



Executive Summary: OE2C Operational Computing Team

“I appreciate having a voice in this process, it means a lot.”

Background:

During March and April of 2015, the Operational Computing sub-team conducted approximately 24 focus groups of staff and students concerning perceptions of IT services and needs across campus. Below is a brief executive summary of the recurring themes gleaned from the focus group activities.

SMU IT Strengths: Themes of “What is Working”

Far and away, focus groups identified embedded technology units and the central helpdesk as SMU’s technology servicing strengths. SMU has a strong track-record of creatively stretching limited and reduced technology staffing and budgetary resources. This has been done in answer to ever-growing service demands as defined by the strategic needs of the central University and by the more non-traditional business and academic needs that characterize the complexities and diverse populations that comprise a world-class academic and research institution. SMU staff members and students know where to go for most technology solutions. As stated, the highest levels of technology service practice and end-user satisfaction with technology services correspond to embedded contextual academic and business technology units (currently reporting with agility to varying deans and vps) and to the highly-regarded central IT helpdesk (currently reporting operationally to the CIO). Other themes highlighting the provision of outstanding technology services are present in embedded web services units, which have naturally evolved to elevate various future-forward capabilities in many academic or business units. At all functional levels, SMU staff members articulated that they desire “what is working” currently to be utilized as a key piece in the endpoint design.

SMU IT Weaknesses: Themes of “Pain Points”

SMU staff members universally articulate the theme that technology services, both central and embedded, have always been grossly under-resourced and have always been stretched to, or well beyond, capacity. Themes that register an absence of overall University investment in agile or specialized academic and research staffing have forced many areas to “cobble together” contextual technology units and embed them where possible to service rapidly growing and fast-moving contextual business, academic and research needs. Under-sourced web-servicing resources have likewise been stretched to capacity and localized web units have developed as various area budgets have allowed. The highest levels of frustration and “pain points” in servicing specialized or contextually meaningful business, academic or research technology needs are found in areas without budgetary flexibility or without autonomous or visionary leadership. SMU staff members thematically articulate “web services and SiteCore” as being a highly complicated puzzle for servicing that remains unsolved—specifically as to what part of web-solutions should exist as a technology service and which part of web-solutions should exist as a marketing/academic/research service. The ERP (my.smu.edu) was identified as the other highest university “pain point” theme in need of more future-forward optimization and refinement for staff and student operationalization.

Culturally, thematic pain points are also identified in a few high-visibility “competitive” operational/commodity technology services being performed in decentralized pockets of SMU that house alternative/redundant networks, domains, helpdesks and commodity servers. Staff members believe that non-central IT services should “complement,” but not “compete” between,

operational/commodity and contextually meaningful service rights. Such competitive commodity solutions create confusion for end users and pose problems leveraging commodity economies of scale. SMU staff members feel that enterprise solutions like Microsoft Exchange and Schedule.smu.edu are diminished when not universally adopted by staff and faculty. Users would like a greater participatory voice in defining IT solutions that correspond to job functions and needs. While end users speak highly of central helpdesk services, customers do not feel they receive the same service levels when issues are referred beyond the helpdesk. Users would like support beyond helpdesk to place greater emphasis on understanding the business impact, context, or root cause of a problem rather than merely resolving the immediate issue.

Vision Statement Themes

- “Technology services can be used to champion innovation, build trust, and encourage risk-taking and to transform business, learning and research. Technology services can also be used to ‘lock down’ and restrict access to those values. SMU needs to move past the central culture of lock down.”
- “SMU must develop a second-century ethic that starts empowering the right people to lead with technology and it needs to cease being so obsessed with structuring the right organizational chart of who is in charge of controlling access to technology.”
- “Develop ‘partnerships through policies’ between all campus IT units, rather than shuffling the staff around every few years.”
- “SMU does not invest enough people or money in technology staffing, infrastructure, or strategy for a university of its caliber.”
- “Every selected future solution needs to include analytical and metrical dashboards of actual usage by faculty, staff and students which can be utilized to determine future solutions and to motivate change. SMU simply doesn’t have a history of being data-driven or transparent regarding IT decision-making.”

Investment Themes

- Thematic narratives identify an SMU need to invest in the creation of a **bi-modal** technology community. This community includes both the run-mode utilitarian and operational process side of IT—which is also able to position into and partner with embedded IT units that can collaborate toward agile technology servicing outcomes characterized by the innovation, exploration, and transformation capabilities required by business, academic and research priorities.
- IT staff themes reflect that IT services cannot be exclusively organized in alignment with horizontal operational process technology services or single individuals, nor can autonomous IT units be organized in isolated, entirely independent vertical service units. SMU technology units need to be unified horizontally but must retain existing vertical reporting structures to sustain and to model IT service agility for business, academic and research areas.
- Invest in hardware spending—life cycles should correspond with warranty or realistic product market life cycles, especially for laptops.
- Invest more overall - “The fact is, compared to our peer and aspirant institutions, SMU needs to invest more in central infrastructure and more in local technology units tasked to understand, serve and transform.”
- Many questions address the theme for OE2C: “Are we going to truly build IT or are we only stretching it?”