

FOREWORD LETTER from the CIO

Dear Colleagues:

Information technology (IT) is now nearly completely integrated into the very fabric of our lives. IT is pervasive—perhaps as pervasive as electricity. And while a “digital divide” still exists in this country and more broadly across the globe, at Louisiana State University—and across higher education in general—information technology is the underpinning infrastructure behind most of our daily activities in a university setting. IT impacts everything—if not via its presence, in its absence. In the years ahead, our reliance on information technology will only increase; we must plan to pay even greater attention to it and the resources devoted to its use.

The technology itself—computers, networks, data, and information “bits and bytes”—remains only part of the equation. These are the physical tools that we can see and touch. But perhaps more critical are the people who apply these tools in productive manners: the human resources. These human resources include those who use the tools every day in their roles in the LSU community—faculty conducting research and classes, students learning and living in a twenty-first century environment, and staff and administrators translating academic priorities into action. It includes, too, those people who enable others use of the technology and advance the community’s effectiveness in using the tools. At LSU, we need to realize the importance of both components of a solid IT infrastructure – the tools *and* the people who make their use productive. We need to not only be thinking about how we modernize and periodically update our tools, but also how we ensure that as these newer tools emerge, we’re also investing in training people in their use and investing in resources to help us understand new ways to conceptualize and support how these tools can be used.

The most effective way to ensure we can address information technology at LSU is to have a well structured, broadly-based, and detailed strategy for its use. And just as important has having this “blueprint” for IT advancement, is realizing that the advancement of IT goals in support of the Flagship Agenda is everyone in the LSU community’s responsibility—not just that of the CIO and the central IT organization. Hence, the best way for such a strategic plan to be successful is for it to flow from the needs of the community served by information technology. That is precisely what we have accomplished in the Flagship IT Strategy.

Previously, “IT Master Plans” at LSU have been too focused on the technology itself, and too directed toward one component of the human resource: the central IT organization. While significant effort went into these plans, given their focus on specific technologies and only the actions of the central IT operations, they ultimately failed. Focusing on technology—which is ever-changing—means that a strategy is outdated not long after it is crafted, and unless constant, vigilant attention is paid to its updating, its usefulness quickly fades. Likewise, if the only stakeholders in success are the CIO and a small group of staff in one department, obtaining traction for the change required to build a flagship-class IT environment loses momentum and again, quickly becomes a forgotten plan. What defines the Flagship IT Strategy is that it has flowed from the community—it is LSU’s plan for IT,

not the IT plan for LSU. This, and a focus on outcomes rather than specific technologies provides it the best chance to be a useful roadmap that will be of value for the 4-6 years it will take to see it to completion.

The Flagship IT Strategy sets a course for progress. It is detailed enough to help ensure that the complete spectrum of IT-enabled areas are covered and yet broad enough in its recommendations and actions to allow flexibility in both how IT-enablement is achieved, and when. It will serve as a well-defined articulation of what we need to do – and more importantly why we need to do it. It will require financial resources – both existing and new. But as any researcher knows, in preparing a proposal for grant funding you have to have a meritorious case, lucidly presented and well articulated in order to be successful in receiving funding. The Flagship IT Strategy sets forth a very meritorious case.

The plan describes where we want to be and why these things are important. But it is like a recipe for a 10-course meal with many, many ingredients. Some of these we have on hand, so we can start to make progress on components of the feast. Some parts will require us to find and acquire the ingredients before we can complete the meal. And as we proceed, we'll likely find we will be able to creatively stretch what we have, or serendipity might provide what we need for one course out of our work on another. Of course we are going to need to identify funding, and be creative in how we do it; but we now have the recipe for success.

The Flagship IT Strategy brings to a close the first chapter in the renovation of information technology at LSU. Over the past year, we have made several changes in the way information technology provision is structured to better prepare LSU for successful advancement of the IT-enablement of the Flagship Agenda. The University created a cabinet-level position for IT in the CIO role. The central IT organization was restructured and renamed (to Information Technology Services) and its focus on the “flagship foundations” was established, emphasizing infrastructure, support of research, support of users, and attention to information systems. Demonstrations of the potential value of IT-enablement were provided, in the form of Pelican and TigerWare. And a community driven process of setting a course for information technology—the planning process—was commenced and completed, resulting in the Flagship IT Strategy. It has been an eventful year—including (and in spite of!) the hurricanes of 2005. But it is only the first year. More years of implementation work lay ahead of us.

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the FITS Task Force Chairs who have done a superb job of generating the knowledge captured in the Flagship IT Strategy: Bill Wischusen (Teaching & Learning); Sumanta Acharya (Research); Joel Tohline (Information Systems); Chuck Wilson and Barrett Kennedy (Infrastructure); and Michelle Gieg and Heath Hattaway (Student IT Enablement). They and over one hundred faculty, students, and staff who worked on the Task Forces are the very essence of the quality of this plan, and they are to be congratulated on their final product. I would like to give a special thanks to Randall Hall, Professor of Chemistry, who as a representative of the Faculty Senate, actively participated in every Task Force, and was a true partner in the creation of the plan. Within the Office of the CIO and Information Technology Services, my thanks to the Deputy CIOs and Officers, leadership, and staff who participated in both the Task Force process and the preparation of this plan. And I especially want to thank Sheri Thompson, who joined my staff in mid-2005 and who has marshaled both the process and the plan

preparation to their successful conclusions. Her work fulfills the vision of the plan's creation by providing a written communication that will facilitate its sharing. LSU owes a debt of gratitude to all involved.

The Flagship IT Strategy is one of the finest such plans in the country. With its completion, we are starting well on our way to national prominence in information technology.

Brian D. Voss