

**Technology Planning Committee Minutes**

November 16, 2023

**Members Present: Erik Sorenson, Leigh Dooley, Gustavo Vasquez, Stephanie Byrd, Jessica Herrera, Brian Van Pelt, Colin Trujillo, Courtney Sousa, Jose Ramirez, Ericka Barber**

**Agenda Items:**

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| **Item** | **Facilitator** |
| **Update on Disaster Recovery/Other issues**  Erik updated TPC on the disaster recovery efforts. One of the issues is that CR lost access to a data array. IT has been working with different vendors trying to get access back to the array. It came down to a credential issue with the company that sold CR the device. That company is no longer in business and there isn’t anybody that holds the key. This is similar to encrypting a thumb stick but forgetting the password. The thumb stick still has the data on it, but the data cannot be accessed. The recovery company has engineers on hand that believe they can engineer a solution to access the data. The engineers originally estimated it would take up to 8 weeks. IT recently got a report that the engineers think they are making progress but it is going to take longer than anticipated. IT is also working with a data warehouse company KORE to try and get the system built back up. IT had a meeting with KORE the previous day. KORE is having issues with licensing on some of CR’s servers they want to move.  Brian Van Pelt reported that there used to be forms at the bottom of each webpage for students to reach out to the various departments. They were never able to get the functionality of those forms back so the forms have been removed. Brian added boilerplate email addresses at the bottom of the webpages for the various department contacts.  Leigh Dooley gave a report to TPC on the recent Canvas outage. On the evening of November 30th during a regular manual batch upload, teachers and students temporarily lost access to Canvas Fall 2023 classes. Reno was the first one to notify people. He contacted James Pace who is the behind-the-scenes Canvas person who helps with the Canvas uploads. James Pace responded very quickly the next morning and got everyone’s access restored. Unfortunately, it did require some teacher participation for full restoration. Most teachers simply had to republish their classes. There were a couple of teachers that lost their grade book data which required more work. When DE reached out to Canvas to discuss what had happened and see if there was something CR could do to prevent this issue from happening again, Canvas said that they don’t recommend the batch upload process that CR uses because errors do sometimes occur. However, the batch uploads is the process CR has to use for now because the registration system is outdated. James Pace did a great job of pulling everything back together quickly and put some processes in place to try to ensure that this doesn’t happen again.  Jose Ramirez said there is room for improvement in some of the current processes in Canvas. CR disables all course shells out of the gate. This is why teachers had to go back in and re-publish their classes. A lot of other schools don’t do that. Instead, they have Canvas set up so that if someone creates a course shell it is published automatically. Those who do not want to publish it can disable the course shell until they are ready to publish it. A shift in that workflow could have automatically fixed the problem for the majority of the folks who experienced the Canvas outage except for possibly the 5-10 people who had bigger issues with their gradebook.  Jose Ramirez shared that one of the main issues with disaster recovery is that the District has software it has acquired that doesn’t behave well in the disaster recovery scenario. The District needs to revisit those pieces of software to see if they are the right fit for the college. The KORE technology did get migrated over to the new cloud backed up array but the system wouldn’t run because of licensing issues and KORE could not get it operational. KORE wanted CR to engage with them on the migration project which cost approximately $12,000. It is a revenue generating process for them. CR shouldn’t have relationships with vendors that require CR to engage with those vendors when it needs to move data from Server A to Server B to make upgrades. Another vendor is Evoq. The data from Evoq could not be migrated because the license is tied to a machine ID. The District needs to take a closer look at its vendors. IT also needs to do a better job of testing disaster recovery. However, testing disaster recovery creates an outage for a few days. That would have to be done in a non-live environment. While the current issues IT is facing are unfortunate, they are nothing compared to a cyber-attack. The District got lucky but can’t continue to expect that luck will be on its side.  Colin Trujillo asked what was on the data array that can’t be accessed. Erik replied that the main things on that data array were KORE and the website. The data array is very secure, which is what the college wanted, but it is so secure that they are having trouble accessing it. | **Erik/Leigh** |
| **New EZ Proxy implementation**  Colin Trujillo reported that Jose and Jessica have been working on upgrading the proxy system that is used for students to access the library database when they are off campus. With the new system students will be able to access the library database through single sign-on.  Colin said the library had an issue with a security certificate when Jose was out and was told it could not be resolved until Jose was back. From Colin’s perspective this was another Canvas outage or website outage. He would love to have some sort of redundancy in place so it isn’t on one person to get things moving when an issue is encountered. Erik, Colin and Jose will discuss this issue outside of TPC.  Erik asked what the timeline was for the new EZ Proxy system to go live. Jose replied that he would work with whatever schedule the library has. The next step is for the company to provide an account so Jessica Herrera can go in and update the database entries into the cloud system and then he would re-point the website. Jose will need to know who needs access to the system and they will need to decide how to enable access to the Academy of the Redwoods. Jessica and Jose will discuss options. | **Colin** |
| **Vantage Consulting**  Erik reported that IT had a meeting with Vantage Consulting the previous day. Crystal Morse has hired Vantage Consulting to try and help the IT Department and the College in determining what IT’s role is. It is an assessment of what IT is to the District and what IT should and shouldn’t be doing. They are not only looking at IT. It stretches out to all areas of technology such as student support, library services, instruction, faculty, classroom support, marketing, audio-visual support, etc. Erik may try to get a group together from TPC to meet with the consultants when they come to campus for a visit. IT is looking at this as an advantage as IT has been concerned about being understaffed for a long time and it has gotten worse since Covid.  Jose stated that the District generally doesn’t see IT as an asset but more as an enforcer. Colin felt that IT is similar to payroll – nobody thinks about those departments until something goes wrong and then it’s a fire. Colin agreed that there is somewhat of a perception that IT acts as a gatekeeper.  Erik said another area to look at is how IT can communicate better. In recent discussions with another manager it was mentioned that people don’t read their emails. Figuring out a way to communicate things better would be beneficial. Jose mentioned that employees get so many emails that they can’t keep up. Courtney stated that technology can be so foreign to people that even when an email is sent out and is worded in a way that most would consider understandable, those without basic knowledge of technology may not understand it.  Courtney Sousa shared that the Budget Advisory Committee regularly includes technology in their discussions but it is in very broad terms. While there is support for funding technology, it may be advantageous to have someone from IT visit the BAC and discuss specifically what is needed. Erik said whether or not IT is included in the right committees and meetings is another issue that Vantage will be looking at. IT needs to be included in certain discussions where it currently is not.  Gustavo Vasquez stated that expanding a front end help desk would be really helpful. He has been able to answer some of the low level technology questions at Del Norte so hopefully that has helped with the ticket requests from Del Norte employees.  Leigh Dooley asked what the timeframe was for Vantage to complete their assessment. Erik replied that the consultants will visit campus in February or March. Erik is working on putting a list together for Vantage now. They will use that list to put together a proposal. The assessment will show IT and the District where to make improvements. The report should be done by summer 2024.  Jose Ramirez said that Vantage will hopefully be looking at the EMP and FMP and how a small department of IT functions within those directives. They will be able to provide better guidance of what IT should do and cannot do based on geography, staffing levels, funding levels, etc. They will be looking at all of the other elements of IT so they can align those initiatives so they are effective. Vantage’s assessment will basically be an intensive program review which is something the department has needed for a very long time. Looking at the structure of IT, which doesn’t have a Director or a Vice President, it is evident the District doesn’t make investments in IT. The technology that the District has acquired recently has been primarily funded through grants or special state funding. The District doesn’t fund IT in the way that it should.  Brian Van Pelt asked if Vantage may come back with a recommendation to the college to increase IT funding. Jose said that is a potential outcome but he is hoping they come back with more policy based discussions and questions for senior cabinet to look at on how IT is valued, prioritized, funded and staffed. Where is IT in the strategic planning process? Currently, it seems that IT is an afterthought and looked at more as a gatekeeper, as Colin mentioned. IT has directives from the State, the Chancellor’s Office, CISA and the FBI that IT has to abide by but the District planning processes are not aligned with that.  Courtney Sousa stated that even those who are not in IT can see the direction the world is going in. Everything is done electronically. The college can’t keep up and continue to go in that direction without IT.  Jose Ramirez said that the argument isn’t necessarily that IT is understaffed or underpaid. Every department has its own directives but they need to have a shared common understanding of what the benchmark is. Figuring out the very base foundation will make everything else is easier after that. This is philosophically where cabinet needs to come in. Having conversations about services and needs is a lot easier once that foundation has been established. | **Erik** |
| **Department Updates, etc.**  Brian Van Pelt stated that Molly Blakemore has submitted the contract for OMNI CES and it is in the budget office awaiting IT’s review. A consultant has been hired to analyze the website. The website will be getting a new layout, template, and visual design. The consultant has conducted surveys and has delivered a report. There will be a meeting with the consultant where certain people will be invited to look at the findings and help shape how the college moves forward with the new design. The new design won’t be implemented until the technology change over happens. The EVOQ contract runs out in June so they could potentially have OMNI CES up and running by that time. | **Open** |

1. **Future Agenda Items?**
   1. **Computer Replacement Cycle**
   2. **Technology Plan**

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