Faculty Senate Committee on Technology and Infrastructure
Report to the Faculty Senate

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Committee Members:

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INTRODUCTION

The committee has met at least monthly since September 2018. A number of issues have been discussed given the reorganization of the senate. This includes the current state of affairs involving technology that directly affect faculty.

The past Senate committee with similar responsibilities was very large by comparison to our present formation. This change in size has enabled us to examine a number of items and issues. Since the committee consists of senate faculty only, views can be expressed without major consequences. The size also has allowed us to formulate new legislation directed toward the university very quickly.

CURRENT STATUS OF TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE AT URI

Most of the technology initiatives during the past year by the university have had some faculty input—with appointments being made on a ad hoc basis. However, a number of the new software systems have been introduced without adequate beta testing by faculty users. For example, the IDEA system was supposed to allow faculty to specify when it would be used during the evaluation period. However, when it went on line, the default implementation allowed student input at any time. Preliminary (Beta) testing could have avoided this.

The Office of Research has introduced new software without faculty testing. When asked about this, the response was ‘well, it is used at University of Michigan.’ Recently ITS has acquired license to Microsoft 365. This acquisition did not involve faculty. MATLAB can be accessed by some faculty through special arrangements, but it is not clear that other faculty can gain the same access.

PeopleSoft is being changed or upgraded and, because of Senate representation on the ITS governing board a suggestion was made that beta testing be performed by a group of faculty before something new is released. As a result, a beta testing group has now been formed. (the ITS Governing Board has only two faculty, the remainder being administrative.)

The replacement of Sakai is also under review by another ad hoc committee of the Faculty Senate.
More recently, the ITS division under the new Director, Karlis Kaugers, has issued a preliminary statement on reorganization. We are in the process of examining this document. The division also recently surveyed faculty on software licenses with an idea to consolidate our business with such suppliers.

Thus it seems that new ad hoc approaches continue to abound, many with little or no faculty input. Therefore, we propose the following:

PROPOSED LEGISLATION (approved by the Committee)

The Faculty Senate Committee on Technology and Infrastructure recommends a change in the University acquisitions of technology, including software, hardware, network configuration that affects the teaching and research mission of the faculty. Large purchases identified as those affecting more than 20% of faculty in aggregate and costing in excess of $25,000, require the consultation and approval of this committee.

Furthermore, any system with these characteristics needs to be Beta tested before being implemented. The Beta testing plan needs the approval of this committee as well.

We would expect these changes to go in the University Manual and thus be policy.

SUMMARY

The committee requests a full Senate discussion of these issues. By adopting such new rules, the faculty will have real and effective input on the quality of technology and infrastructure used in our academic settings.