The Quality of Life Committee’s

Report to the President

At the request of Dr. Catanese, the Quality of Life Committee met five times within the 2011-2012 academic year to investigate, and make recommendations about, three quality-of-life areas: (1) Promoting “High Tech with a Human Touch” – How does technology drive our behavior?, (2) Global Education: Are we meeting the cultural needs of our institution and surrounding communities?, and (3) Promoting a sustainable campus. The larger committee was broken down into 3 subcommittees, which were charged to gather preliminary information/feedback about each area and to make recommendations based on their findings. Each area is addressed separately below.

I. Promoting “High Tech with a Human Touch” – How does technology drive our behavior?

Subcommittee: Karin Almasi, Peter Cohen, Catherine Cook, Eric Kledzik, Phillip O’Meally, Shane Santana (lead coordinator)

The subcommittee submitted a list of twelve ideas/areas where technology could be impactful to the entire institution, including online. These can be found in Appendix A.

The subcommittee chose to delve further into the effective use of phone trees on campus, specifically with Continuing Education (ABA program), Financial Aid, and Technology Support Center. The Telecommunications Office tracked peak usage and average hold times over a six month period and also looked into depth of options.

Findings (see Summary Charts in Appendix A):
(1) The peak usage times on the phone trees coincide with the Florida Tech cycles, so the peak times make sense.
(2) Average wait time coincides with peak usage times.
(3) Although Financial Aid had the highest Abandon Rates (initially), they have made major changes to their system and the queue time has improved. Financial Aid expects a rush on the system before the start of the Fall semester.
(4) The phone tree technology seems to be fine and is meeting its intended purpose for peak operation times.
(5) The depth of options within each office using phone tree technology does not appear to be unreasonable.
Recommendation:
Due to increases in enrollment, the number of calls to Continuing Education (ABA/online) programs and Financial Aid during peak operation times are growing. It is the recommendation from this subcommittee that these programs and other support departments, such as the Technology Support Center, be provided with additional staff to handle the excessive load during these times in order to keep the wait times and abandon rates as low as possible.

II. Global Education: Are we meeting the cultural needs of our institution and surrounding communities?

Subcommittee: Cassandra Carnley, Ulreen Jones, Swapnil Kumar, Jackie Lingner (lead coordinator), Daniel Otero

The biggest concern of the international community on campus is the lack of space dedicated to their cultural needs. The committee members discussed how this was becoming a growing concern in light of our increasingly higher percentage of graduate and undergraduate international students on campus. The location of the space is also important and the ISSS office indicated that they would rather stay in the Keuper Building and expand the second floor to include a meeting space and prayer room.

Another point mentioned was the desire to effectively communicate with incoming internationals before arrival on campus. Despite emails and regular post, many students still remain uninformed about what is required once they arrive or expected activities.

Recommendations:
(1) Space: A specific recommendation from this Quality of Life subcommittee is the need for dedicated space for multicultural programming on the FIT campus; using a free standing facility such as the AFC, a free-standing house or Keuper Administration Building as examples. With the addition of University Commons, space on campus will be opening up and the consideration of an International Center should be discussed. Taking cost into consideration, renovations to the Keuper Administration Building would be minimal compared to the construction of a new free standing facility.

Dedicated space would provide a focal point for student activities and programs of a global, cultural, educational and social nature, and a gathering place for Florida Tech’s international and domestic students and student organizations. The space would continue to support the academic mission of Florida Tech and strategic priorities by working closely with campus partners in supporting over 1600 international students from over 100 countries around the world. Furthermore, the
space would create opportunities for all students to learn about each other’s culture and geographic region and identity.

The ISSS Office and its sister organization, International Student Service Organization (ISSO) conduct ongoing events throughout the year, including the annual International Festival, International Student Orientation, Welcome and Year-end Events, bi-weekly coffee hours, weekly workshops, to name a few. These event spaces currently being utilized on-campus are at/over capacity. Dedicated space would need to include a lounge, multipurpose room, student meeting rooms, kitchen facilities, a prayer room and offices. The space would be used to house the ISSS Administrative Offices, international student organizations, and perhaps a study abroad office and library (per Heather Cudmore). Such dedicated space would provide a venue to be utilized by all units on campus conducting multicultural programming, and also be available for other organizations to meet (Study Abroad, ICC, Globalization Club).

One immediate concern for the university is the need for a dedicated Prayer Room that is more centrally located. Grissom Hall is currently being underutilized because the majority of students are on the south campus for classes.

The ISSS Office would continue to provide assistance to our international students in all matters pertaining to immigration, visa status, document certification, employment authorization and more. Our office offers arrival orientation and cultural adjustment to our international students and dedicated space would help to encourage all domestic students to get actively involved in activities sponsored by the ISSS, ISSO, and in the various international clubs at FIT to ensure they are globally engaged during their FIT experience.

A lounge would offers all FIT students a place to relax, meet new people from all over the world, enjoy foreign shows, movies, or sports on various media and a place to plan and implement programs and activities.

Also, as many international students smoke, there could be a dedicated area outside and away from the International Center specifically for smoking; this area could be course be used for all campus smokers.

(2) Effective Communication: The campus currently communicates with prospective students by e-mail. The ISSS Office has several student volunteers from different countries who communicate with admitted students (in their native language if available), answering questions/concerns from both students and their family. These student volunteers communicate with students on their own time from their own
rooms. With the addition of dedicated space, a work area could be set up for current students to reach out to admitted students.

Beginning with the fall 2012 semester, the ISSS Office is going to offer SKYPE sessions. It is hoped that this communication will start to bridge the gap between the student’s admission and their arrival into the United States and onto campus.

The Airport Pick-Up program for new international students is being resurrected with the fall 2012 semester.

Another suggestion is a mentoring program. Florida Tech could provide incentives to attract good students to serve as mentors. An incentive could be a paid lunch at a local restaurant, volunteer hours, etc.

III. Promoting a sustainable campus

Subcommittee: Susanne Bahr, Dylan Dalrymple, Rob Ghiotto, Bill Macom, Jon Shenker (lead coordinator)

With a dedicated sustainability faculty member and educational program (i.e., minor) and a Sustainability Committee, there are numerous ongoing sustainability activities and plans. These include projects in lake and Botanical Gardens management, management of campus ponds, recycling, and expansion of current solar-power energy efforts.

Recommendations (see other recommendations in Appendix B):
(1) Full-time position: A new full-time position in either Support Services or Facilities to be the Manager of Sustainability will be essential to develop, coordinate and administer programs and policies within the area of sustainability at the university. This manager would facilitate cost savings, fundraising and grant awards in the area of sustainability, would work closely with all administrative and academic departments, student groups, alumni and various campus entities. The manager would be responsible for promoting and coordinating sustainability initiatives throughout the university and with the City of Melbourne, and for the successful management of sustainability programs and sustainability best practices.

(2) Funded Annual Sustainability Project (sponsored by Quality of Life Committee or other university-level entity that conducts a highly visible, student-oriented project on campus): For 2012, the Sustainability subcommittee proposes a wetlands aquascaping of the Olin Quad retention pond in conjunction with Earth Day 2012 (April 22nd). Although only two years old, this pond is presently undergoing serious erosion around the edges and is being managed with highly “Unsustainable” practices.
The proposed project will organize and promote student, faculty and staff volunteers to install low maintenance native wetland plants around the periphery of the pond. This would inhibit the current erosion problem, control excess nutrients and improve water quality so the pond doesn’t have to be dyed blue in color each month (as an anti-algae control). The native wetland plants would be small and planted on a 2 to 3 foot spacing (depending on species), requiring approximately 2,000 plants to do the slope from water’s edge to the top-of-bank (some professional services would be required to remove approximately a 4 to 6 foot strip of existing sod). Most of these plants produce attractive flowers, and would quickly spread to produce a riparian barrier against excess fertilizer entering into the pond. Volunteers would be provided with inexpensive work gloves and garden trowels. The cost for the plants is estimated to be $3 each and can be supplied by a local nursery. This pond would serve as the prototype for improving the other ponds on campus.

Estimated cost: approximately $6,500
Appendix A

“High Tech”

Subcommittee
“High Tech with a Human Touch” Ideas

- Use of QR codes across campus for easier access to information for students and visitors
- Use digital signage to promote e-books (library has 31,000 e-books; 45,000 full-text periodicals and research guides for each academic discipline created by library information advocates)
- Promoting safety while using electronic devices (texting, ipods, etc)- which will be extremely important with the completion of the new building across Babcock St.
- The proper use of electronic devices in the classroom
- Encouraging instructors to conduct pre-test reviews in ANGEL
- Utilize the blank digital signage screen in Panther dining by moving it to the Chemistry Department
- Is there a substitute for TV 98? If so, who is maintaining the information and can it be broadcast on the new digital signage?
- Stream SGA meetings online through UStream as an “online town hall” so online students can actively participate by typing in questions and comments
- Include a section in University Experience courses for appropriate use of electronic devices in the classroom
- Incorporate students with the planning and construction of new buildings, e.g., allowing construction management majors to intern during the construction process
- Emailed suggestion: to have some human touch for sustainability. Possibly for Earth Day we can have something human related to earth activities.
- Less use of phone trees – make it easier to contact an actual person when calling a department.
Appendix B

“Sustainability”

Subcommittee
1) Awareness of Sustainability Efforts on Florida Tech Campus
The Sustainability Steering Comm, chaired by Dr. Nelson (committee members: K. Lindeman, G. Tsark, J. Oglesby, A. McIlwraith, and others) has been established to help oversee sustainability efforts on campus.

Major goals of the SSC:
- Begin to identify and coordinate the many Sustainability activities around campus
- Effectively publicize the activities, through the university website, a rotating banner on main web page and other venues
- As new activities are instituted, news of their actions will be released to the community and to the news media

2) Infrastructure for Sustainability on Florida Tech Campus
Work with Facilities Management and the Sustainability Steering Committee to incorporate sustainable technologies in the physical structure of the university
- As equipment needs replacement or repair, efforts should be made to convert to more efficient, sustainable technologies (e.g. photovoltaic power/LED lighting/high efficiency pumps and motors). Priority should go to highly visible items when possible
- New structures on campus should be designed and constructed with LEED designation and technologies in mind; particularly as demonstrations of Florida Tech’s commitment to Sustainability (and as excellent student recruiting/public relations tools) and for lower long-term operating costs.

3) Academics of Sustainability on Florida Tech Campus
- Continue to promote the Sustainability Minor with links to major programs in Biology, Environmental Sciences and Engineering
- Create central office for Sustainability to coordinate and promote student projects and Facilities projects (see below).
- Develop a standard form for submittal of student project ideas that can be used to coordinate publicity and fund-raising efforts
- Seek funding from outside donors to support student Sustainability projects. This effort will require coordination with Florida Tech Development Office.