Antelope Valley College

Technology Review

Final Report

October 24, 2008

Strata Information Group

Overview

At the request of the President, Strata Information Group (SIG) was engaged to interview AVC students, faculty and staff with the objective of identifying actions that could be taken to improve technology deployment, management, and utilization for AVC.

The College Coordinating Council identified participant groups. SIG staff were on the AVC campus on September 3, 17 and 25 to meet with students, faculty and staff. The meetings were very well attended with over 50 individuals taking part.

As background, SIG has provided various kinds of services to the College over the past 8 years. It is important to note the substantial growth that has taken place. This growth includes a much larger/faster network, many more computers with classrooms, a more technology-dependent curriculum, more knowledgeable faculty and a much larger computer device count. It is truly an impressive expansion. With rapid expansion comes growing pains and in the course of the interview several challenges were identified.

An important observation is that there is a “disconnect” between the perceptions of faculty and some administrative system users and those of the ITS staff. This can be summarized as frustration on both sides with one side feeling their needs are not understood and the other that their efforts are not appreciated. Furthermore, there is a general feeling that ITS is responsible for all technology. Therefore if there is any sort of technology problem, it is an ITS problem. There is now a feeling in ITS that “no matter what we do, we can’t win”. An important goal for the entire AVC community is to reduce the “we-they” attitudes that exist and work more as a team.

The recommendations in this report are meant to suggest some approaches that if implemented in a thoughtful and cooperative manner can improve the situation.

Recommendations:

1. **Wireless Access**

   Enhance the basic network infrastructure and provide secure remote access and on-campus wireless access. This is a service that is identified as a need by the students and faculty interviewed.

2. **Manager/Director Academic Computing**

   Create a manager/director responsible for academic/instructional computing. This position should be the advocate for faculty and instructional requirements. The position requires academic experience, knowledge and skills. The person assigned will serve as the co-chair of the academic/instructional advisory committee and will also serve as a dedicated liaison with ITS. This role will foster understanding of faculty needs and facilitate development of solutions. Both the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Director of ITS feel that the position should be placed in ITS. Working collaboratively with the managers in ITS, this person can improve communication and responsiveness. Additionally, instructional support staff that should report to this new position and their duties will need to be identified.

3. **Advisory Committees**

   Create a responsive advisory committee for academic/instructional computing. The current Information Technology (IT) Committee should be modified. These committees need to be co-chaired by senior staff with the appropriate ITS managers. While advisory in nature these committees can provide critical direction regarding institutional priorities, procedures and practices. A strong advisory committee structure can facilitate planning and improve accountability for achievements and execution of the plans. within the college, there is a lack of understanding about how decisions are made, priorities are set and standards are established. A sample advisory committee structure is included at the end of the report.

4. **College-wide IT Budget**

   Elements of the IT budget that provide basic technology services and that are non-discretionary should be moved to a college-wide, “utility” account. Items that should be considered for inclusion:
   a. Banner and similar campus-wide software maintenance
   b. Blackboard support charges
   c. Server replacement schedule
   d. Lab rollover/replacement schedule

5. **Communications**

   ITS can do a better job in communicating across the board, including planned changes and outages for IT services. Regular maintenance “windows” should be established and well publicized; no system changes should be implemented without actively soliciting feedback from the impacted segments of the campus community.

6. **Instructional Support**

   Recent changes in ITS support for buildings (assigned techs to specific locations) seem to be improving support. Faculty in areas where this structure is in place are very positive about the results. However, the ratio of the number of machines supported to the number of support staff is very high and additional staff should be considered.

7. **Technical Analysts**

   The placement of Technical Analysts in various departments seems to be of benefit. Departments with tech analysts report good results in dealing with technical issues and working effectively with ITS.

8. **Support for Classrooms**

   Current efforts to coordinate IMC and ITS services for problem reporting, resolution and support for "smart" and classrooms with media equipment should be continued. It will result in faster and better support for faculty.

Consider Best Practices in Use at Other California Community Colleges

1. **Faculty Support Center**

   Create better support for faculty who are interested in the use of technology. A "Center for Teaching and Learning" is a concept that has been employed at other CCCs. This Center would be strongly linked to the new director position for instructional support.

2. **Computer Replacement Plan**

   Develop a college-wide computer replacement plan, schedule and funding.

3. **Remote Access**

   Develop a procedure for authorization to allow VPN (or similar) access to network resources. In today's environment this inability to securely access institutional resources remotely is a roadblock and results in extra travel time.

4. **Web Presence**

   Clarify the responsibilities for web content and currency of information. Many people at AVC consider this an ITS responsibility. As a best practice, these responsibilities for managing content are shared by the WebMaster and user departments with technical support from IT. Consider the organizational responsibilities for content maintenance for:
   a. MyAVC
   b. AVC web

5. **Help Desk**

   The Help Desk function is much less effective when calls go to voice mail and responses are only made via email. This "front door" to ITS is sometimes viewed as a roadblock to receiving service. Consumers of ITS support desire better communication from tech staff regarding status of their requests and a note when office equipment has been diagnosed or repaired, etc. Communication, from a customer service standpoint, is perceived as needing improvement. Consider a business process analysis review to identify possible improvements.

6. **MyAVC Help Desk**

   The MyAVC Help Desk function is staffed by 2 part-time hourly staff. That appears to be a low staffing commitment given the growing importance and usage of MyAVC. When problems with the primary online entry point for the campus community are not resolved quickly, it produces a cascading negative impact on perceptions of service overall.

7. **ITS Location**

   ITS department is spread over 5 locations and has no counter space. This fragmentation creates additional challenges with communication and consistency in provision of service. Consider establishing a central service/help desk location.

Advisory Committee Structure

Educational Technology Advisory Committee

Charge-

- Provide recommendations to the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee and the Executive Council concerning the application of technology for instructional programs.
- Recommend standards and procedures for the implementation of instructional technology throughout the District.
- Recommend priorities to the ITS Department for instructional computing support.
- Recommend standards for the acquisition of new instructional software and hardware.
- Establish ad hoc groups to focus on specific topics as required: Internet, lab support, network, standards and procedures, computing ethics, software licensing.

Co-Chairs- Dean, Manager/Director Academic Computing, Faculty

Composition-

Interested faculty
Instructional Dean(s)
Manager/Director Academic Computing
Director, ITS
ITS and department staff, as required

Administrative Information Systems Advisory Committee
(Currently the IT Committee)

Charge-

- Provide recommendations to the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee and the Executive Council concerning strategic policies and directions for administrative information systems.
- Provide a collaborative forum to clarify concerns and produce recommendations regarding operational priorities and system enhancements.
- Recommend priorities related to the selection and implementation of new systems as well as enhancement of existing administrative information systems.
- Assist in the development of the Information Technology Plan.
- Provide a consistent communication channel for reporting administrative system status to constituent groups and existing councils and committees.
- Coordinate the work of specially appointed task groups as required.

Co-Chairs- VP or Dean, Director, ITS

Composition-

Key users- Deans and Directors- A&R, Financial Aid, Personnel, etc.
Computer Systems Manager
ITS staff, as required