

Faculty Senate Agenda Item

No. 09-10

SUBJECT: Faculty Senate Resolution on the Washburn Technology Crisis

DESCRIPTION: Whereas the disastrously ill-timed and executed update of Washburn University technology systems over the weekend of August 8-9, followed by the full-scale meltdown of email systems from August 20 forward, has had a wide range of negative consequences for Washburn students, faculty, and administrative systems, including:

- At a time when enrollment and retention issues are especially important to Washburn's bottom line, the disruption of on-line classes, enrollment systems, and ability to email faculty at the very start of a semester, leading a number of students to withdraw from classes;
- Significant interference with students' abilities to interact with their professors and professors' abilities to communicate with students, significantly complicating basic processes of instruction;
- Catastrophic impairment of the ability of faculty to maintain their professional development, in an era when conference calls for papers, article submissions, invitations to speak, letters of recommendation, and basic communication with colleagues outside of Washburn fundamentally depend on functional email systems and access to email address books;
- The loss of email folders as an organizational system, resulting in loss of data and complicating all aspects of university life, including teaching, service, and the arrangement of special events;
- Significant interference with the ongoing work of Washburn libraries, in particular the ability to facilitate interlibrary loans, to manage faculty book orders, and to maintain connections with the Washburn community;
- Massive disruption of basic inter-campus communications, with deep consequent disruption to campus life, the ability of faculty to perform their service duties, the operation of campus committees, advising and enrollment management, and the added expense of the retreat to photocopying and hand delivery of messages;
- The loss of faith by Washburn students, faculty, and staff in the ability of ISS to provide reliable service and the perception that the administration of Washburn University lacks clear answers to the technology crisis; and
- The embarrassing taint on the public image of Washburn University and its ability to project an image of basic competence and ability to carry out advanced education in a computer-driven age, revealed in media ranging from negative television coverage to mocking Facebook pages,
- and whereas neither the vaguely worded updates posted on MyWashburn by ISS nor any statement by the administrators to whom ISS is responsible have done anything to address the fundamental character of this breakdown; the deep level of disruption in student, faculty, and Washburn community lives; where responsibility for this crisis lies; or what will be done to ensure no further disruptions of this sort in the future.

MOTION: the Faculty Senate calls for the establishment by the President of Washburn University of an investigative panel, including faculty and student participants, commissioned to explore, at minimum, the following issues:

1. What was known in advance of the upgrade of potential difficulties or system incompatibilities, and why nothing of this knowledge, if it existed, was communicated to the Technology Steering Committee and the Faculty Instructional Technology Committee;
2. What led to the decision to carry out such a fundamental shift in systems one week before the beginning of a semester, and why the Technology Steering Committee and Faculty Instructional Technology Committee were not alerted to the fact that this upgrade could be less than routine;
3. Why no back-up systems were in place, and why there seems to have been no effort to create any sort of fail-safe mechanism, any workable restore point, or even, at the bare minimum, some sort of bounce-back message for email so that colleagues outside of Washburn would know that messages were not being received;
4. Who at Washburn University is taking responsibility for the decisions that led to this crisis, and what consequences that responsibility entails;
5. What the cost of this crisis has been to Washburn University , in terms of lost student enrollment, retreat to paper copies, disruption of faculty and student life, and wasted staff time;
6. What mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that meltdowns of this scale do not take place in the future;
7. Whether, in light of the crisis, it has become critical to engage the services of an outside consultant on technology issues on campus;
8. And what mechanisms will be put into place to ensure that ISS is directly answerable in some real way to academic programs.

The committee shall include representation from each academic unit of the university and each division of the College of Arts and Sciences. No more than one member shall be drawn from ISS, and that member shall not chair the committee. The commission should deliver at least a preliminary report of its findings to the full faculty of the university by no later than December 16, and a final report no later than Feb. 26, 2010.

Date: September 14, 2009

Originated By: Thomas Prash
Faculty Senate President