Interim Report to the Faculty Council
Faculty Information Technology Advisory Committee (FITAC)
January 21, 2000

I. Introduction

The history of this committee (see Appendix) has been characterized by spirited discussions of the future of higher education in a society with increasing reliance on information technology (IT). In this context, we have begun addressing the critical question—How can UNC-Chapel Hill adopt the technology in a timely fashion to ensure its teaching and research competitiveness?

We view successful integration of IT into an organization as having two dimensions: the establishment and management of infrastructure (e.g., hardware and software) and the creation and management of a process that integrates this infrastructure into the academic and service life of the University. FITAC is particularly concerned about clear strategic directions for addressing issues of faculty reward, professional development, scholarship, curricular and programmatic matters, and assuring appropriate faculty voice in the development of IT policy.

UNC-Chapel Hill has been aggressive in pursuing a proactive process of transforming itself in the first dimension, establishing an Information Technology Services (ITS) strategic plan for infrastructure and conceiving the Carolina Computer initiative (CCI). By contrast, the university has not articulated a clear vision and well-conceived strategic plan for the second dimension. For example, the first CCI undergraduate class will begin this fall and yet a comprehensive plan for integrating the use of computers in undergraduate courses has not been presented. Given the current growing infrastructure in IT, FITAC has concluded that it should facilitate the creation of an institutional strategic plan that will make the appropriate use of our rapidly expanding infrastructure and even help direct future infrastructure design.

This interim report to the Council is intended to enlist the Council's support in the committee's effort to initiate a comprehensive dialogue and analysis of IT at UNC-Chapel Hill. FITAC believes the success of such an effort, and the policy recommendations it would generate, requires participation of all segments of the UNC-Chapel Hill community—faculty, administrators, students, and staff. The goal of this undertaking will be to provide a sense of strategic direction, an ordering of priorities, and the establishment of an effective mechanism for incorporating and managing IT in the context of the University's mission. This interim report delineates the need for an institutional IT plan, and highlights important issues the plan should address. Our reflections can not be exclusive but must represent the beginnings of a dialogue that illuminates concerns and issues of individuals and units across the campus community as we ponder IT's role in our future.

I. The Growing Importance of IT at UNC-Chapel Hill

"Information technology" is not new. Conceived synoptically, IT encompasses activities as old as the first efforts to inscribe and retain accounts of peoples' beliefs and accomplishments. Its history is punctuated by various technological advances—the movable press, telegraph, radio, television—with which we are now commonly familiar. Today, however, the term has become an idiomatic reference for digitally based technologies made possible by computer hardware, software, and networking systems.

Most members of the UNC-Chapel Hill community recognize the inevitable growing importance of IT in our teaching, research, service, and administration. Many also recognize the remarkable range of activities that IT supports. IT allows scholars near-universal access to the rarest of Islamic manuscripts, permits students to conduct chemistry experiments in ways not previously thought possible, and encourages faculty to interact with colleagues across the nation and throughout the world on a daily, if not hourly, basis. Clearly, the University would be intellectually poorer if IT were absent, and our students would be ill-served if they were not prepared by us to function creatively and effectively in the technology-rich world that awaits them after graduation.

IT can make a critically important contribution to the realization of the University's mission if it is effectively integrated and used thoughtfully and with clear purpose. The committee acknowledges the contributions of the Vice Chancellor of Information Technology Services at implementing the infrastructure dimension for IT integration and those academic units, faculty, and staff who have taken the lead on finding the time and resources to begin adopting IT productively. We believe, however, that far more must be done. Future policy and practice comprising a programmatic (second dimension) strategic plan must be informed by a comprehensive and rigorous review of the issues and opportunities at stake in our IT investments.

To this end, FITAC believes that efforts to integrate IT into our culture will be meaningful only when as an institution of diverse constituencies we collaborate to craft the directions, priorities, and processes by which IT will become an integral component of the University's intellectual enterprise. Achievement of this goal will require extensive and vigorous discussion among our community. This is especially true when one considers both the contextual and substantive issues at stake in IT policy.

II. IT in Context: Constraints and Opportunities

Information technology is not cheap. Considered in terms of both monetary and human-resource commitments, IT represents an enormous investment for the University. Wise choices in this matter are further complicated by the fact that IT policy has been, and will for some time continue to be, developed in an environment of dynamic, rapid change. Given the profound consequences IT decisions have for our students, colleagues, and co-workers, FITAC has become quite concerned that questions about the broader contextual issues shaping IT policy be proactively addressed. Four such issues and concomitant questions were of particular concern to the Committee:

- o The IT "Revolution": Many argue that IT will revolutionize teaching, learning, and scholarship; others scoff at such claims. If for no other reason, these responses make it imperative that IT policy address very basic questions: What will IT's role be in our future? How should IT be used in our teaching, research, service, and administrative activities?
- o Efficient Technology Utilization: The pace of technological change is daunting. Hardware, software, and use-practices often become obsolete in a few years, if not months. How do we balance effectively between the need to keep up with technology advances, and limit our investments to the technologies that are most effective and efficient given our use-needs?

- o Technology Adoption: UNC-Chapel Hill is not the only institution of higher education confronting these issues. Some of our peers are moving forward more quickly with the diffusion of this innovation into their institutional cultures. In what ways should we adopt IT? How can IT adoption be facilitated? Can we exert what we believe to be an appropriate role in leading the integration of technology into academic life while still learning from the experiences of others?
- o IT Policy Authority: Institutional dynamics are a critical element in how IT issues are addressed and IT policy established. UNC-Chapel Hill functions as an integral member of the UNC system and our policies and practices must complement those of our sister institutions. At the same time, UNC-Chapel Hill must retain sufficient prerogative authority to address our unique circumstances. Moreover, there are critical questions regarding how IT decisions here at UNC-Chapel Hill will be made, implemented, and enforced. What form will the structure and authority of IT decision-making take at UNC-Chapel Hill? How will that authority work in relation to the UNC system and in relation to academic, administrative and service units across the campus?

III. IT at Carolina: Identifying Issues of Substance

In addition to broad contextual issues that will shape the way IT policy will be made, FITAC has begun identifying specific concerns that bear on the substance of the IT policy and practices Carolina needs to develop. For the most part, these concerns are about "fitting" IT with existing practices.

- o Faculty Rewards: Accumulating evidence indicates IT will consume greater amounts of faculty time and will become a robust, substantive scholarly enterprise. As we learn how to use IT more effectively, as we transform our scholarship and scholarly materials into forms more amenable to IT, and as we seek to learn of IT's impact on our lives and the lives of others, the contours of academic life will change. Yet much of this effort and scholarship will not fit within traditional standards we use to define,evaluate, and reward academic excellence and achievement. What incentives or inducements must we provide for faculty to pursue IT-based learning, teaching, and scholarship? What changes must we consider in rewarding faculty when they do pursue IT? How will copyright and intellectual property be allocated and protected in this changing environment?
- o Professional Development and Security: There is growing debate about the effects of IT use on contractual relations and working conditions for faculty and staff in higher education. How will IT policy be managed to guarantee that University employees enjoy appropriate career security and opportunities to acquire IT skill and expertise for teaching and research?
- o Academic Uses: Much of the ongoing discussion about IT turns on questions of how different clienteles can be served by IT applications. For example, on-campus use may differ from distance education use, or baccalaureate uses may differ from graduate and professional education uses. How will UNC-Chapel Hill sort through these issues and respond in appropriate ways to the different pedagogical needs of different clienteles?

- o Resource Utilization: Even the best efforts of faculty, students, and staff will be for naught without support for their efforts. How will we determine the distribution of resources for hardware, software, technical support, instructional design, and education/training for those using the technology? What levels of support are appropriate given the programmatic IT strategic goals established for UNC-Chapel Hill? How will we provide for regular assessment of IT uses in teaching and learning?
- o Funding: Finally, all of these issues must be decided within the constraints of available resources. Decisions to support IT will inevitably layer additional demands on institutional resources, and in some cases these decisions will be further complicated by the status of initiatives undertaken by individual units. From what sources will IT activities be funded? Will IT expenditures be controlled by a centralized authority, or will individual units be given flexibility in meeting their own IT needs? How will revenues generated by IT activities be managed? Will there be guidelines for public/private and inter-institutional partnerships involving IT?

IV. Conclusion

We are at the embryonic phase of IT's profound and critical impact on Carolina's prosperity. Thoughtful conceptualization, open decision-making, and effective and efficient implementation of IT policy will profoundly impact Carolina's future success. To ensure success, the University needs a vision for how IT will serve its mission and how specifically it can be achieved. To this end, FITAC asks faculty, administrators, students, and staff to collaborate with us in our inquiries and discussions. Our plan is to carry out during the Spring 2000 semester a dialogue on IT at Carolina through meetings, focus groups, forums, print, and informal conversations. We will in the coming weeks roll out a schedule of activities that will be advertised broadly to ensure maximum input from all corners of the university. Our goal is to produce, by semester's end, a "working draft" statement of vision and strategic directions for information technology at UNC-Chapel Hill. The document will serve to focus institutional attention on this critically important issue and provide a framework upon which a final, comprehensive IT strategic plan can be crafted.

We are asking for your participation and guidance as we develop a working draft of an IT strategic plan. To begin, share our undertaking and discuss your IT concerns with your colleagues and co-workers. And, feel free to contact any member of FITAC individually, contact FITAC by e-mail <fitac99@listserv.unc.edu>, join the discussion on FITAC's web site <http://www.unc.edu/cit/fitac/discuss.html >, or attend any of the sessions FITAC and its subcommittees will be holding over the semester as it gathers data, perspectives, and ideas that will form the foundation of a working draft of an IT strategic plan. Please join us in this important project.

Respectfully submitted,
Faculty Information Technology Advisory Committee

Bill Balthrop, Chair of FITAC, Department of Communication Studies
Bob Adler, Kenan-Flagler School of Business

Daniel Anderson, Department of English
Skip Bollenbacher, Department of Biology
Julie Collins, Kenan-Flagler School of Business
Marjorie DeWert, School of Education
Sheila Englebardt, School of Nursing
Anita Farel, Department of Maternal and Child Health
Steve Leonard, Department of Political Science
Joanne Marshall, School of Information and Library Science
Ed Neal, Center for Teaching and Learning
James Noblitt, Department of Romance Languages
Howard Reisner, School of Medicine
Diane Strauss, Davis Library
Steve Weiss, Department of Computer Science
Richard Whisnant, Institute of Government

APPENDIX: FITAC BACKGROUND AND FACULTY COUNCIL CHARGE

The Instructional Technology Advisory Committee was an ad hoc body appointed by Chancellor Hooker in Spring 1998 to advise the Center for Instructional Technology on issues relating to the Carolina Computing Initiative. It was soon evident that CCI's oversight was part of broader considerations regarding information technology (IT) and its role in the University's mission. In response, the Committee was reconstituted as the Faculty Information Technology Advisory Committee (FITAC), and in 1999 FITAC was reestablished as an appointed committee under the auspices of the Faculty Council.

Given the rapidly evolving importance of technology in higher education, the Council made FITAC a broadly representative body with a comprehensive charge to assess IT's role in UNC-Chapel Hill's future.

The Council's charge:
4-26. Faculty Information Technology Advisory Committee. The committee is appointed by the chair of the faculty. It shall consist of (i) faculty members, who shall constitute a majority of the members; and (ii) one or more students, serving one-year renewable terms. The committee represents to the Chancellor and the University community the concerns of faculty and others with regard to information technology. The committee's functions include:

- considering issues pertaining to the use of information technology in teaching and learning, research, and other professional activities in the University; and
- advising University officers and offices of administration on faculty needs and interests relating to information technology.