Marquette University Committee on Academic Technology  
April 26, 2013 –Minutes

Attendance:
Present: Bruce Boyden, Lesley Boaz, Michael Class, S.J., Steven Crane, Scott D’Urso, Kathy Lang, Thomas Lenoir, Patrick Loftis, Shaun Longstreet, Gary Meyer, Jon Pray, Heidi Schweizer, Chris Stockdale, Tom Wirtz
Absent: Margaret Cinto (Excused), Laura Matthew, Barrett McCormick, Lars Olson (Excused), Janice Welburn (Excused)
Invited Guest: Mark Simonson, Office of the Provost
Recorder: Steven Crane

Approval of Minutes:

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 pm with a reflection by Jon Pray. After brief review, the minutes For the March 22, 2013 meeting were unanimously approved.

Information Items:

Current committee chair, Scott D’Urso, announced that he would be going on sabbatical and then becoming a department chair, so he needed to step down as chair of this committee. It was agreed that any nominations should be conveyed to Gary Meyer and/or Scott D’Urso sometime during the following week. If one is forthcoming, that person will be the new chair. If there are multiple nominations, the new chair will be determined by the committee through electronic communication.

Subcommittee Update:

Jon Pray reported on the progress of the e-textbook committee. The committee met with representatives of Follett regarding what they see as trends in the area. Follett indicated that their data show roughly 40% of freshmen make use of electronic material, while only 12-13% of seniors tend to do so. It was noted by the committee that this pattern makes sense given the penetration of electronic materials in the grade and high schools, and that we can expect these percentages to rise as these younger students arrive on campus. It was also, noted, however, that there are multiple potential interpretations of these data, so that the best “take away” seems to be that the trend is toward more utilization. There were also some questions about the current status of the University’s negotiations for a new contract with Follett, and what role the committee might play. Jon Pray indicated he would explore these issues.

Jon Pray next indicated that the discussion with Follett extended to concerns about the cost of books and affordability. Follett indicated that rental options, custom texts, and course packs may be the best solution to cost containment. It was noted that part of the cost problem might be traced to slow adoption decisions, especially given the lead time needed to make use of customized publications. It was further noted that late adoptions can cause complications regarding compliance with federal law. At the same time, it was pointed out by several committee members that there are sometimes good reasons for slower adoption decisions, including the diversity and complexity of choices in the current
market, the need to reflect on a results of a given semester, and difficulties associated with selecting a standard text across multiple sections of a course.

Patrick Loftis reported that the hardware/software committee was continuing work on two efforts: 1) A survey of D2L users is planned, to identify high, moderate, and low users, and to solicit information about usage patterns and issues that might need attention. Those with possible questions for this survey were invited to submit them to the subcommittee. 2) The committee is working with Kathy Lang to learn about college-based software licensing issues and usage. The goals are to find out what usage patterns exist across campus and to explore options for leveraging the university’s buying power to lower costs. Procedures for both collecting and disseminating information in this area are being explored.

New Business:

1. Academic Technology Expenditures

Mark Simonson of the Office of the Provost made a brief presentation summarizing the procedures used in the university to track academic technology spending. He distributed a short handout that included a narrative of how spending occurs and is funded across different units. This also included summary data on hardware/software expenditures over the last several years. As part of the presentation, Mark explained some of the challenges associated with detailed tracking, including the nature of the accounts system, and the blurred or fuzzy distinctions that exist across some broad budget categories. In particular, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish academic from business expenditures, and capital from operating expenditures. In addition, some units apparently funded some of their own technology efforts through either outside funds or reallocations from other parts of their unit budgets. The primary messages were that: 1) the university spends a lot each year on technology, something on the order of $2-2.5 million a year outside of the formal IT budget. It was noted that this is a bit less than 1% of the overall University budget, but when the 4% or so for IT is factored in, this seems to be close to the 5% benchmark that has been reported for universities elsewhere. 2) Some units try to support educational technology through their own funds. At times, this complicates the process of determining the total academic technology support level university-wide.

Following the presentation there were some questions regarding the mechanics of the expenditure tracking system, including what the current system can and cannot break out in detail. There was discussion about whether or not the committee should recommend that a more detailed tracking of academic technology expenditure be adopted, perhaps as part of the new budgeting system when it is adopted. After some general discussion of whether the committee should develop some specific questions or categories for tracking, it was agreed that the committee should first meet with representatives from the Finance Office. It was concluded that this would take place next fall.

2. Conversation about Online Learning

Gary Meyer offered a brief review of the thinking that led to the development of the meeting that is to take place on May 2, 2013. He indicated the goals were: 1) to inform the campus community about what MU does in the way of online and blended course offerings, what type of support is provided, and what
thinking might be going on regarding MOOCs. 2) To engage the community to discover what is on their minds and what directions they think MU should go.

Heidi Schweizer then provided details on the planned meeting. She indicated that there had been good response, and that over 65 people were expected to attend. The agenda will include a brief summary of the state of the art currently at MU (including various types of support), and some information about MOOCs. But most of the time will be devoted to small breakout group discussions around several questions. Possible questions discussed included the following:

1. What should be the level or amount of blended/online undergraduate coursework at MU?
2. What should be the level or amount of blended/online graduate coursework at MU?
3. ???
4. What is needed in the way of support for instructional efforts?
5. What, if anything, should be done in the area of MOOCs?
6. What concerns should we have about quality and how should they be addressed?

It was the consensus of the committee that this would be a good event, and one that might be considered for repeating on an annual basis. As reinforcement of this notion, it was noted that a similar event held recently in Engineering was quite successful.

3. Other Business

As a final order of business, the committee briefly reviewed the agendas of the current two subcommittees. It was concluded that both currently have worthy efforts underway and that both should be continued into next year.

Given no other specific business, the committee adjourned at 2:45 pm.