and his leadership team for preliminary review of the evaluator's findings in January 2007. An update of OIT actions was provided by the CITO and those updates are provided in footnotes in the relevant sections of this interim evaluation report. No other comment has been received from members of the leadership team.

2 FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

This section of the evaluation report presents the evaluator's findings and observations based on interviews and discussions with end-users, administration and OIT staff within the framework of questions and issues described above. The section is organized in three parts—(1) General Findings and Observations; (2) External Findings and Observations; and (3) Internal OIT Findings and Observations. This seems a logical division, providing the evaluator the opportunity to relate findings and observations applicable to an overall perception of the consolidated organization and to focus on more specific findings and observations related to internal OIT staff and external administrators, faculty and end-user groups.

It has been approximately one year since the consolidation of the UA System and UAF IT units into the new UA Office of Information Technology (OIT). One OIT manager described these first processes from January through June 2006 as “organizational triage”—engaging in difficult processes of defining work and unit responsibilities and aligning labor and skill sets of existing UAF and UA IT staff within the new OIT organization. *No individual should underestimate or undervalue this difficult and challenging task, and the current success that has been achieved by the OIT leadership and staff.* The processes seem to be working, in general, because the OIT organization has made a significant transition to support statewide and UAF IT services, although, admittedly, there are frustrations and anxieties that remain unresolved nearly one-year after the consolidation took place. By July 2006, the OIT units seem, from all evidence, to have focused on work and services to be provided to UAF and statewide by each of the reorganized OIT units.

1. Operational Performance of OIT: In general, there seems to be *cautious optimism* that consolidated UA OIT is working and is performing the consolidated role that was intended. Specifically, UAF and UA system administrators, faculty and staff noted three areas that they perceived performance improvements: (1) the campus network seemed to be more reliable; (2) the campus email system had been upgraded and was reliable; and (3) the combined Help Desk/Support has resulted in improved support for faculty and students, particularly for UAF end-users. Given the difficult transformation into a consolidated OIT unit, these are positive indications of approval from a broad base of UA user groups. These OIT

achievements should be acknowledged and, from the evaluator's perspective, celebrated within OIT and the UA community as significant milestones in performance.

There remain concerns, however, among UAF academic administrators and faculty/staff that OIT lacks understanding and support for some of the key technologies used for instruction, research and outreach/distance learning—namely the failure of the Blackboard technology at the beginning of the fall semester courses. In addition, some college deans remain concerned that appropriate technology plans, reflecting the real needs of teachers, are not being implemented. There are also concerns about technology replacement, support and management for the classrooms and for the offices. There was general agreement among University deans and unit heads that the University of Alaska Fairbanks needs to increase base funding for information technology refresh for faculty and staff users; maintenance of hardware and software is also related to the university's ability to maintain secure systems, to promote basic equity among faculty and staff users, and to support currency in the applications of technology. In addition, incremental funding is needed to maintain and refresh instructional technology in classrooms, labs, distance learning and other instructional facilities operated the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Overall, the core investment for information and instructional technology must be addressed by the UAF administration in collaboration with OIT and academic colleges, research units and service departments. Some administrators, especially those leading academic colleges, are concerned that college IT staff become engaged in IT planning and policy discussion, especially since these college/unit technicians currently provide the first-line, on-site support for college and research units.

2. Fiscal Performance of OIT: At high levels in the administration, there are questions and challenges concerning the *aggregate investment* in information technology, especially questions about the return on investment (ROI) resulting from key investments in hardware and software technologies. The evaluator understood this to be *total* IT investment made by OIT, academic colleges and departments, and administrative units. The OIT Business and Operations Plan (July 2006) has not been adequately reviewed by the University or UAF administrations.¹ Discussion of the key assumptions with key administrative leadership is needed to gain understanding and buy-in for the long-term benefits that a consolidated OIT organization will provide the University of Alaska. In fact, the Business and Operations plan has not been completed; key sections on performance evaluation, performance indicators and alignment with University Goals and Objectives have not been developed by the OIT

¹ UPDATE: The OIT Business and Operation Plan was submitted to UA and UAF administrators in Fall 2006. The first formal discussion was held with UAF administrators in December 2006, a meeting at which the evaluator was present. Since that meeting, formal reviews of the plan have been taking place. The business and operational assumptions have been adopted by UA and UAF fiscal officers. With leadership from Julie Larweth of the OIT Business Office and Lacy Mitchell Assistant to the CITO, the OIT leadership team and managers have been developing a set of priorities, objectives and metrics that frame key measures for evaluating the OIT organization within the framework of UA and UAF strategic plans. There also seems to be an excellent and positive working relationship between the OIT CITO and Ro Bailey, the new UAF Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, who has considerable understanding and extensive experience of information technology. Jim Johnson, UA Vice President for Administration, also has been engaged in the long-term fiscal discussions for OIT operations. These are key relationships for the long-term success of OIT—not only as key stakeholders but also as critical advocates for systematic planning.

Leadership Team. Thus, the kind of information about the return on investment (ROI) or the value of the IT investment (VOI) cannot be provided key administrators and governing boards. It should also be noted that there is increased emphasis under the new UAF Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services and under the UA System Vice President for Administration on enhancing fiscal and organizational efficiencies. These officers should be cultivated as key partners in articulating long-term fiscal strategies to maintain, reduce unnecessary redundancy, and/or reallocate fiscal resources to critical needs within the OIT organization.

It should also be noted that the UA System and UAF have implemented strategic and compact planning processes. Academic, research and support service units are developing strategic plans and performance based metrics that must align with UA Goals and Objectives. These on-going processes provide an opportunity for academic and service units to identify, assess and evaluate the unnecessary duplication of services as the academic units attempt to align fiscal resources with performance metrics. Given that these compact planning processes continue to be implemented by the University of Alaska over the next three to five years, there remains excellent potential for substantial cost containment/reductions in areas and the strategic development of an investment pool of funds for allocation to strategic initiatives, including information technologies.

3. Leadership and Technology Planning: There are several factors that will be discussed in this section: (1) the Office of the CITO; (2) the OIT Executive Leadership Team; (3) Technology Planning and Initiatives, and (4) Administrative Desire to Engage End-Users in Strategic IT Planning.

The Office of the CITO: The CITO continues to have strong support from the UA and UAF administration, administrators and faculty/staff for the OIT consolidation. Because of the CITO's prior academic experience, he has developed an excellent trust with the academic administrators, faculty and staff with the statewide and UAF campus community. Because of this, the CITO is perceived to be the key contact person for resolving *all* IT problems, and thus his "plate" is becoming overloaded. Early in the consolidation processes, this "overloading" was exacerbated by the resignation of a key fiscal officer and by another staff member taking an extended leave of absence. Both staff members were critical to building the fiscal and implementation plans for the new OIT organization. In November 2006, a new Executive Officer was appointed who has excellent experience in the UAF Compact Planning processes under the Office of the Provost. The Assistant to the CITO is an excellent resource to complement the new fiscal officer. In addition, a Senior Project Manager was appointed to begin managing, monitoring and reporting progress on OIT projects. These core staff bring skill sets and insights to foster the development of the OIT service culture. For a number of reasons, the CITO has become a primary point of contact for solving day-to-day IT problems and issues, and, as such, problems become perceived by many in OIT as priorities. The CITO, in collaboration with the user community and the OIT Leadership Team, needs to better define a set of priorities for the OIT; at present, each problem becomes an immediate priority and many OIT staff seem to be

confused about the common vision and direction.² The CITO needs to foster his Leadership Team as first-contacts for problem-solving; the CITO must establish strong internal communication and accountability among his leadership team and IT staff. The CITO has a pivotal responsibility to foster the vision and direction not only within OIT but within the UA community of users, but will need supportive documentation derived from internal assessment to communicate to the UA and UAF leadership.

Executive Leadership Team: The hiring of permanent Executive Directors to lead the OIT units has been painfully slow. By December 2006, only one Executive Director has been permanently appointed—nearly a year after the consolidation had taken place and position descriptions had been written. It was reported that several factors were contributed to this: (1) changes within Human Resources processes slowed the efforts of search and screening committees, and (2) the candidate pool was not large or strong. In some cases where there were strong candidates, some candidates withdrew from the pool of applicants because of the length of time it was taking for the UA search processes to take place. The result is that there is still not a permanent Executive Leadership team in place. To not have a permanent Leadership Team in place has slowed the processes of transforming the OIT organization and shaping the future directions for OIT. Given this context, the acting Executive Leadership seems to not be functioning nor acting as a team: rather, they tend to act independently, maintaining their silos of responsibility. There does not seem to be an understanding or acceptance of a common vision. Where problems have arisen, there seemed to be a lot of finger-pointing rather than problem-analysis and problem-solving taking place. Under some circumstances, there should be a blurring of units of responsibility, especially as some IT functions are consolidated and resources and personnel are shared. There also needs to be some consideration about personnel leads for certain initiatives, such as Blackboard, to coordinate all communications with end users. Some key UA administrators are concerned that OIT leadership does not listen to the campus issues, but rather has a solution to a problem without fully understanding the problem. In addition, there has been little substantive work by the Executive Leadership done to implement OIT assessment processes related to the OIT Business and Operational Plan. For OIT to be successful, the CITO, with the support of UA and UAF administration, must cultivate the vision and the responsibility of OIT leadership team by focusing on the common mission, by

²UPDATE: Julie Larweth, the recently appointed OIT Executive Officer, has been assigned responsibility for completing the OIT Business and Operations Plan. Based on her leadership for Compact Planning at UAF under Provost Paul Reichardt, Larweth has engaged OIT Executive Directors and Managers in January to develop priorities and internal protocols, and is currently completing the sets of metrics to be used to evaluate OIT operations. These metrics, combined with a fiscal plan, should provide core information related to the VOI/ROI of OIT services. As the OIT Business and Operations Plan is completed, it becomes a significant OIT asset for *monitoring, measuring and reporting* on operations and services within the framework of UA and UAF strategic plans.

empowering the leadership team to make and be accountable for decisions, and by participation in the UA/UAF strategic planning processes.³

OIT Managers and Staff: Managers take two roles in the OIT organization—providing management for the sub-units and being a staff member with specific responsibilities. The managers seem to have good technical skills. Management skills need to be cultivated through in-service and professional development programs. Managers seem to be frustrated over several issues in OIT, and have suggested that this frustration is resulting in some morale issues that are developing among the managers and staff. There seem to be several factors related to these frustrations and morale concerns: (1) there needs to be a better statement of OIT priorities; the managers need to have a better understanding of OIT goals and priorities; the problem-of-the-day is often elevated to major priorities. The manager group asserts that saying *NO* to new projects is imperative in order to accommodate the on-going operations and identified projects within OIT. (2) accurate information related to goals and priorities is often not communicated to the managers by the Executive Leadership or is misinterpreted.⁴ Managers perceive that they and their staffs are often “beaten up” when IT problems arise, and that they are not backed by leadership. The managers group believes that the appointment of the Senior Project Manager will assist the coordination and follow-up on projects.⁵ However, managers are on the front-line for getting things accomplished: their team’s work and contributions needs to be recognized and celebrated as a part of the overall OIT consolidation continues to work. Executive leaders, including the CITO, must be perceived as communicating with and supporting these managers and staff; the focus on specific priorities related to the mission and vision of OIT and on the development of unit performance indicators will assist these managers to develop and cultivate an OIT culture. Managers have also noted that several open positions have not been filled. They are concerned about workload, especially since the scale of all

³ UPDATE: OIT is in the final stages of completing the selection of the Executive Directors. Interviews with candidates for the final two positions have taken place in January and February 2007. This should result in improved long-term planning and organizational cohesion, particularly as the leadership team engages in collaborative problem-analysis, planning and evaluation. It is also noted that it has been reported that OIT spring semester operations was markedly improved over fall semester—especially the stability experienced by faculty and students using the Blackboard technology for instruction; problems experienced in Fall Semester were corrected by OIT. Internal OIT communications seem to have improved, resulting in improvements in operations and end-user services.

⁴UPDATE: *Cf. Footnote 2.* Executive Directors and Managers have been actively engaged in defining unit goals, establishing metrics and establishing sets of priorities since the evaluator was on site. Managers and Executive Leaders are also engaged in developing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to be used by OIT and End Users. These are key and critical tasks for the OIT organization. Communicating these to internal and external groups will be beneficial to the UA community.

⁵ UPDATE: In December 2006, the CITO found internal funds to “jump start” the appointment of Sue Sharpton as OIT’s Senior Project Manager. Sharpton, in fact, attended some of the meetings held with this external evaluator, listening to the feedback received from campus administrators and IT staff. Sharpton’s work, coupled with the work being done by the OIT Executive Directors and Managers under leadership of Julie Larweth, will improve internal OIT processes, and the monitoring, management and reporting of key IT projects to the UA community.

statewide and campus operations have grown exponentially following the consolidation.

Technology Planning: The most significant effort being undertaken by OIT is the planning for Enterprise Architecture for the University of Alaska. It is one of the most significant efforts to provide quality IT services throughout the UA system but also provides the architecture to implement standards and manage costs. Working with the Gartner Group consulting, OIT is in the process of designing UA enterprise architecture that will provide a complete end-to-end model/master plan that should integrate academic plans (goals, visions, strategies) with enabling IT infrastructure and computers, operating systems and networks. This is a major task that should engage very broadly the entire UA community in assessment and evaluation. This is one of the most important contributions that OIT will make to maintain the University's competitive position in the information age.

However, this high-level strategic planning for Enterprise Architecture must be complemented with functional planning to maintain the quality of current IT operations and services. In organizational transformation, there is a "honeymoon period" through which new ways of identifying and achieving common goals can be achieved. The evaluator noted the willingness of campus-based groups to collaborate to improve the IT environments and to strengthen IT policy and practices throughout the campus in particular. Key academic administrators have indicated that college and unit level IT support personnel need to be actively engaged in discussions of policy and practice together with the OIT leadership and staff. There is a perception that OIT has a tradition that does engage the campus expertise in planning or implementing technologies and systems and that it is generally a one-way communication about how an IT policy or service will be implemented. Much good-will can be gained by OIT from thoughtful listening and response to the end user communities and to the engagement of expertise within colleges and research units to implement changes in services. Some perceive that OIT dialogue with customers is explaining to the end-users that "this is how OIT will implement the project." Simply stated, the evaluator believes that there is merit in engaging constituents and end-users throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation processes for any project, service or policy-development. In addition, the evaluator believes that there currently exists a positive environment in engagement will be warmly welcomed and will produce excellent outcomes—especially in communicating with key academic administrators.

4. OIT Alignment with UA and UAF Strategic Goals and Objectives: The OIT consolidation and reorganization complement strategic planning that is being undertaken by UA statewide and UAF institutional strategic planning. The OIT Business and Operations Plan (July 2006) is complementary to statewide and institutional planning initiatives and processes. However, OIT has not completed several essential elements of the Business and Operations Plan:

- a five year budget needs to be completed, implemented, managed and monitored for all OIT units;
- OIT leadership needs to develop monitoring, measuring and reporting processes for all OIT operations and services based on objectives stated within the Business and Operations Plan, and
- OIT leadership must demonstrate the Value of Investment (VOI) in technology and infrastructure by demonstrating how IT enables the UA community to achieve its defined performance-based objectives.

OIT Executive Leadership must design an assessment process that answers a question of *how* information technology can be used to assist the academic and research units to achieve performance goals. The evaluator believes that an immediate focus on these issues will assist the CITO and Executive Leadership team to bring together an understanding of the vision, mission and goals/objectives of OIT, particularly if those outputs are to be reported and validated by UA and UAF administrators. This provides an excellent opportunity to engage administrative leadership in understanding and validating OIT strategic plans and initiatives. Such strategies also provide an opportunity to develop well-placed advocates for consolidation within the UA and UAF communities.

5. Other Constituent/Stakeholder Observations and Recommendations: Below are observations that were made to the evaluator by several stakeholders that should be considered by the CITO and Leadership Team in how OIT can engage stakeholders and communicate with stakeholder groups.

- UAF deans and directors would like to be informed and engaged about technology planning and policy development. There needs to be a systematic plan developed for technology replacement and technology refresh throughout the UAF campus. UAF central administration asserts that deans and directors must be engaged in the long-term IT planning. A policy needs to be implemented for technology refresh for the UAF campus, and be equitably administered by OIT in collaboration with key academic officers.
- There is general concern that students at remote campuses have improved access to the technologies, support, and resources as students on the campuses. IT planning must include the training of off-campus technical personnel. In addition, there may be some logic in providing some priority help desk service to remote campus technical support. Training of remote campus personnel is critical. In addition, several new projects, such as the Ph.D. in Psychology, show creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, but also these initiatives place additional stress on limited human and technological resources. OIT needs to be engaged from the outset in the planning to make certain that upfront and long-term support is incorporated into the project.

- There is recognition among UA and UAF administrators that the CITO is becoming overloaded with the volume of requests from throughout campus. Deans and directors have recommended that members of the Executive Leadership team could be appointed as a first-line liaison with particular academic colleges/departments and units; members would be responsible for problem resolution and reporting within the OIT organization. OIT needs to better define priorities, and avoid taking on too many new projects.
- Several UA and UAF academic and research administrators have advocated that technology and network standards be established. This is recommended because of the ability to contain costs but also OIT should concentrate priorities on correcting basic deficiencies, rather than concentrating on “flashy new things.” Identification of unnecessary duplication of competing IT services will be an on-going process; there seems to be willingness to explore options to reduce IT duplication when college and unit administrators are convinced that OIT can provide reliable services. There is administrative support for containing and/or reducing IT costs where duplicate services are providing no added value.
- Salary levels and changes in benefits packages are having negative impacts on attracting quality applicants for IT positions. Several factors were cited: (1) there is increased competition for employees in the private sector, and the private sector is providing generally more competitive pay and benefits for similar jobs in the local job market, and (2) changes in the health and retirement benefits of the University of Alaska have reduced the perception and the attractiveness of the comparative value of the benefits as related to the recruitment of candidates. OIT should encourage UA Human Resources to conduct a market assessment and analysis to remain competitive in recruitment of highly-qualified applicants for IT positions.

3

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FOLLOW UP

Based on the information gained from key informants, the evaluator makes the following recommendations to further the gains already made by the consolidated OIT organization. Noting the tremendous tasks before the OIT Leadership Team, the evaluator considers the following recommendations as critical to enhancing the organization culture of OIT.

Recommendation 1: Complete the OIT Business and Operations Plan: Completing the Business and Operations Plan provides an opportunity to engage OIT Leadership and UA/UAF administrators in reviewing the assumptions, the Business and Operational priorities, the financials, and the development of concrete performance metrics. One scenario to complete the plan could be a facilitated leadership retreat at which the OIT Leadership Team and selected UA and UAF administrators intensively review, make changes and alterations to the plan, and develop core performance metrics. At the end of the retreat, the plan, especially the performance metrics, could be presented to the UA President and UAF Chancellor for approval. It opens up an excellent opportunity to further

understanding and discussion of the UA performance metrics and how IT might be able to assist in achieving, in collaboration with academic, research and student units, those metrics. Following such a leadership session, the plan needs thorough review by appropriate academic and administrative committees, but by having key UA and UAF administrators engaged during the completion of the plan, key advocates outside OIT can assist in informing the UA community regarding the plan.⁶

Recommendation 2: Implement Team Building and Professional Development for the OIT Leadership and Management Team: The CITO must lead efforts to increase team-building among OIT leaders and managers. It is critical to the success of OIT to have leadership understand and share the vision of OIT, and to be able to communicate to internal staff and external audiences. One strategy for enhancing team-building is to engage leadership in an on-going series of workshops and retreats designed to enhance skills in internal/external communication, managing resources, OIT priority setting, evaluation, manager training, among other relevant topics. The evaluator recommends that these workshops be well focused and outcomes well defined for those leaders participating. In addition, the CITO needs to empower the Leadership Team to plan and solve problems within the working framework of OIT operations, and to challenge the Leadership Team to enhance customer orientation throughout the units. Furthermore, the CITO needs to off-load some on-going meetings to appropriate members of the Leadership Team, and empower the leadership team to plan, solve problems and engage in decision-making.⁷

Recommendation 3: Develop an OIT Communications Plan and Process: In organizational change, the implementation of a communications plan is critical to keep internal and external audiences aware of what is being done, why it is being, how it is being done, and what will the outcomes be. The evaluator recommends that the CITO appoint an individual to develop and implement a Statewide/UAF campus communications plan to keep individuals informed, including milestone events, planning processes, outcomes, and internal communications. In addition, there are some collateral efforts being undertaken under the UA Office of the Vice President for Administration to work with an external consulting group to develop a communications plan that can be shared with the OIT group. The communications plan should include ways to celebrate successes of the organization and of individuals as OIT matures.

Recommendation 4: Engage Stakeholders in IT Planning: There is a window of opportunity to engage the UA community in planning and implementation processes. There is an interest in where technology is heading as it applies to instruction, research and outreach initiatives. There is interest in having college/department technicians engaged actively with OIT campus-wide initiatives. There is recognition and a need to develop and

⁶ See UPDATES footnotes 1, 2 and 3. This work was delayed because two key personnel were no longer available to the project. The appointment of Julie Larweth as OIT Executive Officer in November 2006 has jump started the processes to complete the Business and Operations Plan.

⁷ OIT is engaging Executive Leadership and Managers in some professional development and training, such as improving project management. Continued professional development in identified and strategic skill areas will further organizational performance.

implement technology standards that may result in cost-containment or potentially cost-reduction. There is also a need to develop understanding and to promote advocacy within academic units in support of the consolidated vision of IT on the campus. Engaging stakeholders in the planning processes, in developing strong policy and practices, and in reporting results should engender understanding and good-will for OIT throughout the UA community. A regular communications process is a tool to enhance stakeholder understanding and support.

Recommendation 5: Determine Costs for Entrepreneurial Projects and Impacts on OIT: A university is about innovation and new projects demonstrating new ways of teaching or delivering services is a part of that innovation. The collaborative Ph.D. program in Psychology is a good example of academic enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit; the participating psychology departments are to be commended for pioneering new applications of technology to create quality programs. However, the UA needs to implement procedures to make certain that units, such as OIT, are engaged from the outset of planning and that impacts on technologies, networks and personnel are included in the one-time and on-going operational costs for such programs. In addition, other campus units are also impacted as well, such as the campus police who have to secure facilities. The UA system needs to assure that fiscal and other resource impacts are understood as innovative projects are approved. OIT, in collaboration with end users, should be assigned the responsibility for the development of standards for equipment and maintenance.

4

POSTSCRIPT TO EXTERNAL EVALUATION

In a final meeting with President Mark Hamilton, he commented that the consolidation of OIT was "the right thing to do." President Hamilton recognizes the challenges that bringing two independent operations together brings, but he recognizes the benefits that will result for the University of Alaska. He also understands that consolidation will take considerable time to complete the organization, but he is personally pleased with the progress that has been made. The evaluator, who has similar experience in reorganization, understands the challenges of bringing together often disparate individuals from dissimilar traditions into a single organization. Often people become too close to the issues to see the progress that has been made, and most leaders overlook the opportunity to celebrate the Herculean success that has been achieved. The evaluator also acknowledges that much of the report is directed toward actions that should be taken rather than on the successes that have been achieved. But that is the nature of assessment, as it certainly is in this report. What has been the focus are actions that need to be taken to move the OIT organization into the next stage of development. The report is written with that outcome in mind.

APPENDIX 1

Key Informants for Evaluation Report

Monday, December 2

9am – Julie Larweth, OIT Executive Officer

11am – Provost Paul Reichardt

3pm – OIT Managers

Tuesday, December 3

8am – Beth Behner, Chief HR Officer

9am – Research Working Group

12:30pm – Steve Smith

3pm – Chancellor Steve Jones

4:30pm – Rick Caulfield, TVC Director

Wednesday, December 4

9am – Tim Barnett

10:30 – Gary Newman (UAF Staff Council)

11:30 – Julie/Lacy

1:30 – UAF Deans/Directors

3pm – Jim Allen, Psychology

4:30pm – Jim Johnsen, VP for Administration

Thursday, December 5

8:30 – CITO Staff (Directors, Julie, Lacy)

12pm – UAF Distributed Technicians

1pm – UAF IT Council

3pm – Michael Scott, OIT Campus Tech Services

3:30 – Julie Larweth

Friday, December 6

8:30 – Tom Moyer, MyUA

9am – Richard Machida, OIT Technology Oversight

10am – Ro Bailey, Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services

11am – OIT Business Plan Review w/Paul Reichardt, Ro Bailey, Buck Sharpton

1:30pm – President Mark Hamilton

3pm – CITO Steve Smith

APPENDIX 2

Documents/Sources Consulted

Alex Hills, Martin Ringle and Steven Zink, *An External Review of Information Technology at the University of Alaska*, June 2002

Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, *The Balanced Scorecard*. Boston: Harvard Business School, 1996.

OIT Business and Operations Plan, July 2006.

Transition Team IDD Submissions, August 2006

Steve Smith, *Proposal for UAF-Statewide IT Merger*, June 7, 2004

Steve Smith, *Proposal Detail for UAF-Statewide Consolidation*, September 16, 2004