

# University Budget Advisory Committee

## Minutes – 3/11/2021 meeting

Voting members present: Nabil Al-Tikriti (Chair, At-large)  
Stephen Davies (Secretary, At-large)  
Liane Houghtalin (CAS)  
Kyle Schultz (COE)  
Suzanne Sumner (At-large)  
Chris Garcia (COB)

Voting members absent: Laura Bylenok (At-large)

Non-voting members present: Patrick Catullo (Athletic Director)

Non-voting members absent: Michelle Pickham (Staff Advisory Council President)

Guests: Hall Cheshire, Chief Information Officer

1. The meeting was devoted to a presentation from Hall Cheshire, Chief Information Officer (CIO). Mr. Cheshire began with the general observation that although the Information Technologies (IT) division has a large budget (about \$2.5 million), very little of it is discretionary. Most of it is irrevocably allocated as soon as the academic year begins. (For instance, the licensing fees for numerous software products and services appear in the IT budget, mostly for simplicity and consistency. Choices about those expenditures are not made by IT, however.) In many ways, the division is thus a “service department” in that almost none of the money is actually used by IT, but is instead used by the rest of the institution. Not every single technology-related expense at UMW is in IT, but about 80% of all technology costs do appear on the IT budget.
2. The budget for IT has a number of line items that are “aspirational.” Many of these deal with travel, professional development, and other things that would benefit the division’s staff. The money in those categories is almost never actually spent for those things, due to higher priorities inevitably costing more than was anticipated. In actual practice, the amount spent on travel and professional development is near zero. Mr. Cheshire said he would consider removing (or reducing) those misleading line items from future budgets so that it more accurately reflects what is actually spent.
3. IT is understaffed, and at times this threatens the ability of the division to provide needed services. In 2009, the headcount was 45 FTEs (full-time equivalents). Today, it’s only 24, and five open positions are currently frozen. As a result of this, some IT employees are working very long hours – seven days a week in some cases.
4. Mr. Cheshire also noted that the salaries of IT staff are not in most cases at market level. This exacerbates the staffing challenge especially when we try to rehire after someone leaves. The competition for technology talent, especially in the DC and Richmond areas, makes it very difficult for us to sign on new staff. This is a challenge not necessarily faced by some of our peer institutions who are situated in more rural areas.
5. One offsetting factor to these staffing difficulties is the trend towards using Cloud-based services, instead of owning and maintaining our own hardware. This reduces the need for staff somewhat, and also reduces the risks we face in regards to turnover: Cloud providers have a “deeper bench” than we do for key positions like Database Administrators. Still, with our current staffing levels, any position that can’t be filled does have a negative impact.
6. Mr. Cheshire made known his intent to move still other UMW systems to the Cloud, including

Banner. This has the potential to shift technology costs and support tasks to Cloud vendors, which can free up IT staff time for other projects and initiatives and reduce the need to increase IT staffing in the future.

7. Regarding laptop/desktop replacement, Mr. Cheshire informed the committee that recently, \$200k/year had been set aside so that UMW could move towards a five-year replacement cycle. This remains an aspirational goal, however, and Mr. Cheshire noted that we currently have some systems as old as eight years in active use. Additionally, the \$200k was reduced to \$140k for this academic year, due to the financial impact of the pandemic.
8. Dr. Houghtalin ventured that since modern devices are lasting longer, perhaps a longer replacement cycle doesn't cause as many problems as it once did. Mr. Cheshire replied that there is some truth to this, but the diversity of technology needs among staff and faculty makes it hard to make generalizations about how often their equipment really needs to be replaced. Also, much of the replacement cycle is due to software, not hardware. For instance, Microsoft recently ended support for Windows 7, yet UMW has many Windows 7 machines currently in use.
9. Dr. Al-Tikriti, Dr. Davies, and others commented that the \$19,000 allocated for the enterprise classroom scheduling system (CollegeNet Series 25) seems like a poor use of scarce UMW resources, especially because department chairs were generally happy with the previous (manual) process.
10. Mr. Cheshire clarified one point of possible confusion: all the equipment housed in our data center is indeed owned by UMW, with the single exception of one rack used to support the MARIA (Mid-Atlantic Research Infrastructure Alliance) fiber-optic network. (As recompense for housing this data repeater equipment, UMW was given a free 1 GB link between UMW and the network's exchange point Ashburn.)
11. Finally, in response to Dr. Sumner's usual question ("what keeps you up at night?") Mr. Cheshire unequivocally answered: security. In today's oft-hacked interconnected world, Mr. Cheshire wondered aloud whether we can we ever do enough to keep UMW's systems and data safe.