

TSAC Minutes

Wednesday, December 20, 2000

Present: Carla Birckelbaw, David Kuntz, James Fielder, Kate Plantholt, Pete Juvinal, Doug Mock, Krena Hoyt, Ken Fansler, Eric Hodges, Melissa Enderlin, Randy Hill, Rudy Radosevich, Scott Genung

Absent: Dean Plumadore

Guest: Dave Williams

Agenda

1. Charge to committee from Dave Williams
2. Open forum for questions to Dave Williams about TSAC and/or the Distributed Computer Support Plan
3. General discussion of initial steps for implementing plan and initial goals for TSAC
4. Discussion/approval of Help Desk software RFP
5. Business items - co-chair election procedures
frequency/time of meetings
communication medium

1. Charge to committee from Dave Williams

Dave Williams, Associate Vice President for Information Technology, attended the first meeting of TSAC (Technology Support Advisory Consortium) to provide the committee with its charge for its initial actions. He spoke to several points:

- Each of the members of the committee has been selected by their respective Dean or Vice President to represent all technology support within their college or VP area. It will be very important for each of the members to communicate the recommendations and actions of TSAC to all technology support staff within their area or college, as well as bring their area's concerns to TSAC.
- TSAC reports directly to Dr. Williams, who will provide support or advice as needed on key issues as they arise. He will help the committee determine when recommendations need to be presented to another administrative group such as ECAT or the Provost Advisory Council.
- There are two phases to TSAC's work. Phase 1 is solely concerned with implementing the Distributed Computer Plan, as outlined in the final planning document dated October 2000. He specified a target date for having the DCS plan fully implemented as no later than December 2001. Phase 2 is the long-term agenda for TSAC, discussing day-to-day operational issues involved in the distributed campus support infrastructure. In this mode, TSAC would be concerned with troubleshooting common problems, researching new products, and recommending changes and/or improvements to the current support structure, among many other agenda items.
- Dr. Williams suggested a list of issues needing action during Phase 1, including clustering issues, single phone number for clusters, Help Desk software RFP, recommendation for communications devices, implementation timeline, glossary of acronyms/titles related to the DCS plan, publicity materials in promotion of the plan, training for support staff on aspects of the plan, creation of a handbook, and study of the current role of LAN Coordinators/Managers.
- Meetings with Deans and VPs about how support clusters will be arranged and staffed within their respective areas have gone very well, with Dr. Williams receiving unexpectedly positive response to support needs as recommended in the plan. He will have a new plan to share with TSAC very soon in regards to cluster arrangements.

2. Open forum for questions to Dave Williams about TSAC and/or the Distributed Computer Support Plan

Dr. Williams opened the floor for questions regarding any aspect of what he had spoken about or questions in general. Several issues were discussed and/or clarified, including TSAC's place in the budgeting process,

Phase 1 and Phase 2 of TSAC's work, and where we stand as a campus on technical support staffing issues as studied without successful resolution in the DCS planning committee.

3. General discussion of initial steps for implementing plan and initial goals for TSAC

Carla Birckelbaw, co-chair, offered the following set of goals for Spring 2001 for discussion:

Framework and communications system for the Distributed Computer Support Plan in place by June 2001, including:

- Support clusters identified
- Single phone numbers assigned
- Hotline established
- Minimum set of communications devices defined
- Formal & informal communication channels created
- Service Level Agreements written
- Help Desk software purchased and tested in University Computer Help Desk

Support Clusters Identified- The definition of a "cluster" as opposed to an "administrative unit" caused some confusion and was discussed at length. The working definition arrived at is that a "cluster" is a group of users and support personnel connected by a single telephone number. Clusters are generally, but not consistently, defined by geography or similar areas of concern (i.e., grouping Biology and Chemistry together). An "administrative unit" is a college or VP area. Any administrative unit may (or may not) include several clusters. When the new cluster arrangements approved by the Deans & VPs has been made public, discussion on how to effect the changes in individual areas can begin.

Single Phone Numbers assigned – Each cluster will need to set up a single phone number system. The group discussed generally how that will work in practice, noting that having a single phone number with a response time to users within 15 minutes does not necessarily mean that the phone has to be staffed by a physical person at all times. Again, this is an area where finalized cluster arrangements are needed for meaningful discussion to take place.

Hotline Established- Carla Birckelbaw gave an update on current plans to put the Hotline (Bat Phone) in place. The Help Desk is currently evaluating the different options in terms of equipment needed to maintain 24/7 coverage of this phone number. Operationally, a senior member of the full-time Help Desk staff will answer this phone (or return a page) within 15 minutes 24/7, 365 days a year. There was general discussion of when a call to the Bat Phone is warranted and who will be given the number. Much further discussion is needed on this topic.

Minimum set of communications devices defined – This is a topic that is on the agenda for the Jan. 9 meeting of TSAC. Because TSAC will be making recommendations for equipment purchases that need to be included in the fiscal '02 budgets (which will be due in January-February), a decision on this issue must be made immediately. The group recommended inviting Bill Blomgren, Director of Telecommunications & Network Support Services, to the Jan. 9 meeting to aid in our discussions. The group will need to recommend what it considers the minimum number and type of communications devices (pagers, cell phones, etc.) needed for a single cluster to provide appropriate response to their phone number.

Formal & informal communication channels created – There was brief general discussion on this topic, which is better suited for later in the planning process when the group has a more concrete idea of how best to communicate and when. The idea is that there is a definite need for 2-way formal communications from TSAC representatives back to their area or college. Evaluation of our current structure of Lab Managers & Lan Coordinators' meetings also fall into this category. The topic should also be broadened to include how TSAC wishes to communicate its recommendations to users and other technology committees on campus.

Service Level Agreements written- Each cluster and central support unit will write a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the University Computer Help Desk as part of the Distributed Computer Support Plan. The SLA will be a formal document stating what will be provided, by whom, and when by both

parties. It will define levels of support expected and quantify those as much as possible. TSAC will need to develop a template for these agreements between the Help Desk and clusters/central support units, which can then be individualized as needed.

Help Desk software purchased and tested in University Computer Help Desk – This process is underway. Top vendors have visited campus to demonstrate their products, and a draft Request for Purchase (RFP) has been written (see agenda item #4). Once the RFP has been approved by TSAC, it can be sent to vendors with an approximate due date of mid-January. The current expectation is that the product be implemented, if possible, over Spring Break, in the Help Desk and tested for the remainder of the semester. Departments that wish to implement the software could then do so at their convenience over the summer.

4. Discussion/approval of Help Desk software RFP

Committee members were provided with a copy of the draft Request for Purchase (RFP) for Help Desk software before the meeting, with a request that they review it and be prepared to suggest any changes they deem necessary. No changes were suggested, but there was general discussion of how and when the software would be implemented. The committee approved the RFP, which can then be processed and sent out by Purchasing.

5. Business items

Co-chair election procedures- TSAC was formed with a structure involving 2 chairpersons. One is a permanent co-chair, held by the Distributed Support Coordinator. The other co-chair will be elected annually from the voting members of the group. The group decided to hold an “email election”. Nominations will be sent from committee members (for themselves or others) to the permanent co-chair, by January 5. The co-chair will then send out a list of nominees for voting prior to the January 9 meeting.

Frequency/time of meetings – It was decided by the group that the need to forge ahead quickly with the DCS plan made biweekly meetings necessary. TSAC will meet biweekly beginning January 9 on alternate Tuesdays at 2 pm.

Communication medium – To facilitate discussion between meetings, the group elected to set up a listserv discussion list. The co-chair will request and set up, also serving as owner of the list.

Tentative Agenda for January 9, 2001 meeting:

1. Presentation of “final” clustering arrangements by Dave Williams
2. Define minimum set of communications devices for each cluster
3. Results of co-chair election
4. Other items as suggested by committee members