



A Case of Good Management: IT Alignment at Calvin College

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The mission of the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research is to foster better decision making by conducting and disseminating research and analysis about the role and implications of information technology in higher education. ECAR will systematically address many of the challenges brought more sharply into focus by information technologies.

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Preface

The EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) produces research to promote effective decisions regarding the selection, development, deployment, management, socialization, and use of information technologies in higher education. ECAR research includes

- ◆ research bulletins—short summary analyses of key information technology (IT) issues;
- ◆ research studies—in-depth applied research on complex and consequential technologies and practices; and
- ◆ case studies—institution-specific reports designed to exemplify important themes, trends, and experiences in the management of IT investments and activities.

In its most recent research, ECAR will publish a comprehensive gathering of information on IT alignment in higher education in *Information Technology Alignment in Higher Education*.¹ The research was undertaken in the phases described below.

Literature Review

A review of the relevant literature helped us define the study's major elements and create a working set of hypotheses.

Online Survey

The EDUCAUSE staff sent an e-mail invitation with the Web address of an online survey to 1,483 institutions belonging to EDUCAUSE. Senior college and university administrators from 483 institutions (464 U.S. institutions and 19 Canadian institutions) responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were chief information officers (CIOs) and other IT leaders. The 483 responses were used as the respondent base for *Information Technology Alignment in Higher Education*.

Telephone Interviews

Researchers conducted intensive telephone interviews with 22 IT executives, managers, and faculty members at 22 institutions.

Case Studies

Researchers conducted this in-depth case study to complement the core study. We assume readers of this case study will also read the primary study, which provides a general context for the individual case study findings. We undertook this case study to examine the strategic planning, management, and alignment at Calvin College.

ECAR wishes to thank all the administrators, faculty, staff, and students at Calvin

College who generously shared their time, thoughts, and insight with us. We are particularly indebted to Henry E. DeVries II, vice president for administration, finance, and information services, for making the necessary arrangements for our visit; Gaylen Byker, president; Joel Carpenter, provost; and Claudia Beversluis, dean for instruction. These people all helped provide us with a sense of the mission and vision of Calvin College. ECAR also thanks the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), Ed Barboni and Richard Ekman in particular, for suggesting that Calvin College had an interesting IT story to tell.

Introduction

Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was founded as a seminary for the Christian Reformed Church in 1876. The curriculum expanded over the years. In 1906 the school took on the name John Calvin Junior College. By 1921, Calvin College began awarding the bachelor of arts degree. When Gaylen Byker was appointed president in 1995, he quickly discovered that little planning existed for the use of IT. A Calvin undergraduate, Byker also earned a J.D. and an M.A. in world politics from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to his appointment at Calvin, he worked in international banking and energy.

One of Byker's earliest initiatives was to bring in a team from Purdue University to evaluate technology use at the college and issue a report. The three members of the team, all of whom had earned undergraduate degrees at Calvin, focused on the college mission they had understood in their years at the school: "For us, the first and foremost mission of the college is that of instruction. A second albeit very important mission is that of scholarship. A third and final mission is that of service to the various constituent communities. Thus, for us, the faculty and students are Calvin's *raison d'être*."²

Chief among the Purdue team's recommendations was the creation of a cabinet-level CIO position, a strategic decision that led to the hiring of Henry E. DeVries II. The report focused primarily on what needed to be done to support Calvin's academic mission and, in effect, became a road map for the new CIO.

About the same time, work began on a five-year institutional plan. Although Calvin didn't intend to create a separate technology plan, the 1997–2002 plan did contain numerous statements about technology. Within a list of "Threats and Challenges," a statement reflecting comments from the introduction to the Purdue consultants' report acknowledged the impact of "New Technology and Changing Pedagogy": "New technologies are being introduced into higher education at a dizzying pace. They are changing both educational objectives and the delivery methods of education. They are often very costly and quickly become obsolete."³

To meet these and other challenges, the planning group established four broad goals, two of which concern technology. The first goal, which reflects the college's essential identity, states, "Advance Calvin's leadership in developing distinctly Christian patterns of teaching and learning." Three sections support this goal, with particular attention to creative teaching and course development:

- ◆ 1.2.4—Evaluate new technologies for learning and implement those that will enhance Christian higher education but not add unduly to its cost.
- ◆ 1.2.5—Explore ways to respond to the expected transformation of higher education caused by the introduction of new educational technologies and by attempts to reach new groups of learners.
- ◆ 1.2.6—Develop a comprehensive plan for the improvement of information services and establish some specific goals toward that end.⁴

Goal 4 focuses on improving the college's "competitive position as a provider of high-quality education at a reasonable cost" and further acknowledges funding issues:

- ◆ 4.5.4—Raise \$1.5–\$2 million per year for acquiring, installing, and operating new computing and telecommunication technology.⁵

Clearly, this first five-year plan addresses the alignment of technology and teaching, and the need to align these goals with a sound funding plan. This is typical of what we found at Calvin College, where, as Henry DeVries commented, "Community is embedded in the culture, and that allows communication to flow." Also significantly, Calvin, in this first plan as well as in the next, focuses on the institution's educational mission.

Planning, Funding, Implementation

Henry DeVries, like many Calvin administrators, faculty, and staff, received his undergraduate degree there before going on to earn a Ph.D. in ornamental horticulture at Cornell University. Before returning to Calvin, he directed Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Electronic Technology Group. About his new position DeVries commented, "The move from Cornell to Calvin was from informal, adult, and community education to formal, undergraduate education—the challenges are largely the same." Nonetheless, he began work as CIO at Calvin at a propitious time, a period when it was possible to "become proactive instead of reactive."

DeVries inherited a cumbersome computer center focused more on computing than on service, but nevertheless with "many areas of strength," as the technology review team noted in their report, especially in "People, Facilities, Equipment."⁶ Joel Adams, a professor of computer science who came to Calvin in 1989, commented, "Attitudes on the part of faculty were negative toward the previous IT

director when DeVries arrived." In response to the Purdue team's report, Adams said, "Calvin put resources into technology—made a strategic investment—in particular by hiring Henry DeVries." In less than a year, the organization changed its name to Calvin Information Technology (CIT), and the board of trustees' administration and finance committee approved a six-point Five-Year Information Technology Maintenance and Renewal Plan in February 1998. President Byker was gratified that in response to this plan, the board of trustees implemented "a 2 percent tuition increase dedicated to improving and sustaining the voice, video, and data infrastructure on the campus."

The maintenance and renewal plan dealt primarily with networking, infrastructure, and hardware needs. It focused on budgeting for campus-wide technology projects, addressing ongoing capital costs, anticipating future costs of upgrades to the campus data network, providing resources to replace computers and other equipment, addressing the replacement cycle, and identifying future information technology projects. The plan provided for them, at least to start, with the 2 percent tuition increment. Calvin, however, perceived these projects only as a means to an end: supporting the institution's educational mission.

Following the Purdue consultants' suggestion, Calvin also formed the Information Services Committee, with a mandate to advise rather than "involve itself in the day-to-day administration of the Calvin Information Technology department."⁷ The committee, which reports to the faculty senate, consists of the CIO; one student; one Calvin IT staff member; an IT staff member from another unit; and four faculty members, of whom one serves as chair. The committee provides the link between overall IT services implementation and the faculty governance system. DeVries commented, "Faculty governance is particularly strong and active here at Calvin;

this committee has been more occupied with development of campus-wide policies than administrivia. Still, they do provide the connection to faculty governance that provides a feedback loop and endorsement of major decisions. For example, they spearheaded the decision about ubiquitous laptop computing a few years ago. Last fall they began working on drafts of two policies, 'Calvin College Information Privacy Policy' and 'Information Security Plan for Calvin College,' to bring us into compliance with the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act." He also explained, "In the spring, the broad guidelines for IT resource allocations for academic departments for the following year are presented to the committee before final review with the provost and the deans. We also confer with the committee about the validity of the ideas for pilot projects—they function as a community sounding board/focus group for the IT staff."

Early on, DeVries forged an open relationship with his staff. In a presentation titled "Calvin Information Technology: A New Name, A New Beginning," he stated his vision: "To promote information technologies at Calvin College which are appropriate to academic and administrative needs of the college and which support all members of the community."⁸ As part of the "new beginning," DeVries reorganized the information services division (see Figure 1).

Information services includes the library, the Instructional Resources Center, and Heritage Hall, which houses archives for

the college, for Calvin Seminary (which has a separate governing board and administration), and for the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

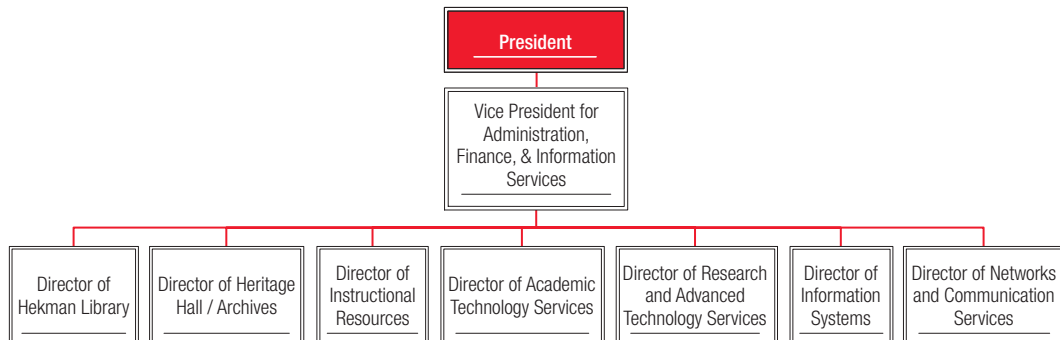
Significant Areas of Change

DeVries executed the CIO role so successfully that when the CFO resigned, he was asked to serve as an interim appointee in that role. He presently occupies both positions as vice president for administration, finance, and information services. Although administration and finance remains a separate division, the rather unique combination of roles has helped DeVries move forward with numerous initiatives.

Campus-Wide Software Initiatives

Managing change is never easy, even with Calvin's strong institutional buy-in. CIT's strategy was to effect change in the summer, to give people time to adjust. In summer 1998, CIT replaced WordPerfect and QuattroPro with the Microsoft Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access). In summer 1999, CIT deployed GroupWise for e-mail and calendaring and provided Y2K information for faculty and staff. It held extensive training sessions to accustom faculty and staff to the new software and reduce support issues later. To celebrate the changes—and add some fun—CIT held a "New Year's Eve" party in July.

Figure 1. Calvin College Information Services Organizational Chart



Part of the planning effort—obvious to CIT staff but perhaps not to everyone on campus—involved creating long-term relationships with vendors. Outside Hekman Library, which also houses CIT offices and the main student computer lab, IT vendors have two reserved parking spaces at the heart of the campus.

None of these changes was explicitly part of the Five-Year Information Technology Maintenance and Renewal Plan. While Calvin's sense of community creates open avenues for communication, not everyone is aware of CIT's planning or agrees absolutely with the changes that have occurred. Still, Calvin's IT priorities clearly reflect college priorities. Admissions, for example, is critical to institutional success; alumni relations are important but not critical. Thus, Stephen Ruis, associate director of admissions, noted that "IT is a department that is eager to partner, to serve and provide solutions for whatever we want to do," and provided specific examples including implementation of the Datatel client for enterprise resource planning (ERP), e-enroll, help with process reengineering, and encouragement for the use of instant messaging for communication. Ruis feels his office has "a unique, working relationship with the IT department." Mike Van Denend, director of alumni and public relations, took a more philosophical view and summed up administrative attitudes by commenting, "Responsible use of technology is central to our mission at Calvin." He surely reflected campus-wide sentiment by saying, "In the long haul we're better off working together."

The library and, to some extent, the Office of the Registrar raise cultural issues. Registrar Tom Steenwyk commented that it was "interesting to hear IT has a five-year plan" and observed that Calvin's "academic division is a prime customer" for CIT. His office faces considerable "challenge due to changes in processes." Greg Sennema, digital services

librarian, similarly feels his program has "dual relationships with CIT, just another department, but also access to CIT databases, especially to the MySQL server," relationships that greatly facilitated some projects on which he had worked. Sennema also said he had been given two IT support positions in recognition of the importance of library conversion in the digital age.

Life-Cycle Replacement and Standardization

Jim VandenBosch, a longtime professor in the English department, reported that providing hardware for faculty and staff 20 years ago was pretty chaotic. A "dispersion model" provided all kinds of machines. "Henry implemented a total change," he said, and now "most faculty don't complain about computer resources."

Rick De Vries, assistant director for technology integration, was responsible for the life-cycle replacement implementation. "At first," he said, "we tried ruthless standardization." The goal was to support desktop security and reduce software costs. Because of faculty objections, a decision was made to allow for some variation. Still, De Vries continued, "during migration to a three-year replacement model, repair positions went down to one student." Going with "a Microsoft campus agreement for three or four years proved very cost-effective."

Jerry Fondse, another English professor, commented, "Tech people are pretty good at figuring out what faculty want, but sometimes are a bit pushy." Joel Adams provided further insight into how CIT works: "There is a plan for the typical campus user, but the plan for a campus standard includes a great deal of flexibility." Adams added that CIT's new service model provides good support. It seems that, on the whole, the plan to standardize and create a life-cycle replacement model gained wide acceptance on campus.

Academic Programs

President Byker is proud of Calvin College's 1.1 to 1 ratio of staff to faculty. This ratio appears to depend partly on technology-based efficiencies, but we also found that many staff members whose primary appointment is with CIT also teach or are involved in important educational initiatives. Key to advancing IT at Calvin was the creation, in 2000, of Interdisciplinary 110, Research and Information Technology (RIT), a one-hour course required for all students as part of the new core curriculum. Taken in conjunction with a required freshman English course, RIT "is a first-year introduction to the computer and to college-level research skills." The course also addresses other issues: "Included in the course is a discussion of the cultural impact of computer technology and the ethical responsibilities of its users."⁹ This rather unique approach earned Calvin a three-year Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to fund both course development and dissemination of course contents and methodology to Council of Independent Colleges members and other partner schools.

Dawn Bush, director of academic technology services, along with faculty and librarians, led course development, and members of her staff help support it. Steve VanderLeest, professor of engineering and one of the RIT developers, stressed that "planning for the course was helped by CIT." Students we interviewed concurred that IT support was excellent. On the other hand, many students commented that faculty use of technology varied enormously, not that this assertion surprised us. This is a familiar story across the country. The students we talked with, all of whom seemed tech savvy, thought the RIT course was valuable, but some told us they thought that in a class of 30, 5 to 10 could test out, 10 to 12 needed the instruction, and there were some students who weren't interested. We also found it interesting that

CIT is an important employer of students on campus and sees this as part of its role in student development. One student said, "I didn't come to Calvin because of technology, but technology kept me here."

Implementing a Course Management System and a Portfolio System

Dawn Bush oversees the largest single CIT unit, which is not surprising because supporting the college's academic mission is a primary function. Her responsibilities include the help desk, teaching and learning support services, and technology integration services. Of 38 full-time CIT employees, she is responsible for 15. In all three areas, academic technology services also employs many students. Dawn is convinced that her unit plans more *for* constituents than *with* them. This is especially true in Calvin's Blackboard implementation. There was no direct faculty involvement in her decision to go with Blackboard. Calvin already had implemented some of the typical course management system services before Blackboard arrived on the scene. Coming in, as it were, on the ground floor, she was able to do local branding. At Calvin, Blackboard is known as KnightVision and is widely used. ("The Knights" is the Calvin nickname for the various athletic teams.)

Rob Bobeldyk, assistant director for teaching and learning, said about 80 percent of Calvin courses now use KnightVision. With a teaching and learning staff of five people, his office is kept busy supporting the educational mission. He estimates that he spends 40 percent of his personal time on curriculum development, working with various faculty members. Student response at Calvin, as at most colleges and universities, is mixed. One student told us, "Sometimes you get professors who don't know what they're doing with technology." Although the chief complaint concerns the use of PowerPoint in the class-

room, some said they were frustrated when faculty used KnightVision solely for posting class documents such as the syllabus, lecture notes, or PowerPoint presentations. When a faculty member knows what she or he can do with KnightVision, however, it greatly enhances the classroom experience.

KnightVision's success convinced Dawn Bush that Calvin could use Blackboard to implement a portfolio system when faculty pushed for one. Bob Keeley, professor of education, said, "The portfolio initiative originated in the department, and the response from CIT was very positive—there was no master plan, just talking to each other." Calvin recognizes that IT fluency is crucial for graduates of their teacher education program, which attracts the largest number of majors at the college. The education department now requires all students to create a Web-based portfolio using KnightVision. President Byker is pleased their recent accreditation review took particular notice of this: "The members of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education review team recognized the distinctive nature of this portfolio implementation during their accreditation site visit last fall, and they have passed along Calvin's model to other schools. As a result, other colleges and universities have been consulting with the teaching and learning team in Calvin Information Technology as to how their school might implement a similar program."

Bob Keeley worked with Rob Bobeldyk in this implementation. He said he was impressed with their "openness to talking with each other and listening." After the implementation, he noted, "Support is first rate. When there's a problem, they respond very quickly."

Laptop and Wireless Initiatives

Karen Saupe, professor of English, chaired the Information Services Committee in 2000 when an initiative to require all students to have laptop computers was considered. She

said, "I was frustrated by faculty responses, and by IT's insistence. We need CIT to lead us, and they're getting better at listening to us. Feedback loops are informal, and sometimes don't work." But she admitted the laptop initiative was a frustrating process. The committee conducted surveys and consulted faculty and students, and in the end decided not to go forward with the project. Henry DeVries remarked that he was not disappointed with the outcome; he thought the debate was useful. This laptop decision illustrates how CIT opens an issue for discussion and willingly accepts a campus-wide decision after considerable debate.

The committee has also considered a project to create a "wireless campus," but this is currently on hold. Still, Bob Keeley and his education department colleagues set about dreaming what they might be able to do with a set of laptops with wireless capabilities. He really became excited when CIT said they were looking for a department to come up with a proposal. Despite the decision not to implement a widespread laptop initiative, and a decision to put a wireless rollout on hold, the idea of a limited laptop project took off and was approved. This again illustrates that communication channels are open to individual initiatives as well as campus-wide implementations. Indeed, Sue Hasseler, another professor of education, observed, "Impetus sometimes has come from a few department members, who work with CIT and bring things back to the department." Joel Adams and Bob Keeley both commented that different departments have different relationships with CIT, engineering and education in particular. Clearly, CIT is eager to provide laptops in classroom situations where they're useful, but the college backs off from more universal solutions.

Smart Classrooms

Given the extensive use of technology

in teaching, it is not surprising that CIT has worked hard to create smart classrooms. Rob Bobeldyk estimates that at least 75 percent of campus classrooms are “smart.” Designing them has been a collaborative effort from the start and a learning experience for everyone. Steve VanderLeest noted, “The planning process is good because we have trials ... support of experiments. Smart classrooms is a good example. Piloted with interested faculty, it went from something simple to greater variety.”

Calvin now maintains three standard configurations for their smart classrooms: red, blue, and green. These configurations, together with a list of all available rooms, directions for use of the equipment, and even pictures of individual rooms, are maintained on the Web.¹⁰

As the rooms became more widely used, Bobeldyk discovered new support needs and responded quickly. Phones were installed in all the smart classrooms so that faculty could easily contact the help desk, which guarantees a live response anywhere on campus within five minutes. David Fuentes, a professor of music, commented extensively on working with CIT. He noted that much of the “hardware and software used for music are not designed for education.” When CIT staff observed that one of the rooms designed for music instruction was not being used much, they consulted the music department and quickly responded to the difficulties. Collaboratively, CIT and the department redesigned the available space, ordering smaller workstations to accommodate more electronic pianos. CIT also made changes in the lab management. Fuentes clearly was impressed, and pleased that “Henry [DeVries] gave permission to hire someone to help with the lab.” This sort of cooperation has led to extensive technology use at Calvin.

Providing Service and Support

In many ways the key to successful alignment of IT at Calvin College can be seen in the

dedicated attention to service and support. The help desk, for example, conducts monthly surveys based on incoming questions and on more general issues of customer satisfaction, and posts the results on its Web page.¹¹ While help desk staff are often too busy to keep these results current, a feedback loop from the help desk surveys to the teaching and learning team directs the development and implementation of training experiences. This clearly shows concern for acting on information rather than merely making it accessible.

Another sign of CIT’s dedication is that although it does no chargebacks for service, numerous formal service-level agreements (SLAs) exist. CIT publishes these for the community on the staff resources page under “policies and guidelines.”¹² Included are a statement regarding service-level agreement objectives and individual links to such specific kinds of agreements as

- ◆ computer software SLA,
- ◆ computer hardware and operating system SLA,
- ◆ dial-up SLA,
- ◆ ResNet SLA,
- ◆ take IT home SLA,
- ◆ CIT services SLA (explanation of which services are provided to various members of the Calvin community), and
- ◆ classroom technology SLA (smart classrooms, computer labs, and so on).

Finally, a link to “work order priorities” takes users to a page that specifies response times, and a link to “glossary of terms” provides further assistance.

Conclusions

Calvin College is now nearly midway through a second planning effort, “A Five-Year Plan, 2002–2007,” and sometime this fall will evaluate the process with an interim review. This plan maintains a keen awareness of technology’s importance: “Calvin College has made major strides to provide students,

faculty and staff with the infrastructure and services they need for communication, computation, record keeping, research and teaching.”¹³ It also reflects cost concerns: “Not only are there costs of equipment, software and services to contend with, but very real human costs in time and energy spent on learning to work with new systems. These costs tax already full schedules and already hard-to-balance priorities. Calvin has done a reasonable job of weighing such costs to date, but the task has no end in sight.”¹⁴

And it reflects a continuing sense of alignment. The first of two “greatest challenges” facing the college “is to renew and advance its Reformed Christian identity and mission.” The second is to consolidate and sustain its engagement with the revolutions in collegiate pedagogy, curriculum, and technology.¹⁵ The “Goals, Strategies and Tasks, 2002–2006” once more includes balanced statements regarding technology.

Although once again no individual plan for technology exists, Randy Buursma, director of student academic services and professor of communication arts and sciences, sees CIT moving in perfect alignment with the institution as a whole. At student academic services, a comprehensive office for student support services, Randy is in an excellent position to gauge student use of technology.¹⁶ He commented, “There is a plan for updating hardware. There’s also software planning. Folks at IT look for products that work with our vision at Calvin. And there’s other planning from IT folks. They are constantly planning for training. A tracking program is used to see what questions are coming in. Somebody is thinking about how we work with each other and is looking for products that will support our work. GroupWise and KnightVision are CIT initiatives. People who are here become agents of renewal. Technology can be used to bring about God’s kingdom, and this is what we teach.”

Calvin has undertaken numerous strategic initiatives, notably to create a cabinet-level CIO position, to add over half a million dollars from a tuition increase to the institutional budget for technology expenditures, and to increase the number of smart classrooms over time. For the most part, however, CIT is concerned with how to improve daily support. Installing phones in the smart classrooms to let instructors call for instant help is much more tactical (how do we get faculty comfortable with using these rooms?) than strategic. To support its strategic goal to create lasting vendor relationships, CIT tactically dedicated two parking spaces outside their offices reserved for IT vendors only. This balance of strategic and tactical initiatives demonstrates an impressive alignment of technology with every aspect of the college’s mission and goals.

IT services at Calvin College have been organized in ways that strongly suggest a keen attention to alignment and may provide a road map for others. Elements of this road map include the following:

- ◆ *Engage leadership.* There remains little substitute for an institutional leader with vision who understands and appreciates how information technologies can service the academic purposes of the institution.
- ◆ *Solicit and heed outside feedback.* By commissioning an external review of IT by knowledgeable outsiders who had a stake in the institution, the president took an important step and sent a powerful signal. This action announced IT’s importance, an intention to invest in IT, and an expectation of IT’s performance that was to be benchmarked against an external authority.
- ◆ *Create a CIO position at the cabinet level and recruit an outstanding candidate to fill the position.* Earlier ECAR studies indicate that inclusion of the CIO position in the cabinet is associated with a host of positive leadership styles and behaviors. These

moves reinforce the message to community members that IT is deemed important at the highest levels of the institution.

- ◆ *Create an advisory information services committee.* This signals that IT decisions span the academy and derive from real institutional (academic and business) priorities. The aligning message in this action is that “IT is everyone’s responsibility.”
- ◆ *Write an IT plan and incorporate IT into the institutional plan.* This is another signal of IT’s importance and professionalism. Planning and plans exist in part to align IT’s priorities with those of the institution and with the institution’s financial means. They also indicate intentions and expectations delivered widely to members of the campus community.
- ◆ *Find new funding and apply it!* President Byker and Calvin College paid more than lip service to the newly elevated institutional priority on IT. The college’s IT funding increase recognizes IT’s inherent ongoing costs and reflects a genuine commitment to heeding the Purdue advisors’ advice and to the IT organization’s evolving plans and priorities.
- ◆ *Merge CIO and CFO positions.* While hardly replicable on a wide scale, this action testifies to extraordinary alignment among and between key campus functions. The ultimate goal of alignment may be to weave technology into the fabric of an institution’s thinking and actions. For Henry DeVries, there is no separation of Calvin College’s administrative intentions from its technological capacities, potentialities, or limitations.
- ◆ *Introduce flexible standards (Microsoft campus agreement).* Implementing and enforcing standards is key to aligning technology applications and support resources and aligning IT resources and institutional expertise. Calvin College’s actions were organized to realize these

alignment potentials while incorporating sufficient flexibility to honor and recognize the institution’s academic diversity.

- ◆ *Create long-term relationships with vendors.* We see this as another means of aligning the institution’s IT directions with the external world and of creating the preconditions for long-term success in procuring and supporting vended technologies and solutions.
- ◆ *Require students to achieve technology literacy.* A technology plan that invests in a new technical infrastructure and IT-enabled services without simultaneously elevating campus users’ capacities to fully exploit them is fundamentally unaligned. Every ECAR study reinforces the message that the gating function in every new technology deployment is not technology per se, but people’s capacity to acclimate themselves to the technology. Calvin College’s linkage of technology training to student research literacy was another way of signaling the tight alignment between IT and the institution’s core academic purposes.
- ◆ *Create bottom-up pilots—for example, wireless and portfolios.* Information technologists at Calvin College consistently waited for or encouraged signals (demand pull) from academic units as opportunities to pilot new capabilities. Again, taking a “leader-servant” posture builds trust between the IT organization and its key stakeholders, the goal of a fully aligned IT organization being that every new IT investment was “someone else’s” idea.
- ◆ *Implement service-level agreements.* The Calvin College IT organization’s hotline phones in smart classrooms and service-level agreement to respond to outages within five minutes removed faculty’s real and appropriate fears of IT. The message once again is that IT serves the academic mission.

- ◆ *Earn credibility: “support is first rate!”* There is perhaps no more powerfully aligning activity than constant and daily execution of promised services. Credibility builds trust, which forms the foundation of all aligned organizations.
- ◆ *Support experiments and conduct surveys.* The Calvin College IT organization exhibits a humility and quiet confidence that again foster trust. Engaging in regular and ongoing survey work signals that the service provider (IT) is listening. Conducting experiments signals both an openness to new ideas and approaches and a willingness to make mistakes in the name of service and progress.

This is an amazing, almost textbook story line. All the classic alignment indicators and techniques are present: leadership, reporting level, governance, planning and plans, leadership for faculty initiatives, accommodation of staff needs, software standards, vendor relationships, alignment of IT in support of academic programs, alignment with customers through service level agreements, and flexibility.

Of course, it helps enormously to have a vision that all campus constituents share, a mission that encompasses all the activities germane to an educational institution’s success, and a well-organized staff that works well with all sorts of people on campus. Calvin’s membership in such organizations as the Council of Independent Colleges, where it serves in a leadership role and shares its successes with technology, also indicates a rare kind of alignment and dedication. Not many institutions have such a unified vision, but clearly such a vision provides for great success in the use of technology. These are all goals and lessons for which any academic institution can strive.

There is, of course, something more at Calvin College—a tradition of which it is

proud. The first bullet on a sheet of “facts and points of interest,” available for visitors, reads, “Calvin is one of the country’s largest Christian colleges and has a 2003–2004 enrollment of 4,332 students, representing almost every state, numerous Canadian provinces and 50 other countries around the world. At \$17,770 for tuition for 2004–2005, Calvin is about \$3,000 less expensive than the average four-year U.S. private college. Financial aid for Calvin lowers costs significantly. Over 60 percent of Calvin students receive need-based financial aid.”

Today, Calvin College is celebrated as a premier institution keeping faith with its religious tradition.¹⁷ The college vision statement is both succinct and comprehensive: “Calvin College is a comprehensive liberal arts college in the Reformed tradition of historic Christianity. Through our learning, we seek to be agents of renewal in the academy, church, and society. We pledge fidelity to Jesus Christ, offering our hearts and lives to do God’s work in God’s world.”¹⁸ This vision pervades every facet of life at the college. IT is seen as an important means for achieving institutional goals. As President Gaylen Byker put it, preparing “our students to engage the challenges of the digital workplace” is a central concern. Similarly, faculty research often focuses on the responsible use of technology. Professor of communication arts and science Quentin J. Schultze, for example, has published several books on the responsible use of IT, including *Christianity and the Media in America: Toward a Democratic Accommodation*.¹⁹

Still, it is not Christian commitment alone that has led Calvin College to such success with IT. No doubt many colleges and universities—those that have kept “faith with their religious traditions” as well as those that have secularized—cannot boast of Calvin’s successes. Calvin has looked at the future and is determined to fully engage with it.

Endnotes

1. B. Albrecht et al., *Information Technology Alignment in Higher Education* (Boulder, Colo.: EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, Research Study, Vol. 3, 2004), <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ecar_so/ers/ers0403/>.
2. Calvin College, "Report of the Information Review Team to President Gaylen J. Byker," Apr. 22, 1996.
3. Calvin College, *A Five-Year Plan, 1997–2002*, May 1997, p. 5.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
6. *Ibid.*, slide 8 in the PowerPoint version of the report.
7. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/admin/comm/info/mand.htm>>.
8. H. DeVries, PowerPoint presentation, slide 3.
9. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/admin/registrar/core/courses/rit.htm>>.
10. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/it/services/smartclassrooms/index.htm>>.
11. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/it/helpdesk/aboutus/stats.htm>>.
12. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/it/services/helpdesklas/index.htm>>.
13. Calvin College, *A Five-Year Plan, 2002–2007*, May 2002, p. 6.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
16. For an extensive catalog of the services provided, see <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/sas/>>.
17. See R. Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).
18. See <<http://www.calvin.edu/about/mission.htm>>.
19. Q. J. Schultze, *Christianity and the Media in America: Toward a Democratic Accommodation* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 2003).