

Site Review Team Report
Student Affairs Technology Department
Weber State University

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Executive Summary

The site review team reports on the Student Affairs Technology Program Review self-study and the associated site visit. After two days of meetings with Student Affairs employees, o employees, students, and Division leadership, the site review team notes seven strengths of the Student Affairs Technology Department: high quality services, cohesive and collaborative department, recent reorganization, strong student employee professional development activities, web site and social media services, strong student service orientation, and good collaborative relationships with other campus units. The site review team makes seven recommendations for improvement: becoming more proactive than reactive, implementing stronger infrastructure and systems management, eliminating single-person staffing dependencies, assessing real needs for desktop support, gathering metrics and tracking data, developing a focus on communication, marketing, and advocacy, and developing of business continuity and disaster recovery plans.

Introduction

The Weber State University Student Affairs Technology Department (SAT) conducted a program review during spring, 2015. A program review is a comprehensive department evaluation with several goals: to insure that the department is providing high-quality, effective programs and services, to continually strive to improve Weber State University Division of Student Affairs programs and services, to demonstrate alignment with the University and Division mission statements, to create action plans and identify important initiatives to be used in strategic planning, and to increase knowledge and understanding of the Division within the Division and across the University. Program review is a reflective process that allows for an introspective look at structure and services and allows insight into areas that are doing well and those that can be improved.

The SAT Department first completed a self-study with department data, strengths, needs, and weaknesses. The self-study report, first reviewed and approved by Division leaders, was distributed to a site review team. The site review team, consisting of one external reviewer and two internal reviewers, evaluated the self-study report, interviewed employees, students and leaders during a site visit, and drafted this report.

The site review team believes that SAT's self-study report is aligned with the eight program review standards. Some data that would be useful to SAT was not included; this omission is described in the recommendations below. The site review team is impressed with the work done by SAT; it is notable that this report lists the same number of strengths as recommendations.

Strengths

In addition to the recommendations listed above, we also want to commend SAT for a job well done. The review team was especially impressed with the following:

1. SAT provides a significant amount of good quality support with their limited resources. They are respected within the Division and other University units, and the Division trusts them.
2. SAT consists of a very cohesive team that is strongly collaborative. Our view is that SAT employees believe that their coworkers wish them success and will help out when needed. This strength likely is one reason SAT can provide the quality and amount of services that they do.
3. The recent reorganization was strategically smart and successful, especially given the department's limited resources. The alignment of support for computer labs, testing centers, and desktops, as part of the reorganization, will enable sharing skills and technologies across diverse service areas and eliminate the need to recreate similar support practices in multiple areas.
4. SAT is a strong supporter of the Division and University efforts to better train and develop their student employees, particularly the student employees in the computer labs. The skills and experience gained by SAT student employees likely will improve their marketability upon graduation. SAT can insure that all student employees receive this level of attention.
5. SAT web site and social media support for the Division is outstanding. SAT has compiled useful and relevant information about the use of these technology tools and presented it to departments. Training efforts provide thorough and correct information. The goal of regulatory compliance appears to have been met, allowing the division to have professional quality information on the web that meets the information needs of students and other user groups.
6. All of SAT is focused on students and their needs. Computer labs are well-managed and proactively anticipate change. Several significant changes and new services have been offered through the computer labs. Student mobile printing has been well-received and will ease the lives of students needing to turn in homework. Another change is the effort to allow students to bring their own devices (BYOD) to these labs. Finally, much attention is given to laying out the labs to allow students to work together or alone.

7. SAT collaborates well with other units, both within the Division and at the university level. Specifically, strong and positive relationships have been developed with central IT, particularly the Service Desk. There also is a beneficial relationship between SAT and University Marketing and Communications. In both of these examples, benefits are afforded to both SAT and the other unit.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are broken out into seven categories addressed below:

1. Proactive v. Reactive

We encourage SAT to adopt a proactive approach to recognizing technology needs and identifying new or innovative solutions to these needs. This recommendation could utilize the strongly collaborative culture of SAT by discussing needs and innovations at each department meeting. Individual employees could adopt specific technology areas to monitor based on their personal and professional interests.

We recommend that SAT use server/infrastructure/enterprise application management plans in conjunction with the results of a risk assessment to identify problems that are likely to arise. Methods for handling likely problems can be defined and practiced before the problem actually occurs. Being better able to predict when specific problems are more likely to arise can be accomplished through hardware and software monitoring. Careful and daily monitoring of the logs of these technology resources will significantly support a predictive approach; additionally, hardware use and stress can be monitored to further support a predictive and proactive approach. Software systems are available to gather and analyze logs (Splunk is one example) and hardware use and stress (Nagios is one example).

2. Infrastructure and Systems Management

There is no replacement plan for Division servers and infrastructure. There appear to be two reasons for this: there is not a list of inventory or an inventory management plan, and there are perceptions that there is no money for server hardware replacement. SAT needs to create a replacement plan and then work with Division leadership to identify funding sources for the replacement of each piece of hardware. Unexpected loss of a piece of hardware can cause serious problems that may take days or weeks to resolve; a proactive management plan can eliminate or greatly reduce this risk.

More attention and management needs to be devoted to Student Affairs Systems. Because little information was provided in the self-study report about servers, enterprise applications, their management, and future plans, the site review committee fears that too little attention and effort are being applied to these resources. There are several recommendations: create an inventory of server/infrastructure hardware and develop a management/replacement plan, create an inventory of enterprise applications and define necessary management activities, and carefully identify skills needed for server/enterprise application management and insure that any single-person dependency is eliminated.

3. Single Person Dependency and Staffing

SAT has many single-person skill dependencies. If the single employee with that skill leaves their position, needed skills may not be available for technology services. The site review committee recommends that SAT identify the skills needed to provide technology services to their customers, prioritize the importance of those skills, and identify employees with the necessary skills. For skills with high-enough importance, arrange to have other employees trained to develop those skills.

When funding for an additional full-time employee becomes available, SAT needs to be able to identify the highest priority of skills or responsibilities for the position. Ideally this identification process would use a technology skills assessment, relevant metrics, and strategic plan objectives.

SAT effectively uses student employees, particularly in the student computer labs and testing centers. All other subunits of SAT use student employees. In lieu of funding for full-time staff positions, the department needs to hire more student employees, particularly as desktop support STAs. Supervisors who have enough time to train and oversee student employees can greatly increase their subunit's productivity and customer satisfaction by employing more students.

4. Desktop Support

Providing quality desktop support enables much of the Division to accomplish their department and personal goals. Division employees report that they are generally happy with the support being received, although some employees noted that the support was not as timely as they would like. Specific issues or problem types were not identified. It is recommended that SAT develop metrics to determine the type of support employees need and want, define what support they can provide, track the quality of desktop support, including time to resolution, periodically review these metrics, and create action plans to resolve less than acceptable desktop support services.

5. Metrics and Tracking

SAT does a considerable amount of high quality work in technology, of which they, the Division, and the University should be proud. Among SAT employees, there is considerable pride in what they do and how it is done, but in some cases the rest of the university does not recognize the value of this department. We recommend that SAT determine metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) to track that will demonstrate the value of these services to the Division and the University. Include this data in annual reports and make it available in discussions about space utilization and funding for computer labs, testing center services, etc.

6. Communication, Marketing, Advocacy

Similar to the suggestion above, we feel that the staff of SAT should put more emphasis on sharing their successes with campus, and that they sometimes need advocates in administration to make sure that their issues are addressed in university level discussions. For example, the needs of the SAT department ought to be included in conversations about student technology needs, building space allocations, and policy writing. The SAT Director can work with division administrators to develop advocacy strategies. Such advocacy begins when the SAT Director functions as the interface between SAT employees and Division leadership.

The SAT Mission & Goals statement states that SAT "is responsible for supporting all technology used in the Student Affairs Division". It is recommended that the Division formally centralize technology support within SAT and that departments be discouraged from developing their own solutions independent of SAT. In one case, departments build their own labs but then rely on SAT to support them; this may be a method to get money from the student fee board. With their limited resources (that appear to always be fully used), such external technology initiatives make it difficult for STA to manage and support everything.

7. Disaster Recovery Plan

A disaster recovery plan will support SAT and the Division when faced with unexpected interruptions in service (e.g., fires, floods, illnesses, etc.). First, it is recommended that SAT develop a business (or service) continuity plan for SAT operations. This plan defines how SAT will continue to provide services until the unexpected interruption is ended. Such a plan can be a model for other departments to develop their own business continuity plans. Critical information from these plans for SAT includes RPOs (recovery point objectives) and RTOs (recovery time objectives) for critical technology services. From the collection of department business continuity plans, SAT has the objectives for developing a Division disaster recovery plan. A disaster recovery plan defines how SAT will continue to provide technology

services after a serious interruption or complete destruction of these services. Development of a disaster recovery plan is often easier when done in conjunction with other campus technology services. Additionally, it is very important for all participants to test and adjust their business continuity and disaster recovery plans.

Conclusion

The SAT Department has built an effective foundation for Student Affairs technology services. Many of their activities and services could be classified as excellent. Areas for improvement are identified, and such improvements will elevate SAT to an even higher level of quality and commitment. Given the desire of the Division of Student Affairs to continually improve student services, and the focus of SAT on supporting student services, it is probable that technology will do even more for Student Affairs in the future.