ITEC FAQ

What is the ITEC?

ITEC is the new Information Technology Enterprise Committee. This committee, comprised of senior University of Alberta decision makers, will have a mandate over the University's core IT systems. There are 58 information technology groups across campus that are centrally supported (most are one-person shops), resulting in duplication of systems and effort.

The ITEC has been constructed to have two key powers:
1. Oversight on large IT expenditures. The University of Alberta spends an enormous amount on IT. The intent is to ensure that money is not wasted; it is not to limit a unit's ability to achieve its objectives.
2. Consolidation of core services where it makes sense to do so. This will allow the University to achieve economies of scale.

The expectation over time is that faculty/department/unit IT groups will concentrate their efforts on unit-specific activities that advance their research, teaching, and/or administrative mandate. The underlying IT needs (core systems) will be handled centrally.

What is the ITAC?

ITAC is the new Information Technology Advisory Committee. ITAC was developed based on the model of the current Faculty-Based ICT Committee that meets with AICT regularly. The ITAC provides a forum for giving feedback on the performance of centrally-supported systems and presenting ideas for improving the quality of the offerings.

What are the core systems?

See the ITEC terms of reference document for more details. Core systems are loosely defined as those that would benefit from a unified university-wide offering (which covers all or most units). Examples include email, wireless, backups, network, security, computer labs, help desk, *etc.*

Why is the University of Alberta moving towards centralizing core IT systems?

The world is moving towards consolidated/centralized delivery of core services. Core IT services have largely become standardized and amenable to being treated as a "utility." In fact networking is often regarded as the fourth utility, after power, water and heat. The Canadian government is doing it, the Ontario

government is doing it, and, yes, the Alberta government is doing it. In Alberta, there has been a push towards standardized IT services across the province for the postsecondary sector. The flagship initiative was APAS – a province-wide university application system. Advanced Education and Technology (now called Enterprise and Advanced Education) has offered to help fund the startup costs for shared services. It is already happening on several fronts, including financial systems and, come September, Moodle. They are also pushing for a common province-wide identity management system, a possible precursor to the equivalent of a province-wide One Card.

What role are the auditors playing in this initiative?

The auditors have been asking for a change to IT at the University of Alberta. The push comes from the Auditor General (AG) of Alberta's request for a review of IT governance, through to the University's Board Audit Committee, and the University's Internal Audit Services (IAS). The Board of Governors, through the Audit Committee, has been asking for a better understanding of the overall governance, architecture and risks related to IT. The view is that there is great risk in having decentralized, core "utility" computing pieces.

Why are the auditors concerned about IT? They keep asking hard questions that are difficult to answer – not just for AICT and AIS, but for the entire University community. For example, what would the responses of your IT group look like to the following questions if the auditors came knocking on your door?
- Do you have a complete set of documented policies and procedures that are consistently followed?
- Do you follow ITIL processes?
- Do you have a complete disaster recovery plan that has been tested?
- Is your server infrastructure stored in rooms with proper power, air conditioning, fire suppressant, and physical security?
- Are all your systems fully up-to-date with security patches?
- Do you have IT governance in place?
- How much deferred maintenance do you have and do you have a risk assessment of it?
- Are all devices containing confidential information properly secured?

It is hard enough to get the above done in AICT and AIS, let alone in all the IT groups across campus. The latter is the requirement.

The Gmail project was an easy sell to the auditor because they could see that central provision of a core service would allow for many of the above matters to be resolved, at least for one critical service.

Why has the ITEC suddenly appeared, apparently without the usual public consultations?

The AG audit recommendation for a review of IT governance has been outstanding for a few years. In 2011, IAS started examining this issue by doing a review of governance. That report showed that the University community was receptive to greater central leadership in IT. An external party (Gartner) was contracted to review the University's current governance structure and make recommendations. The key result was the creation of a senior university-wide committee to oversee IT. The Vice Provost and Associate Vice President (Information Technology) was tasked with composing the terms of reference for such a committee. The result is the ITEC proposal.

In March 2012, a push from the auditors moved the ITEC proposal forward. In April 2012, the proposal was shown to Deans Council, and the following week it was made public. This has happened quite quickly to meet our 2012 audit reporting requirements.

Will this mean that IT systems will be mandated across campus?

In some cases, yes. We already have central systems for wireless (UWS), CCID management, and email. For these examples, the case was made for offering a single high-quality service for the entire university.

The committee may also make decisions on core systems that serve most but not all of the University community. For example, Moodle meets the needs of most units on campus, but it is not mandated.

Hardware/software systems that are faculty/department/unit specific are, in general, beyond the mandate of the ITEC. For example, research systems are generally localized, so it does not make sense to talk about offering them as a central service.

What is the ITEC plan for implementing core systems?

Currently there is no implementation plan in place. The ITEC, once formed, has to decide how it wants to act. There are two orthogonal strategies. The first is horizontal: deploy a service university-wide. Gmail is an example. All email/calendaring services will soon be centralized. The ITEC could decide on another service to deploy to most/all and then work through the details to ensure a high-quality offering.

The second strategy is vertical: work with each faculty/department/unit one at a time. This has already started, for example, with the recent moves of Arts' and Education's core services to AICT.

Of course, the reality likely won't be as clean and simple and it will take several years to accomplish.

Will IT people be forced to join AICT?

No, the ITEC will not force this. It will be up to the faculty/department/unit to decide what to do. Eventually some services will move from each IT group to AICT. The faculty/department/unit might decide to transfer the people doing those services to AICT or to redeploy them to do other IT activities that help advance the goals of that unit.

Is there still time to discuss the ITEC?

Creation of the ITEC and ITAC was approved by the Executive Planning Committee (EPC) on May 9, 2012. However, there is still room to change the ITEC's terms of reference. We welcome constructive feedback on better defining the scope of the ITEC and the ITAC. Email suggestions to vpit@ualberta.ca.