The Views of Students, Faculty, and Academic Department Support Staff about Computer Technology and Support at CMU:
A Focus Group Perspective

Final Report

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Background

In September, 2011, Roger Rehm, Central Michigan University’s (CMU) Chief Information Officer, approached the Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies (CARRS) about the feasibility of conducting focus groups with students and faculty to learn their views about computer technology and computer support at the university. The goal was to provide student and faculty input into the strategic planning process that would chart CMU’s computer technology operations, broadly conceived, over the course of the next three to five years. Given the nature of the discussions in the student and faculty focus groups, a decision was made to include as well the perspectives of the support staff associated with the university’s academic departments.

Use of Focus Groups

Faculty, students, and academic department support staff who currently use computer technology and receive support services from computer operations provide an important perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of existing operations and on the desire for possible changes in services provided. There are great advantages to using focus groups for a project such as this one. Focus groups allow participants to discuss their own experiences in their own words. In addition to providing rich data, such a methodology can also assist in empowering participants by acknowledging the importance of their points of view and can serve a positive public relations function for the administrator or organization sponsoring the discussion. Past experience suggests that students and faculty enjoy the format of focus groups, as this setting allows people in similar situations to express their viewpoints and hear those of others similarly
situated. Focus groups exist in a low-pressure, relaxed setting that should allow participants to discuss their experiences and opinions in some detail.

On the other hand, the people who agree to take part in focus groups are never a random sample of the larger population from which they are drawn. For example, people who are reserved may be less inclined than others to volunteer for focus group participation. And, given people’s busy schedules, it is never possible to find a day and time that will accommodate the schedules of all interested participants. The need to commit at least one hour to the task may also be daunting for those who are juggling the busiest and most complex schedules. While one must be cautious in generalizing the findings from focus groups to the larger population, efforts were made in this case (see below) to continue the fielding of groups until one reached redundancy, with similar arguments repeating from one group discussion to the next.

The Fielding of the Groups

CARRS worked collaboratively with Roger Rehm to develop the focus group guide to organize the participants’ discussions. The guide is found in Appendix A. Mary Senter, Director of CARRS, served as the facilitator for all groups. Monica Folske CARRS served as a back-up facilitator.¹

All participants signed informed consent statements (see Appendix B), and group discussions were tape recorded. No obvious problems occurred during the focus group discussions, and participants seemed satisfied with the experience.

¹ We should note that Senter is a long-term faculty member and that Folske has taught at CMU and elsewhere in addition to serving in her staff position. There was no back-up facilitator for the two groups that took place during Senter’s SOC 350 (Social Research Methodologies) classes.
CMU’s Information Technology (IT) provided invaluable assistance in selecting and inviting focus group participants. Random samples of 1,000 CMU undergraduate students and 1,000 CMU graduate students were generated by IT, and listserv distribution lists were developed to facilitate e-mail invitations to the student groups. Appendix C contains the communications to students. One student who was active in the Student Government Association (SGA) and had served on a computer advisory group organized one of the focus group sessions with fellow members of the SGA group.

The five student group discussions took place between October 17 and October 24, 2011. Three groups were with Mount Pleasant undergraduate students; one group was with Mount Pleasant graduate students; and one group was with Off-Campus students from throughout the United States. The discussions with the Mount Pleasant students took place in various rooms in Anspach Hall or the Bovee University Center; WIMBA was used with the Off-Campus student group. In addition, Senter, who is currently teaching SOC 350 (Social Research Methodologies) asked her students whether they would be interested in taking part in focus group discussions, and two took place on Thursday, November 4 during her class periods.

Information Technology generated and then facilitated e-mail communication with all on-campus regular and fixed-term faculty. In addition, a one-in-two random sample of Off-Campus faculty was invited to participate in a discussion, facilitated through WIMBA. Four faculty focus groups with on-campus faculty, took place between October 21 and 28, 2011. The fifth group,

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2 Pat Garrity and Dave Jelinek were especially helpful, and this project could not have been completed in the time allocated without their active assistance.
3 This student is not being acknowledged by name because he was a member of one of the focus group sessions. We do, however, want him to realize our appreciation for his assistance and support.
4 One Off-Campus graduate student drove to Mount Pleasant for the face-to-face focus group discussion.
5 The assistance of Dan Bracken of FacIT made these WIMBA sessions possible.
6 Learning about focus groups is part of the syllabus for this class.
using WIMBA and comprised of Off-Campus faculty, took place on November 2. Appendix C also contains all communication to faculty.

Faculty Personnel Services maintains a list of academic department, their chairs, and their support staff. All support staff members on this list were invited to participate in a focus group, which took place on Friday, November 11, 2011. Appendix C also contains all communication to these staff members.

All groups, with the exception of the SOC 350 class groups, were scheduled for 90-minute periods, with the group discussion lasting for about one hour. Participants were invited to enjoy either breakfast, lunch, or pizza and dessert prior to the focus group discussion to acknowledge the time they spent with us and to thank them for their participation. Cookies, brownies, and punch were available for the SOC 350 students. A total of 26 students took part in the five originally organized focus groups, 24 students participated in the SOC 350 groups, 38 faculty were members of the five faculty discussions,\(^7\) and seven staff members were participants in the academic department support staff group. Faculty participants come from all of the university’s academic colleges; all but one college was represented in the academic department support staff group.

**Themes from Students**

While students, faculty, and academic department support staff have some similar viewpoints and experiences, there are enough differences to warrant separate discussions of the findings from each group. While no two focus groups were identical, the same patterns or

\(^7\) We were not able to accommodate an additional group of faculty (about 100) who expressed an interest in participating in the focus groups.
themes emerged from a number of the five student group discussions, supplemented by the discussions from the two SOC 350 groups, to give us a reasonably high level of confidence in reporting these results.

This reporting of findings will follow the structure of the focus group guide. Hence, we begin with a discussion of strengths, followed by weaknesses, and then suggestions for future enhancements. When Senter is confused about a viewpoint expressed by students or wants to insert her own viewpoint, she will add her commentary in brackets. Throughout this report, we have tried to let participants speak for themselves and in their own words. Direct quotes from focus group participants are found in italics. Words added for clarification are found in brackets. When words are omitted for the sake of clarity, the omitted words are indicated by three dots (periods).

**Strengths: The Student Perspective**

Students had a number of positive things to say about CMU’s current computer configurations and systems of support. They liked the availability of computers throughout the campus and the wireless access in campus buildings (although not in parking lots and the spaces between buildings).

“…there is enough open computers on campus that you can find one…”

One student noted that it is “nice that they have the up-to-date, the most recent [versions of software].”

They also are fans of the new registration system. They seem especially to like the calendar feature that lets them see what their schedule would look like across the week.

“Whoever did that was a genius because it made things so easy for us.”
They also had positive things to say about the course management software system **Blackboard** (because they could “see” their grades, could access course materials such as PowerPoints, and could have new copies of materials that they have lost during the course of the semester).

A number of students appreciated the fact that the **library has installed double monitors with some of its computers**, and there were some positive comments about the **accessibility of library services**.

“Yeah, I’ve never been to the library here. ... Yeah, I just log into ... go online... and yeah.”

The handful of students who knew about the piloting of the **virtual lab** liked the idea and had had some success using it.

While the Off-campus group was small, it was notable for highlighting the positive features of CMU’s computer systems. These students were very happy with their ability to take courses on line and with the support they received through the **Help Desk**, in particular.

Regarding on-line courses, “*it has been smooth sailing.*”

**Weaknesses: The Student Perspective**

Several students expressed concerns about **printing on campus**. These concerns were of four sorts. First, some students expressed frustration with the new printing policy that charges students for pages printed after a quota was reached. Not all students found this problematic, however; and some had not exceeded their quotas.

Second, students expressed frustration that they are not able to print from all the places they would like; some would even like to be able to print from their laptops. Having a separate printing “system” in the library was seen as a considerable frustration, as well as an added expense.
“I’m a senior, and I’ve never printed one thing from the library. It’s just too much of a hassle.”

Third, students recognized that faculty were not always aware of the new printing policy, or did not take it into account in creating assignments. One student talked about having to print other students’ papers because he was a TA for a class; another talked about a professor requiring that students print out a 10-15 page assignment every week.

Finally, students complained about printers that do not work well in some places and about being charged even when printer quality is low (e.g., low ink cartridges).

“It doesn’t come out; you just lost your money.”

“Yeah, there goes your money.”

Many students also wanted the computer labs to be open for longer hours, and wanted at least one lab to be open 24 hours. [Of course, such a lab does exist, but see below for the discussion about (mis)communication.] Students seemed to want more lab space on the northern end of campus, and some expressed frustration about the closure of the Grawn lab and its reconfiguration in a smaller space in Ronan. Students who have needs for specialized software (NVivo was discussed by SOC 350 students and engineering software was mentioned by others) sometimes find that these applications are available only in specific rooms or labs, and those rooms/labs are available for limited hours (and not always in the evenings and on weekends).

“One complaint that I have heard recently is that the technology building’s computer lab which is the only lab on campus that has certain programs that are necessary for engineering students is locked on the weekends, and they have 20 hours of week of homework, and they need those programs to complete it and taking away the two days when everyone is guaranteed to not have class that puts extra stress on them. So, opening that for a few hours you know every Saturday and Sunday would probably help them out a lot.”
Students recounted some unhappy memories about difficulties first using their personal computers on campus. While technical support was available in the residence halls, two types of concerns surfaced. First, some information about computer training and computer use is available, but it is found online. Given that new students were not able to get “on line,” this information was of little use.

“Maybe not having to register everything that goes online. I understand that there’s different wireless networks you can use at Central. So, if maybe they had one where you didn’t have to register your computer right when you got there, because when you get to Central as a freshman, and you’re trying to figure out how to register, and you can’t figure it on your own, and you can’t even get online to figure it out, and the information for how to register is online... so I think that there is a way to even get online without having to register a computer or even register a computer without having to abide by the safety and security protocol, it might be beneficial.”

Second, students were frustrated that the computer configurations that they brought to campus were “illegal.” Some talked about having to have their computers rebuilt; virus protection software seemed to be a particular problem. That is, the anti-virus software they had already purchased (e.g., Norton) was not allowed by CMU.

“...anti-virus software [is] not necessarily cheap so just having you just delete that off your computer entirely and accept the version that Central will approve can be frustrating sometimes.”

“It would be nice if students knew that [the software that is allowed and not allowed] before they came to campus.”

“Because when you get a brand new computer or you bring a computer from home just for a couple weeks because you broke your other one, you don’t have to necessarily want to register it up here if you need to keep all that safety stuff on it when you return it back to your home or something. Maybe not registering your computer would be helpful.”

Students also expressed frustration with faculty use of Blackboard and, to some extent, with the Blackboard system itself. Students noted [and, of course, we know] that some faculty use Blackboard and others do not. Students reported that it is confusing for them when some
faculty communicate through the Blackboard e-mail feature and others through Blackboard’s announcements. They reported that faculty placed materials in different places [e.g., Course Materials versus Syllabus] within the Blackboard shell and that some place the same documents in multiple places. The SafeAssign system within Blackboard seems to be a particular headache, as students reported being unable to upload their papers appropriately. Other Blackboard incompatibility issues were mentioned as well, focused on particular textbooks or software applications. [I gather that part of this is a browser issue; the system works with some browsers but not others.] The graduate student group expressed frustration about the integration of videos into Blackboard.

“One of the things I don’t like about Blackboard is a lot of times those links don’t work ... he [the professor] had cases up there that were videos that he wanted us to watch. Well, I tried on three different computers at home, at work, and everything else ...”

Students were vocal in expressing their frustrations with the billing system, and the problem is with the system not simply the fact of receiving bills! Students reported that they are not able simply to figure out what they owe and that multiple screens (tabs) provide them with multiple balances that are confusing.

“I was trying to pay my bill on-line, and then they’d say there was an update. I’d go look; it was really confusing.”

Similarly, students found it difficult to reconcile their statements because some lacked sufficient detail to figure out the meaning of entries. And, the history of past amounts billed were eliminated after a couple of years making budgeting difficult.

“But, it’ll say ‘bookstore charges.’ Okay. Like okay. Like, you know, like can I get a little description maybe...”

“If someone was trying to budget better, they’d want to know how much was really essential. You know you have to buy tuition. What are you doing buying candy in the bookstore all the time. You don’t really have a way of going back.”
“So, my freshman and my sophomore year are gone. It doesn’t look like I ever went here.”

Students were annoyed that they found it necessary to check their statements often (daily sometimes) to see if entries had been made to their account. [My understanding from this discussion is that there is no e-mail communication when account balances have changed.] Students recounted “horror stories” about errors being made in their bills—including late fees being applied inappropriately—and the considerable runaround needed to have them corrected.

Concern was also expressed that CMU will not accept Visa cards for payment.

“You know, you can get a charge and it’s not even on there, and I don’t know how much I owe you. Then, you tack a late fee on, and I’m like double-screwed. So, it was just the posting with me that was not quick enough.”

Generally, students do not know exactly what kinds of computer facilities and support are available across campus. Some students reported that X was available; other students did not know about X [so they started trading notes which is another advantage of focus groups]. Students also were not aware that the Student Government Association (SGA) has a fund to help students who exceed their printing quota. This can best be described as a communications problem.

“...I don’t think many students realize they have that opportunity [for programs at the Help Desk] provided to them through their tuition and staff. ... My suggestion would be to increase the knowledge of all of them.”

“I don’t think that anyone really knows about it [the SGA fund].

In addition, some students reported that they did not know how to use some computer applications well; they reported a need for more training. Students find that some Help Desk tutorials are out of date and in some circumstances see the “blind leading the blind” as they struggle to learn from one another how to use software applications.
“...there should definitely be a component to teach our incoming students how to use these programs, especially Centra and the library.”

“I had a friend, too, that came up with me from my area of school, and she had no idea how to work computers—like she never had a computer in her house growing up—and, like, she just was just worried about going into education and working with all of this technology ...”

“The most important thing would be getting the information to residents and students about how to use all of these programs...whether it be billing, registration, whether it be Zimbra or iCentral, whether it be any of these programs that we are expecting our students to know how to use in order to be effective here or be productive here...I think that would be my most important thing.”

In terms of system capacity, some students expressed frustration that they are unable to access the system (or to register, for that matter) at peak periods.

“Usually registration and then Welcome Weekend and the first week of the school year.”

Others noted days when the entire CMU system is “out” (from off-campus locations or from the residence halls). This issue came up, but really was not stressed as a problem.

More generally, students wanted the same software to be available everywhere across campus and wanted both Mac’s and PC’s available everywhere. [Some of this seems to result from a student’s desire not to run across campus to find a particular piece of software needed for a particular assignment. Some of this, however, seems to result from not knowing what is available where or how to use the multiple systems that are available.]

Students reported that some hardware is problematic and that machines in some labs are slow and take a long time to log on.

“It takes like five minutes to log on.”

“In the electrical engineering big lecture hall. No power.”

“...if I don’t come with my laptop to my GA office, I am ... shooting myself in the head.”
There are also a series of issues regarding incompatibility between campus systems, specific software, and Internet browsers. Some software works with one browser and not others. Some computers are too old or have outdated software. This situation is both frustrating and confusing, because it is difficult to learn the various forms of system compatibility.

“Okay, so you have a registration system that CMU runs, and CMU’s own computers don’t have the update needed to run CMU software.”

“…we [graduate assistants] have the crappiest computers... they sound like they’re going to take off like an airplane. That’s how much they overheat... It’s like you can’t even do half the things on, like, CMU’s website because the computer ... can’t do anything because they’re so old.”

“I had software I had to get that was only supported though a certain browser like Explorer, and you had to have a new enough Word and Excel and everything to actually use it. And, I can’t remember if we were 7.0 or 10.0, and if you didn’t have 10.0 then you couldn’t use it on your computers. So, you had to go to an actual computer lab to do that. So, it was kind of a hassle to be able to do all that when you are required ...”

Some students expressed frustration with OrgSync, the new registered student organization software. Others found it acceptable, after they learned how to use it.

“I have not met one person who likes that. Everyone is just frustrated by it.”

A number of students noted that CMU’s current website is difficult to navigate successfully.

“I personally have a hard time navigating Central’s main website.”

They also noted that “nothing is updated,” and they expressed concerns about what they see as its low quality.

Suggestions for the Future: The Student View

The discussion of weaknesses, of course, overlaps with the discussion about suggestions for the future. For example, students who are concerned about a shortage of lab hours want the labs open longer. This section of the report, however, focuses most explicitly on the suggestions
put forward when students were asked about configurations (new bells and whistles) that they would like to see in the future.

Some students report that faculty members need to stay up to date. In particular, they want faculty to be required to use Blackboard – and in the same ways. This was a dominant student viewpoint [although it will be very hard to implement, and students do not realize this].

“I wish it was a little more uniform like there was some—I don’t know—if there are standards for professors to use Blackboard.”

“...there are so many places to look. If you just had one spot that consolidated everything, it would be a little easier because I find myself printing off assignments or even the course syllabus from different areas.”

“Yeah, it [Blackboard] should be like a rule for them to teach.”

Students were frustrated that faculty members continue to require them to print out multiple copies of assignments or notes, perhaps not realizing that students now have print quotas. Faculty need to be made aware of the printing constraints affecting students; one student suggested having higher printing quotas for courses with high printing demands from faculty.

“...maybe for specific classes that do have a higher quota...give those students an extra, say $5.00.”

Students also think that faculty need more training on Blackboard use, mediated classrooms, the use of both PC and Mac platforms, and the use of mobile devices for learning.

“Yes, I think they should know a lot because like technology’s just up and coming—like it’s just gonna keep getting more and more in-depth so, like they should know these things or at least get taught how to do it.”

“Yes, I think, like, IT should do some sort of training for instructors on Blackboard.”

“It falls on Central to start showing professors how to take advantage of that [mobile devices] and not to—uhm—maybe demonize people who use their technology and maybe help them.” [This latter quote resulted from a conversation about using mobile devices in classrooms and faculty asking students to put them away during the class period.]
“Maybe more smartboards and just stuff like that [would be nice to have in the future]. The problem with that is even if we do upgrade to smartboards and stuff like that people don’t know how to use them. So we can say it means something besides chalkboards but then some of the professors wouldn’t know how to use them.”

Some students also wanted more mobile app’s and want to make it easier to connect mobile devices and home computers with CMU “systems.”

“…everyone’s obsessed with getting apps.”

“Yeah, ’cuz everything’s mobile these days.”

“…if we just stick Blackboard to desktop or laptops systems and don’t go to the mobile platform, then it’s going to get left behind.”

“I would like to be able to get to my U-drive from home…”

“…accessibility from home to use, like, SPSS and things like that.”

A number of specific applications were highlighted, the most popular being an app that allows students to access Blackboard directly. Some wanted the ability to send their CMU e-mails to their phones; others said that this option was already available.

“I’m at that point right now where cmail and Blackboard are always up.”

“OrgSync up there, too, cmail, Blackboard, and Facebook—because I’m a college student.”

Other suggestions include an events app so that students can learn the activities for the day, a ride board app, a campus menu app, a meeting room schedule app, a departmental app, and a local bus transportation app. [I think the issue with the current calendar is that it requires you to see a month and then to highlight a day in question.] One international student was most interested in the bus schedule, because international students often do not have access to cars while in the United States. Students also discussed the advantages of an improved on-line system for applying for residence hall rooms.
Students also expressed **frustration with CMU’s existing web site** and wanted a new site and/or portal “**to be up to date and be useable.**”

“I want to see more current information on the main Central site."

“...just having one central thing where I don’t have to keep on logging in all the time.”

Graduate students, in particular, highlighted their busy schedules and the fact that most live off campus (and, for some, at a considerable distance from Mount Pleasant). They wanted announcements (and perhaps other Blackboard features) directly downloaded to their mobile devices as they become available.

“And the instructor ... uploads a new lecture, a new PowerPoint. You should have the option to sync that to your computer...You don’t.”

Graduate students also wanted **better ways for communicating with one another and for doing group projects.** For example, these students wanted better ways of having multiple students editing the same document, and they wanted better teleconferencing options (having experienced problems with Blackboard groups). Off-campus students also talked about better ways for having groups of students discuss assignments.

“So, they, if they could open it up to students, or, if they have an assignment and students want to meet in the WIMBA room, they should be able to do that.”

“things [with WIMBA] freeze...there was a real microphone issue...some of the instructors have a fan on their computer and when that kicks on ...”

“...we share Google Docs with ... 45 people. You know up to 50 can be simultaneously in the document.”

Students also want **more Mac’s** on campus and want to “even out” the numbers of Mac’s in labs so that students have choice about the type of machine to access. Some students also want more software compatibility between Mac’s and PC’s. Some students just seemed to prefer
Mac’s. Others noted the importance of familiarity with both systems to prepare them for the “real world.”

“So you know there’s two or three PC’s… and the other section have it be an even spread, and the software that is required for classes are both compatible with Mac’s and PC’s. For Psych majors, our class that we have to take ... and you have to buy a part of the book .... it’s not compatible with a Mac. So, I was forced to buy it, and I can’t do anything with it.”

At least one student also noted that the configurations of some classrooms are not appropriate for mediation and that some software they need is not available in key classrooms.

“...from where I sit, I can’t see. So, I don’t know if this is possible, maybe have like two projectors ...”

“When we’re being asked to do something—more than PowerPoint now—and to be able to do ... Movie Maker, we can’t do it because we don’t have access to that program in that classroom. So, if you bring in on your jump drive to that, it won’t run.

“...the classroom that we were in didn’t even have computers in it, and she [the instructor] wanted us to do everything on Excel. So, then, she says, ‘okay, well, I’ll bring in the laptops ‘cause everybody can have one’ ...Well, then, that didn’t work because there’s no plugs. There’s no power ... for access.”

Students in one group wanted the library to be open more hours. [I promised them that this sentence would find its way into the final report.]

“It is, everyone I know, every single person that I know on campus complains about that.”

“Yeah, I think the SAC is open longer than the library, which has always struck me as a bit weird, you know.”

Students associated with the SGA group very much wanted the university to implement an on-line degree audit system. At least one other group mentioned wanting a better system to figure out what they needed to take to graduate.
“I want there to be a checklist for classes I’ve taken. This is what I have like to do, like an audit—like an on-line audit….just like so I can go on there and see where I’m standing instead of pulling out my giant Bulletin…I can see how it could be easily worked into Central or Blackboard even.”

Themes from Faculty

It is clear from the faculty discussions that faculty are not a homogenous group. Faculty members differ both because of their multiple disciplines and because the various colleges have different computer support systems and personnel. Nonetheless, the overall organization of this section of the report parallels that presented for students. Again, direct quotes from focus group participants are found in italics.

**Strengths: The Faculty Perspective**

Faculty noted that they liked the **wireless access** in campus buildings (although there was some concern about the security of the system) and the **U-drives** and **VPN service** that they can access in various locations. By and large, they were positive about the **mediated classrooms** and about **Blackboard**, although they expressed concerns as well (that are discussed below). Like students, faculty had positive things to say about the availability of computers across campus.

“I’m just glad there’s a computer everywhere I go.”

Faculty had positive things to say about the **Help Desk**.

“The Help Desk is very good, very fast, very polite, and they seem to get the job done.”

Off-campus faculty were especially enthusiastic about the positive support that they received from the Help Desk and from FacIT. A number of these faculty had taught for
institutions other than CMU and noted that support systems are better at CMU than at these other (unnamed) institutions.

“I see some of the people talking about ___ who worked tirelessly on weekends when I get stuck with something that can’t be fixed any other time. They’re on call. And they aren’t supposed to be working. I know they aren’t, but they do respond, and I think that’s an important point to make, too.”

Faculty in some colleges (CHSBS, in particular) had positive things to say about their college support staff. Off-campus faculty, generally, reported that the assistance they receive with on-line teaching is excellent.

**Weaknesses: The Faculty Perspective**

A number of faculty expressed concern that the system for replacing hardware every few years that existed previously no longer seems to be in effect. Some faculty were upset about the old age of their machines/software and the lack of functionality for their specific needs.

“I think people get computers that don’t necessarily need them. And then they slow down other people who really need them, you know, to continue their work. I think it’s sad. I have students who are using their own computers to do work for me…to be efficient.”

“They kind of do one size fits all in computer purchase…I listed all the things that would be easier on a higher end machine…but it’s kind of like, no, this is it.”

“…so I went to our IT and said I need more ____ and he said no. You get this much ____ period. That’s it. I had this special need...there is stuff I need for teaching.”

Off-campus faculty were especially concerned about the poor technology in off-campus center classrooms, including too few machines, machines that are too slow, and machines that do not allow for effective WIMBA presentations.

A few on-campus faculty expressed concern about the lack of specialized software and the lack of space for computer labs, especially for labs that run specialized software for their teaching or research.
“...we need teaching computer labs but also computer labs for the students to work in, in which they can use the specialized software that can’t be licensed and everywhere—and where they can do that outside of class time. So, that’s a space issue.

“...we don’t have a lot of licensing agreements for other more sophisticated kinds of programs. And, that’s a problem for our students.”

And, a few faculty expressed concern about the lack of IT support for Mac’s, especially at the college level.

“I feel like sometimes if I want to use a Mac-related app or even just anything Mac-related, there’s not a lot of support for it in the decentralized function in the college....”

Some faculty had “horror stories” to tell: a particular problem affecting some faculty was the long wait (often many months) to gain access to a computer or to appropriate computer software. Some also complained about the long time that was needed to get “things” fixed. The system for purchasing computers frustrates some faculty. There seem in some areas to be many organizational levels of approval needed, and faculty have no good way of tracking where purchases of specialized equipment are in the “system.” For others, however, the problem was that only particular college support staff could make systems operational. This “rule” seemed especially problematic for some faculty in CST. In this college, faculty were told they could not even open the boxes containing their “new” computers.

“It’s very common and for me to see computers that have come and are sitting in boxes in an office for months.”

“...I think the only way you can expedite things is get your chair involved or something like that. But, I feel like that should not be required for every task you need.”

Overall, the concern was not with the quality of college support staff per se, but rather with the fact that there are insufficient personnel to keep up with the demand for service and that personnel are “required” to spend time adhering to rules that do not make sense from the faculty
perspective. [If there really is a good reason for these kinds of rules, they certainly have not been communicated effectively to these very frustrated faculty.]

“...he was so backlogged, so that’s, that’s the big problem.”

“Yeah, there’s just not enough of him to go around.”

“I have this dream of half an hour with my tech person a semester, personal, sit down and talk...”

“I’m glad you gave us a chance to prioritize because I would give up so much just to have a functioning support staff.”

“Not even fantastic, but at least adequate support staff would be helpful.”

Generally, faculty are experts in their fields and for some their field of expertise includes computer operations and computer support. It is exceedingly frustrating to some of these faculty to be told that they cannot have administrator privileges for their own machine (at times purchased through grant funds) and that they cannot configure their machines in ways that assist with their research or meet their personal preferences.

“I’ve am still waiting for software that I could install if I had administrator privileges. This has been over a month now, and it’s just frustrating.

“I don’t need somebody to set it up ... I’m the kind of paranoid person that I don’t like Big Brother watching or Big Brother having access that I don’t know about.

**Faculty want and need control over their machines** so that they can teach the way they need to teach and execute their research in a timely manner. Generally speaking, a cookie-cutter approach does not work with faculty, given their specialized needs and expertise. One faculty member talked about doing her research on a laptop at home because it was so frustrating to try to navigate the permissions and pop-ups on her campus desktop machine. Her graduate assistant moves to her office when the faculty member is out of town, because the graduate student machine is even less capable of executing highly specialized research tasks.
Training and faculty development is uneven. While there were some very positive comments about FacIT staff members and FacIT training, there was also criticism. “Some of these workshops, and I leave there more confused and frustrated than when I go there.”

“I have repeatedly gone over to FacIT for support in this, and they are constantly throwing hurdles at me”

Some faculty expressed concern about new technology that is not being used because of a lack of faculty training; some technology in the new education building, for example, goes unused. “...we have this really neat technology, but nobody knows how to use it.”

Some faculty members have needs for advanced training in the software they use and for the installation of advanced applications. IT personnel and FacIT staff seem unable to address these specialized needs and to handle this kind of high-end faculty development. “...we don’t have the skills on campus to support us. There are many machines that require particular programming that we do not have the skills.”

One faculty member reported coming in on Saturdays and Sundays to configure a lab that she needed for teaching because CMU personnel did not seem to have the specialized expertise to do so.

Further, faculty are not aware of other avenues for receiving assistance. Self-help only goes so far and takes a great deal of faculty time. “...we don’t understand exactly, okay, where do we go for help, and when we go to help, it’s not there. What are we supposed to do next? We’re on deadlines ... I just see this overwhelming, um, problem. Everyone is so overworked and underpaid that when technology doesn’t work, we get frustrated.”

A couple of faculty members noted that they have needs for highly specialized equipment, which are not always available and in working order in FacIT or elsewhere on
campus. It is not clear how faculty should proceed when something they need for teaching or research simply is not available or is not kept in good working order.

Off-campus faculty also noted that their **students need more training** to be effective learning in an on-line environment. These off-campus faculty suggested that students be required to complete some kind of training modules before enrolling in on-line classes.

“I wish there were some kind of one credit class or required pre-course training that students had to do before they could take an on-line course at CMU. Just complete it and show that they’re competent with using the technologies on Blackboard.”

While faculty appreciate **Blackboard**, as stated above, they are **unhappy with the timing of upgrades and with the fact that they were not aware of the changes that were going to be made.**

“I understand the need for upgrading, but it seems that, every time they upgrade, you’re back to square one trying to figure out how things work.”

“I consider myself computer savvy, and I was pulling my hair out because I was trying to get ready for classes when that was when everything changed.”

They were distressed that they had to learn new applications at the last minute before classes began. They are concerned as well that training is not available in a timely fashion; some faculty noted, for example, that **some training modules found on line are, in fact, obsolete.**

Frustrating features of the new Blackboard include the change in location of features; for example, some faculty had to search and search to find how one makes a Blackboard shell available to students.

“...how to make this course available to students, because they buried [this] into a very obscure place, you know. Those things are not self-explanatory, and then maybe a tutorial is helpful [but] it takes time, any of these takes time away from other, more important things. So, it’s not helpful at all, right?”

Some faculty just wish that Blackboard would stabilize so that it is not necessary for them to learn new updates.
“I’m spending whole days [learning new aspects of Blackboard] where I should be doing true content prep for the class.”

“I like Blackboard. It works well. Stop updating the damn thing!”

One faculty member expressed concerns about the capacity of Blackboard to handle large classes and the heavy volume of uploads/downloads occasioned by large class size.

One common argument made by both students and faculty centers on communications issues. Faculty are frustrated that they do not know what software and software licenses are available across campus. CMU might already own the software they need, but they have no way of knowing unless their departmental colleague already uses that software.

“You don’t know who’s got what...And you don’t know who owns some of these things.”

“...we might find that people in departments across campus are using the same software...”

“And, you know that things exist that people don’t know what exists or how to access it.”

Similarly, training modules may exist for some software somewhere, but faculty do not know where they are and how to access them. [Like students, faculty started trading notes on software availability during the focus groups.]

Faculty are very frustrated with the multiple administrative systems that they need to use.

“Now, this university has a number of systems which every faculty member hates, every administrative staff hates”

One faculty member, who by the way is not a department chair, rattled off a list of eight different pieces of software that he needs to use for administrative purposes, none of which integrate with one another and some of which cannot be accessed through i-Central. The frustration is compounded by the fact that faculty were not consulted about the need for the software or about the particular applications purchased.
“And then there are a number of other, other things which we seem to be using because we bought it, you know. It doesn’t seem to have any consideration about how long it takes to use.”

“...this whole thing with prioritization...they send us a form to send out and say here’s where you can go to get the data for the forms. Well you’ve got the data! Why do I gotta transcribe the data off a database onto a form? You have the data.”

Faculty find OFIS extremely difficult and time consuming to use.

“So, if I say OFIS, you know, I can hear screams from my department.”

Several faculty members have simply given up updating their information in the system. One faculty member spent four days trying to enter his vita data into OFIS and still was not finished.

CAYUSE also was singled out as piece of software that is difficult to use. And, faculty with grants are unhappy with the grants accounting system through SAP. Again, as faculty struggle with SAP and other administrative software systems, the issue is whether the university is using well the time of its most accomplished research faculty.

“I think it’s streamlining things for some one or two administrators somewhere along the line ....but it’s making so much extra work for everybody else involved that it almost doesn’t seem to make sense to do it.”

“It’s the same with all the other systems, someone will mess with it without you knowing and then, when you call in, they don’t know because so many people are messing with this area or that area.”

Faculty problems with any of these specialized administrative software systems are compounded by the fact that faculty need much of this software only sporadically; hence, they forget how to use the packages from one time to the next. Further, the packages themselves change with some frequency.

“Each, each system lasts about two years, and then they forget about it.”

The fact that some of these systems (including Blackboard) work with some Internet browsers but not others simply adds to the overall level of frustration.
“I had to go to a student computer lounge to get a PC that would actually work [with one of the administrative software systems].

“Long wait. Two servers weren’t speaking. I don’t know how they were offended but ...

Some administrative software would be easier to use if faculty had scanners or pdf converters in their offices; however, they do not have access to these “devices” that would facilitate use of the administrative software systems in question.

The **freezing of CMU’s website is leading to much consternation.**

“...we can’t update any of them [the web pages]. I mean...we’re in a black hole right now, and I’m so frustrated.”

Some faculty are turning to the use of social media not controlled by CMU to maintain an up-to-date electronic presence for students and others. They worry about the image that CMU is projecting by these web presence problems. Some faculty fretted about the quality of the new website, given how little consultation about specifics had taken place on campus.

“...I think this is a classic example of somebody, somewhere...made a decision without any input from anybody.”

As stated above, **mediation** in classrooms is seen as a positive across campus, but there seems to be some **unevenness** across campus as well. Faculty who teach in multiple buildings are frustrated that the systems are not identical across campus. For example, faculty who move from one building to another to teach or who give guest lectures across campus are not sure whether they need to bring a laptop or whether the building in question uses Mac’s or PC’s. Faculty who teach in the College of Health Professions call for more “**seamlessness**” among the various complex systems that they use as they move through the building for teaching, clinics, and patient care.
In addition, faculty expressed concern that **decisions about mediation** (e.g., where to place equipment) **are made by staff** who do not teach and who do not use the rooms in question.

“I’m sorry. I would just like a projector, maybe that’s wide screen, and that’s not in a place where only two percent of my class can see it.”

“...when they are putting the equipment in, they don’t bother to ask anyone who is actually teaching in those rooms...We asked beforehand: Can we be part of the process?...And we’re told no. We were told outright, no.”

“...the setup [in classrooms] of where the hardware is put ...in many cases absolutely abominable.”

Some faculty were concerned about the **hardware in classrooms**. One faculty member would like to be able to use two screens in a classroom and would simply like to have a working overhead projector, in addition to the mediated system for projecting PowerPoint. The computers in some classrooms are also problematic.

“I think the computer desks that they have there—for those lecture halls—are outdated.”

“...my experience is that the computers that are in the classrooms are the ones that are, or should have, fallen off the edge of the table in terms of their speed, agility ...”

While most comments about the HelpDesk were positive (as noted above), several faculty mentioned the perception that **satisfaction surveys** from the HelpDesk or other IT support operations are only sent or are only returned when staff have reason to believe that the reports will be positive.

“Like if someone’s going to complain about a computer service problem that took two months to work—like they know who I am. ... Because then it’s gonna, if it took two months the last time—if they know I complained—it’s gonna take a whole semester...[the group laughs!]”

Generally speaking, faculty feel that the administration position is that more technology is always better. **There is not sufficient attention paid to making sure that current systems work well and effectively.** Faculty noted that **computers do not always make things better**
and argued that technology should not be used if a task takes longer with technology than without.

“I have to say the principle of using technology is that, if it takes longer to use the technology than without it, let’s not use the technology.”

“…not to be sort of dystopian about this, but they [computer systems] are determining what we do…and so it’s not just that it takes longer, but there’s a lot of stuff that I think we could probably do if we were just using paper and didn’t have the systems…computers are not always making stuff better…”

“…technology is a tool. It’s a means to other ends, and it’s not an end in itself.”

“…technology should never—and I teach technology—should never be an end in itself…”

One faculty member was concerned that the mentality in his college seemed to be:

“we have just gotten this cool thing for you – now do something with it…Sometimes you feel like technology [is] being too aggressive and too far ahead…[Instead, the college should] be more attuned to what people need…”

Similarly, there is not sufficient focus on learning about which technologies actually enhance student learning and which simply employ new gadgets which – although students may like them – do not enhance learning.

Sometimes, the technology gets in the way and makes it more difficult to teach…so my content area is not information technology or computer science. I’m not stupid, but sometimes it’s difficult to keep up.”

“There’s a trade off. Do you want to spend all your time on technology issues, or do you want to work on what might really be important like learning the material that you need to teach the students, that kind of thing.”

“I’m unhappy with the general attitude that technology is the most important thing going on in teaching and learning.”

“I just want to make sure after all the technology’s over they’ve [the students] learned something.”
There were clear differences of opinion about the utility of devices such as clickers, laptops in the classroom, and so forth. This difference probably reflects disciplinary differences, differences in course level, and individual differences in preferred pedagogical method.

**Suggestions for the Future: The Faculty View**

Again, some of the most pertinent suggestions for future improvements involve remediation of the weaknesses articulated above. A consistent theme across faculty groups was the feeling that **faculty are not consulted** before decisions are made and that **decisions about new applications are not communicated to them fully.**

“...we and the students are the end users, and, I think, there’s been a progressive disenfranchisement in terms of what do we use, how do we use it, what do we need, when do we need it, etc.”

In terms of specific new configurations and applications, some faculty would like to have **“blockers” in classrooms** which make it possible for them to stop all gadgets for use by students in particular classes.

“...I’d like to have a classroom or maybe actually the whole building where I could turn off the wireless...”

“...I’d love to have a jammer in my class and plug it into the wall and jam every cell phone and every computer and everything in the room...”

Many faculty expressed frustration about the ways in which gadgets distract students from active involvement in classroom learning and discussion.

“...we all know that multi-tasking is a myth and to be able to pay sustained attention to a human being, a live human being for 45 minutes is a really important skill...”

One faculty member thought that all faculty should receive i-pads to facilitate their work and their communication with students. A number of faculty **would like to use their faculty development funds to purchase the hardware and software** they think is necessary for their work. Currently, it seems that college funds cannot be used for this purpose.
“...they are not very supportive of exploration by faculty in technology. For instance, we cannot use our development money to buy hardware...we cannot even buy a second computer if you have the money.”

Some faculty discussed the need for better software for discussions, conference calls, and meetings (noting difficulties with WIMBA). Off-campus faculty, in particular, complained about the lack of functionality with WIMBA.

“I am hoping one day I will have some kind of tool that will allow me to write more flexibly, then the WIMBA classroom really will come to life.”

And, some faculty would like to see enhanced development of the virtual labs, so that they, too, could access CMU-licensed software.

What was notable, however, in faculty discussions is that faculty were not especially interested in more, more, more. For example, there was no explicit discussion of new mobile apps!

“Stop trying to add stuff, and start working on the stuff we have. And maybe taking away some of the stuff we don’t want.”

Rather, faculty want improved communication, more consultation, and an enhanced commitment to making existing systems effective in meeting the diverse needs of faculty. Faculty cannot be viewed as interchangeable parts but rather as experts whose expertise needs to be acknowledged and used to support appropriate computer figurations that advance both teaching and research across the disciplines.

“...everybody has to follow the same rules. It’s kind of ridiculous to me.”
Themes from Academic Department Support Staff

The overall organization of this section of the report parallels that presented for students and faculty. Again, common themes predominate, although some of the college and disciplinary differences that were found in the faculty groups are replicated here. Again, direct quotes from focus group participants are found in italics.

Strengths—The Academic Support Staff View

Academic office professional staff have generally positive things to say about computer operations, when they are in good working order. As one staff member notes: “I like everything until I have a problem.” That is, they note that they have computers on their desks that work; the software programs Word and Excel are operational; they have access to the SAP system; and an e-mail system is available to them. They note that they can call the Help Desk when they have problems and can receive support services from their college technology support staff. The ability to access e-mail and iCentral from home was also seen as an advantage.

Staff members also appreciated the fact that the software in their workplace is kept up to date with the latest versions of, for example, Word. One staff member whose faculty were in more than one building appreciated access to Skype to stay in touch with department members.

Weaknesses—The Academic Support Staff View

Most of the discussion focused on the frustrating or negative aspects of computer operations. A number of staff mentioned that they are not able to configure their computers in ways that best meet their personal needs and preferences. They are “locked out” of their own machines.

“…the head tech has decided on my behalf what programs I need or do not need on my computer, despite what I may need or may not need on my computer.”
In addition, because they do not have administrator rights to their own machines (or to those of the faculty in their departments), they must rely on their tech support staff to complete the simplest of tasks (e.g., downloading upgrades to Adobe) rather than using such staff for more complex undertakings.

“...[we] shouldn’t have to write a work order for someone to come and update Adobe.”

One staff member noted that she does not appreciate being “treated like I’m an idiot; I’m not going to do something bad.”

Staff members were especially frustrated by the new room scheduling system through the Registrar’s office, ASTRA which was described as “very, very cumbersome.” The system is difficult to use and it results in multiple e-mails in response to a request to schedule a single room. Further, scheduling is limited to a particular time period—you cannot schedule too far in advance and you cannot schedule at the last minute.

In addition, they found the SAP system for accessing student academic records difficult to use in the sense that the information that academic department are most likely to need is found only by clicking multiple tabs or by going in and out of the system several times. The general sense is that the system was not designed with the needs of academic support staff in mind.

“It shouldn’t be this convoluted to get the information that we work with everyday.”

“So many clicks, so many back and forths.”

One staff member noted that it should be possible to write customized SAP reports to meet departmental needs, but this either is not easy to do or is not possible at all.

“My thought is they should have it so we can make our own ad hoc reports. That functionality is in SAP already, they just don’t have it turned on for any of us.”
Staff noted that IT has not been able to write those reports that departments need for important activities such as filing the paperwork for specialized accreditation.

The relatively **new system that Faculty Personnel Services now required for new hires is also problematic** for staff. Staff, who are only allowed Guest privileges, find it necessary sometimes literally to restart their machines to access what they need. And, if more than one search is underway, staff find that they need to get into and out of the program to complete the simplest of tasks. They spend time on the telephone with Faculty Personnel Services to use a system which is supposed to be a computerized system.

Staff also mentioned that **CMU’s current web site is difficult to navigate** and that the current search engine gives you results that are not useful. Further, even staff members who have been at the institution for years have difficulty locating information because pages are redesigned, pages are moved, and pages become dysfunctional (i.e., dead links).

“**And sometimes links don’t work and you get used to using a certain path to find something, and then that’s gone.**”

Staff are concerned that CMU may be losing students because they, too, cannot find what they want. Several staff members also noted that the 48859 zip code is not available as a way of locating CMU in MapQuest.

In addition, **forms are changed or updated by offices across campus without appropriate communication to the offices**—the customers—that most use those forms. Those originating offices seem to think that staff download forms each time they use them, when, in fact, staff maintain copies of forms on their own hard drives and then edit them as new situations arise.

“I don’t have time to search everybody’s web page to look for new forms. I’m barely hanging on as is.”
The current **web migration project is leading to a good deal of frustration.** The inability to update web pages leads to out-of-date information and to an increased workload of updating for web specialists once the new system goes live. Further, some staff members were concerned about the ways in which decisions were made regarding the content of the new website.

> "Who on earth are you to tell us what we need to get out to the public? That’s not your decision to make."

Academic support staff were also concerned about the **out-of-date hardware** that exists in the classrooms and student computer labs in their areas and for their faculty and graduate assistants.

> "...we’re moving forward, but I have faculty and temporary faculty and a lab—a student lab—and those computers are so old."

> "...the mediation is so shoddy, it’s so old...And, faculty come to me for help, and there’s nothing I can do."

Fixed term faculty, in particular, are sometimes given systems that are the oldest or least functional.

> "It’s an embarrassment when we get a new faculty member to campus because, generally, now they’re fixed term faculty members, and they come in and you’re giving them this piece of sh__ computer that, honest to God, I wouldn’t use for a boat anchor, but that’s what I have to give them."

Systems for rotating new computers into offices and labs that were in place in the past have been discontinued. Fixed term faculty members depend on their personal machines, because the university-supplied machines are so out of date.

> "...they’re bringing their own laptop in. That is an embarrassment. It doesn’t look very good; it doesn’t look very good for CMU."
Departments and the colleges do not have a line-item in their budgets for computer purchases. Upgrading of computers and software in some areas seems to depend on the success of faculty in securing grants.

“There’s no budget anywhere on this campus for faculty, at least in my experience, for computers. We don’t have a budget anywhere. So, all my faculty, if it weren’t for my computer tech literally going to the auctions and picking up computers for five dollars and bringing them back to our department, we wouldn’t have computers.”

Concerns were also expressed about the computer inventory system. Support staff find that they need to create their own system, either because their college support staff system is simply inaccurate or because the college support staff does not share relevant information with departments.

“...we’re actually having to go office to office and check. And, it’s a mess.”

At the most general level, academic support staff are frustrated that they are not consulted before changes in technology are made. This lack of consultation is, quite frankly, insulting and results in decisions that are less than optimal. “Who are these people telling us what we need?” There was some agreement that the whole campus simply does not work together, with the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing.

“The whole campus doesn’t work together...You can’t get everything on the website to match. You can’t get anything to match.”

As one staff member noted:

“And in a nutshell, that internal customer service. CMU lacks that dramatically.”

Furthermore, after decisions are made, communication about changes is limited or not forthcoming.

“We really don’t know what’s on campus, what’s available, what can we use, what shouldn’t we use. It’s, yeah, it’s definitely a communications thing.”

“You don’t know what you don’t know.”
Focus group members learned about computer features within the focus group itself, not a particularly systematic way for upgrading staff knowledge and skills. The group discussed Image Now—some had heard of it; some had not.

**Suggestions for the Future: The Academic Support Staff View**

Academic support staff would like the university to develop a **computerized semester course scheduling system**.

“*I just have never seen anything as backwards as our scheduling system.*”

While an electronic system is being pilot tested, staff members who have experienced it are not impressed with its ease of use or functionality.

Staff would also like a **computerized system for filing Bump Cards** for individual students, rather than giving them the orange card which has been in use for years.

Support staff members also noted that there have been efforts to **mail them “tech tips”** on a regular basis, but these communications seem to have been phased out. Staff thought that such a system would be useful in helping them keep up with new developments and with helpful features in existing system. However, staff noted that such communications must come directly to their e-mail Inboxes and that they must be written in a non-technical language, if they are to be useful and used.

Staff would also like to be able to **customize their iCentral** so that it is convenient for them and so that the forms and other materials that they need frequently are automatically updated.

“*Yeah, if I could customize that page, and they could control the links, then, so that it’s always up to date. But I know exactly where it is for me.*”
SharePoint does not seem to be a popular mechanism for facilitating this kind of easy access to “favorites.”

**Discussion**

It is clear that students, faculty, and academic department support staff find much that is positive in CMU’s current system of computer hardware, software, and support. However, there is also room for improvement.

All groups mention problems with out-of-date hardware for individual offices, for classrooms, and for labs. Concerns were also expressed about the unmet needs for specialized software and for extended lab hours. Groups are also frustrated by incompatibilities among existing systems.

All groups also discussed their desire for more training and support for existing hardware and software configurations. Faculty members, in particular, are frustrated that their research and teaching is being compromised by the lack of high-end technical expertise at CMU and by the lack of adequate technical support in some colleges. Faculty feel that the “one size fits all” approach that dominates some thinking within IT serves neither their research nor their teaching interests well.

Students are frustrated by what they see as a lack of faculty use of applications and devices that they find important, while faculty are concerned that technology is being implemented without thought to whether it actually enhances student learning. Faculty are not convinced that CMU’s current technology ethos and its multiple administrative systems actually create more efficiency and enhanced organizational capacity.
More generally, however, CMU needs to be concerned about a refrain repeated by all groups – namely, that consultation with end users about their needs and preferences is not forthcoming and that communication about decisions and new applications is sporadic at best. CMU’s problems with computer technology and computer support are, in part, computer related! However, the institution also needs to attend to the social organizational components of its computer operations. Higher education organizations are not well served and they do not use resources most wisely when they fail to address the frustrations of faculty and academic department support staff.

CMU’s CIO should be commended for his interest in engaging the viewpoints of students, faculty, and staff in strategic planning efforts. Continuing efforts to engage all segments of the campus community in discussions about continuity and change would be much appreciated.
APPENDIX A

Focus Group Guide
Introduction:
The purpose of this discussion is to provide assistance to Roger Rehm and his computer support staff so that they can plan appropriate kinds of computer support and computer applications for the next three to five years.

So, think about CMU’s computer technology broadly and focus on efforts to plan over the long term.

1. Generally speaking, what do you like about CMU’s current computer technology and operations?
   What works best for you?

2. Now, what do you not like about CMU’s computer technology and operations?
   What do you find frustrating?
   What interferes with your ability to teach and conduct your research [faculty]?
   What interferes with your ability to be successful with your classes and to enhance your life as a student [students]?

3. What would you like to do now that you cannot do because of the current configuration of computer technology at CMU?
   What kinds of other support or applications would you like to see in the future to increase your ability to teach and conduct your research [faculty]?
   What kinds of other support or applications would you like to see in the future to increase your success with your classes and to enhance your life as a student [student]?

4. You have mentioned several “things” that would be useful to have available in the future. Let’s discuss priorities.
   Which of these “things” are most important to you? Which have highest priority?
   Which of these “things” would be nice to have, but they have lower priority?
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
INFORMED CONSENT

Focus Groups with Students and Faculty on Computer Technology at CMU

You are invited to participate in this focus group because we are interested in learning more about your experiences with computer technology at CMU and about your views about the types of computer support and applications that should be in place at CMU in the future. Your discussion will be useful to the university’s efforts to plan for computer technology improvements over the next three to five years.

A focus group discussion lasts between one and two hours. One person acts as a facilitator asking general questions and encouraging participation. Another person takes general notes, although no notes that would identify you or others. The discussion is open ended. You should feel to add anything that you like. There are no right or wrong answers. On the other hand, you should never feel compelled to respond to any particular question. Your participation is totally voluntary. The members of the focus group will, of course, hear the comments that you choose to share. We are asking all participants to keep these discussions confidential. We can assure you that the project director pledges confidentiality and that your responses will never be linked to your academic or personnel record or to any other records that the university maintains.

If you have any questions, please ask them to me now. Or, if you have questions about this project or about your rights as a participant, you can contact me at (989) 774-2336. I am the Director of the Center for Applied Research at Central Michigan University, and I am directing this project for Roger Rehm, CMU’s Chief Information Officer. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have voluntarily decided to participate in this project and that you have voluntarily agreed to have the focus group discussion tape recorded. No names or other identifying information will exist in the transcription of the tape.

Your signature: _________________________________________________

Your printed name: ______________________________________________

Today’s Date: ____________________
Appendix C

Communications to Students, Faculty, and Academic Department Support Staff
Invitation

Dear [Student Name]:

The university's Chief Information Officer has asked me to conduct a series of focus group with students to learn their views about CMU's computer technology, applications, and operations. The insights that students provide will help the university plan for the future, and are part of CMU's strategic planning efforts.

A focus group is a guided, confidential discussion among a small group of people. It lasts for about one hour. I would be very pleased if you could join me and a group of fellow students at a focus group discussion on Wednesday, October 19, at 5:30 p.m. or Thursday, October 20, at 5:30 p.m.

Refreshments will be provided.

This is a great opportunity to share your viewpoints and experiences and help to shape CMU's computer support in the coming years.

Please click REPLY and tell me WHICH DATE you are able to attend. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have as well. After hearing from you, we will confirm with the place to meet and other details.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mary S. Senter, Director
Center for Applied Research
Professor of Sociology
774-2336
Invitation

Dear [Faculty Name] or [Staff Name]:

Roger Rehm, the university’s Chief Information Officer, has asked me to conduct a focus group with [faculty] [department staff] to learn your views about CMU’s computer technology, applications, and operations. The insights that you provide will help the university plan for the future, and are part of CMU’s strategic planning efforts.

A focus group is a guided, confidential discussion among a small group of people. It lasts for about one hour. I would be very pleased if you could join me and other department staff Friday, November 11, beginning at 11:30 am and we will end by 1:00 pm. Lunch will be available beginning at 11:30 and discussion will begin soon after that.

This is one way to share your viewpoints and experiences and to help to shape CMU’s computer support in the coming years. Conversations will be confidential; no names or identifying information will be used in the final report.

Please click reply to this email and let me know if you are able to attend. I will send you the exact location after I hear from you. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have as well.

I’m looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Monica Folske for Mary S. Senter, Director
Center for Applied Research
Professor of Sociology

774-2572
Confirmation

Thank you for responding to our invitation for the technology focus group. We will meet:

**Friday, November 11 in the Lake Huron Room** on the top floor of the Bovee Center.

Lunch will be available beginning at **11:30 am** and we will be finished no later than 1:00 pm.

If you have other questions please feel free to contact me.

Thanks,
Monica Folske
Center for Applied Research
307 Anspach
774-2572

Confirmation and Instructions—WIMBA

Thank your agreeing to participate in a discussion with the off campus community about CMU’s computer technology, applications, and operations. The insights you provide will help the university plan for the future, and are part of CMU’s strategic planning efforts.

This will be one of our initial attempt to hold a discussion electronically. We have provided the steps below for you to use to evaluate your computer and its ability to participate or not. Please follow the steps below to participate in the session. If you have difficulty you will need to contact the Help Desk as listed. This technology is also brand new to us.

We will be holding the discussion:

**Wednesday November 2nd 8:00 pm EST**

We look forward to speaking with you soon.

**STEP 1: SETUP WIZARD**

As soon as possible, please run the **Set-up Wizard** found at: [http://cmichlive.wimba.com/wizard](http://cmichlive.wimba.com/wizard) This will test your computer configuration and meet the requirements to access this session held in Wimba Classroom. We recommend the **Firefox** browser for use with Wimba. For Technical Support prior to, or during the online session please call the CMUHelpdesk: 989-774-3662

**STEP 2: Session LOGIN**
PLEASE NOTE: You must complete STEP 1 (SETUP WIZARD) in order to access the webinar.

To join the live session:


Please login under “Participant Login” using your **real first AND last name** (no password required). The room will be available approximately 1 hour before the event begins. (Available beginning at 7pm ET).

Monica Folske for Mary Senter
Center for Applied Research
307 Anspach
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, MI 48859

**Focus Group Filled Up**

We are sorry to say that our scheduled Focus Group to learn your views about CMU’s computer technology, applications, and operations is filled up already. Our limited space cannot take any more participants.

Thank you for your response and we will be in touch if more sessions are scheduled.

Sincerely,
Monica Folske
Center for Applied Research
307 Anspach Hall
774-2572