

A Chronicle of the AJCU Conference on Information Technology Management

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Technology has dramatically transformed life and learning on Jesuit campuses over the past four decades. From switchboards to cell phones, from mainframes to tablets, computers have shaped the lives of today's students in ways that the first generation of information technology professionals could never have imagined when they first began working at our institutions. Who were the pioneering men and women who established the first campus computing offices? How did these academic "techies" manage to develop the software and set up the servers, email systems and help desks that we now consider to be essential infrastructure at all institutions of higher learning?

Since its official founding in 1986, the AJCU Conference on Information Technology Management (CITM) has been the "go to" special interest group for IT professionals who labor, largely behind the scenes, to effect this transformation at the member institutions of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). While information technology, and the warp speed at which it has evolved, is their common interest, fostering relationships lies at the heart of this energetic conference and its diverse and committed members.

Jack Corliss and Mark Castner, two founding members of CITM, are now collaborating to chronicle the group's fast-paced history. Corliss, who began working with computers at Loyola University Chicago (LUC) in the early 1970s, has held every officer position in CITM, and served as the group's secretary for 25 years. He has also attended every annual meeting (28 and counting) that CITM has hosted, since the group first convened at Boston College.

Mark Castner, a seismologist who became involved with academic computing at Canisius College in the 1980s, has made it to all but two of the annual meetings and has served as the group's unofficial archivist over the years. A highly organized pack rat, Castner's files include photographs and official programs from annual meetings, as well as annotated notes and correspondence about the organization's evolution.

When CITM decided to institute term limits for its officers in 2012, Corliss was "invited" to become the group's official historian. Although long recognized by his colleagues as the group's institutional memory, the self-effacing Corliss assumed the mantle of CITM historian reluctantly. A big man with an even bigger heart, Corliss is not inclined to toot his own horn. He was also unsure about how to look back at an organization known for its ability to look forward. With support and encouragement from his LUC colleagues, Bruce Montes and Susan Malisch, Corliss started warming to the job. But the idea of doing a history still felt like "a daunting task" for this tech man.

Remembering that he had once helped Terry Fife access the school's early remote computing system, Corliss reached out to her to see if she might be able to help with the project. A long-time adjunct in LUC's public history program, Fife's day job is leading History Works, a small Chicago-based firm that conducts historical research and develops history projects for organizations, businesses and families. Several Loyola alumni now work at History Works, including Elizabeth Trantowski, who volunteered to assist with the CITM history project.

Starting in January 2013, Corliss, Trantowski and Fife began holding regular Skype sessions with Castner in Buffalo. Montes took charge of scanning the archival material that Castner was unearthing, making those documents available to the history team in digital format. Since April, Trantowski and Corliss have been conducting interviews with CITM members, past and present, to capture the organization's culture, the people and places who have contributed to its longevity, and the initiatives launched by the group over time.

These conversations have unearthed some significant themes and have resurrected some instructive memories. From its inception, members recall CITM as a "can do" group with a collegial and collaborative ethos. CITM's first annual meeting, organized by Bernie Gleason and held at Boston College in 1986, set the tone for what has become a yearly highlight for the group's members. These much anticipated gatherings help members develop and strengthen relationships among professionals known for their ability to work hard and to play hard. Robust programming on a range of IT topics keeps participants on their toes during daytime sessions.

CITM's annual meetings provide technology educators with an intimate forum that promotes open and honest dialogue, and offers them the opportunity to discuss challenges, frustrations, and problem-solving solutions that they share in common with their peers at other Jesuit institutions. Evenings are devoted to engaging extra-curricular activities where host schools pull out all the stops to showcase their institutions and display their home town pride. The meetings support and reinforce the group's long-standing goal to promote camaraderie and collaboration among members and member institutions.

Mentoring has always been a part of CITM's mission. The practice began informally, with more experienced members counseling up-and-coming professionals at annual meetings and on their respective campuses. In 2008, the CITM formalized its mentoring program to identify and support emerging talent and leaders and to facilitate generational transitions occurring within the profession and among the AJCU schools. The successful program, now institutionalized, has graduated five successive classes of mentors/mentees.

Reaching out beyond CITM's original boundaries also propels this special interest group and accounts for its sustained viability within the Jesuit educational experience. Shortly after its founding, former AJCU president, Rev. Charles Currie, S.J., urged the mostly all-male members to expand their gender horizons, and encourage and groom more women for positions within IT departments at Jesuit schools. Today, women are CIOs at eight of the 28 AJCU member institutions.

CITM started to think and act globally more than twenty years ago. Representatives from AUSJAL—the consortium of Jesuit colleges and universities in Latin America—began attending CITM meetings in 1990 and their participation has cultivated a global outreach that has expanded to other AJCU conferences. In 1995 and again in 2003, CITM joined its counterparts from AUSJAL, and held their annual meetings in Mexico.

Although collegiate librarians and IT professionals have had some historic differences over the years, CITM and the Library Deans special interest group held their first joint meeting in 1998. The two groups continue to convene joint meetings in an effort to collaborate and work together in a tech-driven world where libraries are now often known as information commons.

As the CITM looks forward to hosting its 30th meeting in 2015, it does so with a celebratory spirit, pride in its accomplishments, and enthusiastic anticipation of its next thirty years. While a written organizational history is a long-term goal, Corliss and his collaborators are now at work on their first product, a website devoted to CITM's past. Although still a work in progress, a preliminary version of the website can be found at <http://blogs.luc.edu/ajcucitm>.