

I.T. Department Delivering on Promises

by Steven Birmingham, Information Technology Director

At the September 2009 Everyone Meeting, I announced six ways the I.T. Department would be evolving to serve Central Penn better. A winter 2011 *Central Station* article provided initial updates on how we're keeping those promises, and I am pleased to provide additional updates as of winter 2012.

1. Building bridges to students, faculty and staff

In 2010, all students and faculty were surveyed about their most important online and classroom technology needs. Of the 43 suggestions made, 31 have been implemented and another 10 are in progress. Students, faculty, staff and alumni are all represented on the I.T. Steering Committee, which was formed in 2011 and now meets quarterly to review and approve strategies, policies and major projects. Starting last year, an I.T. Department representative now attends all Academic Council meetings, and all significant I.T. project teams now include students, faculty and staff.

2. Aligning our efforts with the school's goals

Central Penn's mission is "to provide an education ..." To better align its efforts with that mission, the I.T. Department is in the middle of a multi-year shift towards areas that directly benefit teaching and learning. In 2011, we upgraded the learning management system (Blackboard) to the newest version. Later that year, we created the I.T. education specialist position and hired Dr. Jim Beeghley to work one-on-one with faculty to leverage technology to enhance learning outcomes. Throughout 2011, 36 pieces of software were added or upgraded for classes. This term, using new high-definition videoconferencing equipment, Central Penn is running its first-ever video class, with three more scheduled for next term. Our faculty and library are piloting student response systems (clickers), lecture capture, tablet computing, streaming video and online collaboration.

3. Embracing Central Penn core values of integrity, professionalism, service, respect and educational focus

To foster integrity, all members of the I.T. team signed a confidentiality pledge in 2011. We've been honing our professional communication by participating in hands-on communication training regularly. For the third year in a row, members of the I.T. team will serve as ushers or provide other support as needed at the Central Penn graduation ceremony. Most importantly, we continue to be guided by the I.T. Department mission developed in conjunction with our customers in November 2009: stay current with technology trends and make utilization of technology easier for students, faculty and staff through advising, teaching, automating and troubleshooting.

4. Documenting our policies and procedures

The I.T. Policy created in 2010 was updated in 2011 and published to www.centralpenn.edu/collegeservices/technology.shtml with a variety of other I.T. information. Since 2009 the department has documented 59 written procedures (from a starting point of zero), with an additional 62 under development. We are about to begin drafting a new long-range I.T. strategic plan to replace the plan that expires this summer.

5. Increasing our knowledge and skills

From 2009 forward, each full-time I.T. Department employee is given an annual individual goal of participating in five to ten relevant training events. All our part-time employees and two of our full-timers are enrolled in one of Central Penn's I.T. degree programs. Each year, we ensure that Central Penn is represented at the most important I.T. conferences: Jenzabar JAM, Blackboard BbWorld, ISTE, EDUCAUSE and PETE&C. We share what we learn through two or more *Central Station* articles per month, as well as the new edHEads monthly technology blog for faculty.

6. Improving help desk capabilities and hours

In 2009, we expanded Central Penn I.T. team support hours by 43 percent, and we maintain that schedule today to supplement our vendors who provide 24/7 support. In 2010, we implemented a nine-point help desk improvement plan that included revamping phone service, establishing ticket severities, setting target work levels, adding key procedures, updating knowledgebases, enhancing the ticket tracking system, publishing more information and managing vendors better. In 2011, we began 24/7 automated system monitoring to detect problems before they impact students, faculty and staff. This year, we've launched a regular series of team ticket reviews where we can learn from each other and continually improve customer service.