

**A Report on the EDUCAUSE Information Technology Governance Summit  
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**Background**

In a continuation of the EDUCAUSE initiative to host forums for discussion of issues of importance to higher education, the Information Technology Governance (ITG) Summit was held September 10–11 in Denver. The summit was designed to bring together a small number of thought leaders and experts to capture the best ideas and strategies for advancing ITG in the community, and was attended by about 35 higher education leaders with particular expertise and experience in ITG. A professional facilitator guided the group through a rich discussion of high-priority ITG issues.

**Context**

In IT as in other contexts, “governance” refers to the process that sets top-level goals, assigns responsibility for meeting them, and assesses the results. A widely cited definition comes from MIT researchers Peter Weill and Jeanne Ross: IT governance means “specifying the decision rights and accountability framework to encourage desirable behavior in using IT.” The IT Governance Institute notes as well that IT governance is integral to enterprise governance, ensuring that IT “sustains and extends the organization’s strategies and objectives.”

More informally, IT governance describes who makes which decisions, who provides input and analyzes the issues, who sets priorities, who implements the results of the decisions, and who settles disputes when there is no clear consensus. Good governance processes are actively designed and well understood and foster timely decisions and alignment of an organization’s IT strategy with its overall mission and goals. They also provide a key arena for articulating an institutional IT vision that stands above the central/local IT divide. Effective IT governance allows institutions to stop thinking about IT in isolation and start developing IT as an institutional competency.

The EDUCAUSE IT Governance Summit’s objective was to assist the community in establishing and maintaining a workable environment of governance of IT in higher education, which includes increasing awareness across higher education institutions about the importance of ensuring IT resources are being allocated strategically. Its specific objectives were to identify IT and institutional performance measures that feed good IT governance, to discuss central versus departmental governance needs and how those might be coordinated, to share information on actual experiences, and to learn from, and contribute to, the in-progress study of higher education IT governance being conducted by the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research.

The summit enabled rich discussions on various issues surrounding IT governance. Institutions that have established effective IT governance environments shared information on their strategies and the challenges they faced.

**Speakers**

Although the CI Summit was designed for productive discussion, several speakers helped set the stage. ECAR Interim Director and Fellow Ron Yanosky gave an overview of preliminary results of the ECAR study on IT governance in higher education. In the summer of 2007, ECAR conducted a web-based survey of EDUCAUSE member institution CIOs, which received 438 responses, and a shorter survey of other non-IT higher education executives involved in governance at 58 partner institutions. Preliminary findings show that, in general, respondents have positive views about IT being aligned with institutional strategic goals. They tended to give alignment and an institutional view of IT precedence over practical politics as drivers of IT governance, yet they also stressed that good relationships and key personalities were the most important factors in producing good IT governance outcomes. The majority of the respondents said that governance is effective overall at their institutions, with the non-IT executives being slightly more optimistic. Ron told the group the complete study would be available in the first quarter of 2008.

A second speaker, Laurie Antolovic', deputy CIO and finance officer, office of the vice president for information technology, Indiana University, explained how IT governance propelled an IT revolution at her institution. She stressed that higher education is not structured well for effective IT governance and that enterprise goals are often unclear or unarticulated. Leadership often lacks interest and understanding of IT in the context of the enterprise, and overall decision-making is too slow. Laurie said that revolutionary change in IT governance was needed at IU during the early stages of planning, and that this stage benefited from more structure. As time passed, governance evolved. The CIO was able to translate and aggregate discussions and decisions of enterprise leaders into business and IT goals. She stressed the importance of the IT organization earning the community's trust. At Indiana University, the IT organization communicates often with the community in order to gather broad input. The IT organization must be good stewards of resources, continue to nurture relationships with the community, and keep an eye on the future. In doing so, IT governance will be successful.

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

The participants spent the remainder of the summit in structured discussions of five aspects of ITG, designed to gather their wisdom, creative ideas, and advice. They concluded with suggestions for what EDUCAUSE could do to help the community advance. The following sections are meant to reflect their major points.

**Alignment and Strategic Planning**

IT governance authorities stress that good IT governance must ensure that IT contributes effectively to strategic organizational goals. Institutions must build alignment into the ITG process, and IT must be at the table in shaping institutional goals, however they are articulated. Institutional goals provide the framework for IT strategic goals; an annual assessment is key to testing this alignment. Success depends on good communications (including relationships). IT strategic planning is most effective when co-led by external or non-IT folks and evolves to effective ITG.

**Executive Responsibilities and the Role of the CIO**

CIOs should accept the opportunity and responsibility to participate in enterprise-level strategic discussions, not only those limited to IT. They should encourage other executives to understand the critical role and impact of IT and take joint responsibility with other campus executives for making decisions about IT. They must resist being the sole decision makers and finders of

funding. However, CIOs can't delegate ultimate responsibility for ITG, because they will still be held accountable.

CIOs must be able to speak in nontechnical terms to constituents and be able to aggregate and translate their ideas. They must be proactive and not wait until IT issues reach the crisis level before involving others. They should welcome the opportunity to enhance credibility with qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Governance Theory and Practical Politics**

ITG usually works differently in practice than in theory. ITG works, or does not work, because of relationships between people, not because of structure or process. At the same time, good processes and structures can insulate ITG from obstructionism or the loss of key individuals.

ITG coexists with parallel processes, for example, faculty autonomy (incentives), legislative items, and so forth. Events can overrule ITG. Strategic priorities can change with executive leadership changes; ITG must adapt. These types of events can present opportunity for the CIO to educate constituencies on IT issues and details. ITG can be undermined by the "squeaky wheel" takeover and/or lack of funding. The campus community needs to trust the process, and trust-building is a critical CIO role.

ITG fits into the institution's broader planning processes. If campus governance works in general, ITG has a higher probability of success. Institutions should identify the best non-IT governance models and integrate ITG in the models that work best with the campus culture.

### **Governance Internal vs. External to the Institution**

New demands, such as those presented by the need for broader support of our cyberinfrastructure and the need to work collaboratively beyond the bounds of the campus, affect IT governance. Governance relationships between central and distributed resources on campus are affected by external consortial agreements. When multiple national and international collaborations and funding agencies become involved, institutions are challenged with issues of policy and distributed IT resources. Collaborations can strain ITG; however, collaborations, voluntary and involuntary, are a fact of life, and institutions must be diligent in picking the right partners. The CIO may need to educate campus leadership on the value of a particular collaboration (communication requirements are different with external and internal partners). Participation in an external collaboration can create cohesion among internal competitors. A new ITG structure may be needed to deal with collaborations.

### **IT Governance Processes and Mechanisms**

ITG must be well-integrated into the institutional culture and provide mechanisms such as steering committees, process teams, and service level agreements for stakeholders to influence the process. Decisions should be categorized, for example, internal to IT and external to IT. If there is an agreed-upon and communicated process and a set of criteria to establish priorities, and if people understand the reality of campus needs, trust can be established among the stakeholders and they can become a united voice for increasing IT resources. Effective ITG must be sustainable and involved in linking budgets to strategic priorities.

Relationships are everything here, and the CIO must take a key role in establishing alliances with other campus leaders in order for any process or mechanism to be effective.

## **EDUCAUSE Involvement**

At the end of the two-day summit, attendees were asked what additional steps EDUCAUSE could take to promote ITG in higher education. Responses were generally grouped into four areas:

1. **FACILITATE COLLABORATION**—Set up collaboration opportunities, for example, discussions at CIO meetings; jointly sponsored workshops and summits with key executives of ACE, NACUBO, etc; a constituent group and resource page focused on ITG; a standing education committee to periodically review ITG issues and communication documents (letter to the president); and a governance symposium.
2. **GATHER BEST PRACTICES AND CASE STUDIES**—Compile best practices on resource allocations, assessment for ITG, assessment tools (readiness index for governance); comparisons to best practices as well as intra- and interinstitutional comparisons; establish a broker peer advising on IT including ITG; develop additional case studies on what worked and what didn't; facilitate search services on ITG; and develop assessment instruments for ITG.

ECAR is currently conducting a major study of higher education IT governance practices that will also involve a number of case studies.

3. **PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**—Identify existing and develop new PD opportunities on relationship building, work of collaboration, the role of PD in the 21st century (emerging CIOs, skills in negotiation and collaboration, research computing, strategic marketing and communication, cultural differences, succession planning, facilitation, best practices, structures/models); develop a series of workshops (one to two days) on these topics; establish executive briefings, regional workshops, and focus groups on research computing; and determine how to educate executives about IT.

Some of these offerings currently exist and others could be included in an expanded ITG curriculum component of the EDUCAUSE Leadership and Management Institute.

4. **TAILOR ITG TO HIGHER EDUCATION**—Develop a paper on why ITG in higher education differs from industry models, so that we aren't held to non-higher education standards. Develop working partnership/relationship with IT governance authorities to expand their expertise to higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Summit attendees described the event as a valuable experience that offered time to reflect not only on the topic in general but on how IT governance worked on their own campuses, and what changes might help to improve the processes. EDUCAUSE will take all recommendations under advisement for incorporation into future planning.