

1. Executive Summary

*“Organizations that use technology to update not only their systems, but also their cultures, stand the best chance of achieving their goals. Therein lies one of the major values of technology”.*¹

Broadly speaking, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) refers to the hardware, software and networking infrastructure we use to manage, process and transmit information and information-related services. Because information in its various forms is so integral to the mission of higher education, ICT has become tightly woven into the fabric of the contemporary university—significantly impacting the way we teach and the way we learn, the way we do our research, the way we support our business processes and the way we interact with both those whom we serve and those with whom we work. The quality of our ICT environment affects our reputation, our ability to meet international standards in what we do, and our ability to compete for the best faculty, staff and students. Indeed, investing in ICT is critical if the University is to attain the strategic goals articulated by the President in *Renewing the Dream*.

Responsibility for ICT leadership rests in the Office of the Associate Vice President (Information and Communications Technology). This responsibility is exercised through collaborative planning with academic and administrative units to ensure that local needs are addressed within an institution-wide context, and through executive authority for the Information Technology Services Division (ITS)—the unit that provides centralized ICT services to support teaching, learning, research and administration. Many other units, both academic and administrative, have active ICT groups as well, with responsibility for development and support of initiatives that address the special needs and agendas of their own unit. Institutional planning for ICT must balance these local interests with the (sometimes competing) interests of the entire campus, something that’s possible only with widespread consultation and engaged participation in both planning and execution. The purpose of this document is to provide a consolidated University vision for ICT for the next planning cycle.

It’s a constant challenge to keep up with the ever-increasing demand from our students, our faculty, our staff and the public for more and better technology. A number of factors contribute to this growing demand, including

- the changing service expectations of both our internal community (our faculty, staff and students) and our external customers (the general public),
- the changing composition of our faculty and student populations, and
- new capabilities afforded by technology advances.

These demands are for new operational paradigms, with an increasing focus on distributed web-based self-service, and for new services to support our growing dependence on technology to do our jobs.

Financial challenges are part of everyone’s reality, but ICT presents intense financial challenges since technology is expensive and the demand for it appears to grow at an unbounded rate. At the same time, these are investments that the University must make to remain competitive. To

¹ John Southard, “What Technology Can Do If We Let It”, *CAUSE/EFFECT*, Summer 1990.

address this dilemma we must do several things. We must ensure that our priorities are well understood, that our plans are sound, and that we are spending what we do in the most effective way. We must be ever watchful for opportunities to consolidate, to leverage, and to generate savings, but we must not be afraid to invest where investment is needed.

As we stated in the 2004 plan, to be effective or meaningful, ICT planning (both short-term and long-term) must be done in a context of stable and predictable funding. Our historic reliance on *ad hoc* and unpredictable sources of funds for equipment acquisition, for operations, for renewal, and for staff is not sustainable. We can cite successful initiatives (such as the campus computer network, the classroom renovation project and student computing) where stable and predictable funding has been critical to that success, and we can also cite many examples where problems have been created by opportunistic or reactive approaches (such as in our fragmented approach to supporting the desktop computing needs of our faculty). Although we may achieve “random acts of success” through opportunistic approaches, we can’t expect to make sustained progress until we break out of this pattern.

The substantial investments we have made in new technologies in recent years have presented both opportunity and incentive to change the way we do some things. But our investments in initiatives such as a new student information system or a campus-wide portal will not return their full benefit unless individual units (and individual users) are prepared to contribute to coordinated planning and participate in collective decision-making, and then align their processes and practices to the norms thus established.

As it did in 2004 our plan presents many exciting opportunities for ICT initiatives to improve what we do and how we do it. But no single unit can set the University’s technology direction—collaborations and partnerships will continue to be vitally important. Coordinated planning is necessary to balance unit-specific and institution-wide needs in order to set priorities appropriately. Although ICT is “everybody’s business” strong central leadership will bring this distributed activity together and ensure that the full business of the University of Saskatchewan is appropriately nourished by information and communications technology. We look forward to working with each and every unit to integrate ICT into their plans and to using these plans to achieve our shared goals.