

Community Computing

Facilitating technological progress at The University of Oregon

A great institutional computing environment consists of so many details, and involves so many decisions, that it cannot be “managed from the top”. This was realized by administrators in the computer industry decades ago, including the government funders who nurtured the industry into existence. As general principles self-management, free inquiry, and collaboration should be facilitated by an open-minded administration in any community or institution, to foster trust, high-achievement, and creativity. In the history of computer engineering, most missed opportunities have stemmed from stringent unilateral control by management.

Before we attempt to Transform IT, we must recognize the strengths of the intellectual and performance culture in computing and technological circles, whose operation tends towards agility and autonomy. This culture’s touchstones includes cooperation, collaboration, initiative, innovation, independence, self-actualization, continuous improvement, broad agreement, transparency, and community self-organization. Computer people are trained and naturally disposed to eliminate problems with performance and automation, and their capacity to self-manage this work has changed the world dramatically in the last 75 years.

People, not “reporting structures”, are responsible for quality and innovation. So, any drive for improvement or excellence must come from the people who do the work, from both their expertise and their understanding of stakeholder needs. The University of Oregon should facilitate the implementation of suggestions emerging from its computing community. The University should put people first, because it respects and trusts its community of experts. It is understood that freedom begets quality, performance, growth, and innovation. Stability and respect are necessary prerequisites to fulfilling our community’s potential.

The Community Computing Team will facilitate a community-driven process for the Transform IT committees. Here are some initial steps.

October 19 --

We will announce and describe this possible pivot towards Community Computing, at the University Senate meeting. We will make it clear that this initiative is intended as a new, improved direction for the existing Transform IT committees. People should not worry that change will be imposed upon them, or their department. We are determined to increase buy-in and effectiveness to the fullest extent possible.

October 21 --

We will share these initial goals and principles (along with references to scholarship on this topic) on the *deptcomp* email list, and set up a Community Computing *wiki*. We'll share on the *wiki* all proposed solutions. We'll also launch the long-overdue effort to create unfettered cross-campus communities of practice (or interest), gathering expertise among all computer people at the UO. We will launch a series of meetings to discuss and adjust the self-management proposals so they can be adopted by the administration.

A list of proposals for community consideration so far:

- Create a collaborative computing University Service 0.1 FTE (the "10% solution") for as many computing personnel as possible
 - This broadens the bandwidth for the development of an improved local engineering culture
 - It allows *ad hoc* teams to solve immediate problems
 - It provides time to study and address long-term campus-wide engineering and application issues
- Improve effectiveness with tools that aid collaboration and transparency
- Prioritize buy-in, on all IT decisions, from the employee level
- Launch highly visible, collaborative communities and discussion groups
- Prioritize employee satisfaction
 - professional development
 - retention
 - recruitment
- Assist in creating regular processes to define strategic priorities and projects
- Define project success metrics
- Apply IT project management best practices
- Clarify work focus with supporting processes, directories, and policies

Other milestones --

Complete the process of scoping constraints upon the "10% solution", which is a widely-perceived resolution to the silo problem.

Initiate a UO IT *desiderata* directory, where people can find the needs *of* workers and the need *for* workers. This implies an employee-driven private process for adjusting lines of reporting, taking on different work, or working in a different manner (e.g. more generalized, more specialized, different specialties, more colleagues, fewer, etc.). We will set up independent committees to delicately facilitate negotiations based on these requests.