**Shared Services: A New Service Model for Your Consideration**
(Presentation to the Provost’s Council)

I am very happy to be here to discuss a collaborative model for providing IT services at USC.

Currently, Information Technology Services (ITS) provides a range of core infrastructure services, such as server colocation, commodity networking on campus, and state-of-the-art connectivity to external networks. ITS also offers specialized, high-end services, including a high-performance computing center that ranks in the top five of academic super computers in the U.S. and an advanced, specialized media facility, known as the USC Digital Repository, which underlies the USC Shoah Foundation Institute and its applications for research and large-scale archival preservation and storage.

ITS’s general-use services include Blackboard and email. ITS and many schools are converging on the same Microsoft Office 365 (O365) technologies, with more and more schools deciding to come into the ITS instance of O365. ITS also assists in procuring campus-wide licenses of software used by multiple schools. Key examples of these include MATLAB, Lynda.com, and Mathematica.

USC’s schools also provide a range of key services, some in partnership with ITS. These services range from world-class to informal. Some services are supported substantially by researchers who rely on them for obtaining competitive grants. Some services develop through coordination among schools, while others develop in more of an ad hoc manner. Too often, a lack of convergence means that some schools, especially smaller ones, are unable to provide all the services to their faculty members and students that they would like.

I am hoping that we can move to a more thoughtful, strategic, and efficient service model by joining together in new ways. My goal is for ITS to listen as effectively as possible to schools’ priorities as plans emerge for new services. I see ITS as a significant partner in the process as schools identify innovative services that they need to build locally. When services are shared between one school and another, ITS needs to support this by enabling services and common architectures. Through partnership, we will do great things together.

What do we mean by shared services?

Shared services are defined as the “consolidation of business operations that are used by multiple parts of the same organization.”¹

At USC, we would distinguish shared services from services that are completely centralized, such as the voice and data networks, as well as from services that are provided internally by a school or unit for its own community.

¹ From: [http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Shared-services](http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Shared-services)
Shared services represent opportunities for partnership, allowing academic or administrative units with specialized business or technology needs to collaborate with other units for their mutual benefit.

Why do we believe it is important to share services?

Delivering administrative services used to be easier because they were aimed at a small group of administrative users who received special training. Now, these services are aimed at faculty, students, prospective students, parents, support staff, alumni, and trustees, as well as administrators. Campuses need to rethink how they design such systems. Partnership with the end users is critical.

It requires much more development time and greater expense to design systems that engage non-administrative users, or “end users.” The expectations of our users are high. They are established by consumer software products, such as iTunes or Gmail, applications that have millions of users and that are professionally designed with great attention to functionality, usability, and aesthetics. These applications are thoroughly tested before release and go through continuous improvement and upgrade cycles. There is a considerable investment made in these products to get them into the marketplace and to keep them competitive.

Thus shared services are an opportunity for us to rethink how we deliver administrative and other computing services and technologies in a collaborative, high-quality, and cost-efficient way.

So, how do we get from here to there?

Some of our challenges are easily addressed. When I first arrived at USC, I heard that some central policies or processes discouraged deans from sharing access to administrative systems and services with other schools. In those cases that came to my attention, the issue of discouraging sharing was immediately resolved, often merely by shedding light on it.

Let me say here that there must not be barriers of this kind to your sharing of resources or services across environments. Sharing should be encouraged and enabled at all levels, but always with attention to addressing security and privacy requirements.

As many of you are aware, ITS has regular meetings with the IT leaders in the schools. While these meetings have led to meaningful collaboration, I am taking steps to improve the model.

My goal is to name an ITS liaison for each school to work with your associate deans and technology staff and to join me in working with you, where appropriate, because I want to ensure that ITS is not simply talking but also assisting. ITS will help when multiple schools wish to work together on a key initiative and need campus support, whether for licensing, basic infrastructure, or other technology needs. We will also engage with you when opportunities present themselves for services at the school level that may become campus services in the future. Rather than view these opportunities in isolation, we need
to welcome them as opportunities for collaboration right from the start. Such areas as desktop support, innovative services such as Salesforce.com, and even group site licenses for innovative informatics software may originate in partnerships among schools and with ITS.

These liaisons will provide a single point of contact who will advocate for you within ITS to help you get to the right experts and resolve your issues. But most importantly, these liaisons will work with me as your partner in identifying ways for greater sharing and collaboration that will make a difference to you.

This process will not always be simple. A strategic shared services model allows organizations to be agile, while at the same time identifying opportunities for cost savings, by reducing the cost of purchase, support, and training over time.² For this to work, ITS needs to transform itself into a true service organization, one that is driven by collaboration and sharing with the schools, one that can adapt quickly as the needs of the university or schools change while also taking care of central core administrative services.

I wanted to share these thoughts with you today, not because my plan is complete, but precisely because I am eager to hear from you and others in your offices, including technology leaders, so that we can develop a shared plan and vision.

I would like to meet with each dean to talk about this liaison model and to ensure that we have key school contacts for other areas, like security, where new and very real advanced persistent threats or state-sponsored cyber espionage demand that we bring our technologists together on a common front. I also plan to launch a strategic planning process to help the campus identify how best to align information technologies and services between the schools, the central IT unit, and the business units. This is not about ITS; it is about how information technologies can best support the USC Strategic Vision—your vision.

The Strategic Technology Forum is a group of technologists that meets with me monthly. I would like to invite your school’s technology leader to help create an active council that will work both with your leadership team and with me as we craft priorities for service sharing. Perhaps we will need to start small, identifying some quick wins and building confidence as we go forward. I am committed to making the changes I need to make to support shared or common services.

Some of you may have been interviewed as part of my active effort to reassess ITS. I have been working on a thorough top-to-bottom reassessment of ITS’s structure in relation to its future as an organization that must be responsive to the schools as an agent for collaboration and innovation. At the same time, we intend to be responsive to new programs, such as the Informatics Initiative, which the provost recently announced. This informatics initiative provides us all with new opportunities to achieve the goals of the USC Strategic Vision, which concludes:

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“This strategic vision is a call to action, a call to think boldly and to enact the transformations envisioned here. We challenge our entire university community to use this vision to guide strategic planning and action for the coming decade.... [A]chieving the new vision will require a higher level of collaboration and connection among [the schools].”

I have shared some ideas with you today, and I hope that they spark some ideas on how we can work together. Over the coming weeks and months, my goal is to listen very carefully to your ideas, those of your faculty, and those of your technology leaders, so that we can together respond to this call to action.

Thank you.