

VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

Executive Summary

The Voice of the Community (VOC) campaign sought to appreciate the current climate towards Information Technology Services (ITS) at Florida State University (FSU), articulate expectations of technology used throughout FSU and communicate to the students, faculty and staff we serve that we are listening and care about their perceptions of our organization. Several consistent themes were uncovered among key stakeholders throughout the campaign. This executive summary presents four overarching thematic issues, as well as audience-specific issues for the sub-populations of faculty, campus partners, students and ITS employees. These efforts have created a snapshot of the experiences, perceptions and expectations the FSU community has with technology and, specifically, with ITS.

Process

A diverse, cross-university committee was formed in early summer 2019 to interview stakeholders, assimilate and analyze data and recommend findings to the ITS Executive Leadership Team. Through 27 listening sessions, including 16 one-on-one interviews and 11 focus groups, and 35 impromptu interviews, there were more than 125 participants who represent 49 colleges and departments in this study. The one-on-one interviews were with faculty members and college representatives from 10 of the 16 colleges. The focus groups participants were full-time staff members who serve in support and administrative capacities in Academic Affairs, Finance and Administration, Research, Student Affairs, University Communications, University Relations and direct support organizations. Students' voices were represented through focus groups and impromptu interviews. Additionally, there were 20 faculty members who partook in an online survey, and 277 ITS employees who participated in an internal perceptions survey.

The interviews and focus group sessions were recorded and auto-transcribed, then validated and clarified by the ITS User Experience staff. Committee members reviewed the transcripts and identified common themes. The transcripts were then merged and data was analyzed using NVivo to understand the quantity and quality of the identified themes. The committee met weekly throughout the summer of 2019 to discuss the interview responses, perceptions and concerns. While there were several issues that were expressed, the following concerns were central and repeated throughout the various listening sessions.



Central Question

As the result of the various interviews, focus groups and surveys, one central question came to the forefront—*Who is ITS?* Several participants, particularly faculty members, asked this question overtly. In other instances, this question was more implicit, with participants expressing their uncertainty on how to best get support, identify best practices or participate in collaborative partnerships.

Findings

Four major thematic issues were found to impact the broader campus community—communication, collaboration, contact and process confusion, and continuous support. Furthermore, specific themes were also identified for each key stakeholder (i.e., student, faculty, campus partner). The major thematic issues are presented here, and a comprehensive list of tactics and issues can be found in the full report.

Major Themes

Collaboration

One overarching theme heard in varying degrees within all 27 interviews and focus groups was that the campus community perceives ITS as a siloed organization that does not foster collaborative relationships with departments on campus. There is a strong desire from participants to be engaged in the process prior to implementation of ITS initiatives. Currently, participants feel neglected in the decision making process and perceive ITS as an “opaque” group which is disengaged with their university partners. This can be seen in the following comment from a faculty member who shares this point of view, *“I am not sure what ITS does or how we would work together.”*

Campus partners shared a slightly different experience. These respondents know what ITS does and the benefits the organization brings to the university, but many participants articulated that there is “friction” in this partnership or difficulties getting assistance with projects or ongoing support. *“If you told me that there was a standing once-a-month meeting and the point is to brainstorm on collaborations and enterprise level solutions, I’m coming to that. That’s cool. That’s something we need.”*

Communication

The second issue consistently discussed among the participants in each of the interviews and focus groups is the lack of purposeful communication between ITS and the university community. People are not aware what IT resources are available, often feel ITS speaks to them in a negative tone and believes ITS operates in “secret” or “behind a huge wall.” The resounding sentiment is that the university community wants to hear more from ITS and experience more transparency when interacting with the organization. *“I hope it continues and grows further because I think a little bit more transparency and openness would be very helpful.”*

ITS needs to shift the communication methods to include open communications about the challenges ITS faces. Humanize ITS and build the perception that ITS will work until we get something right. Additionally, ITS needs to communicate with one voice and be consistent in messaging and interactions with customers. This could include additional communication methods such as social media campaigns, town hall presentations at campus meetings and expanding an ITS monthly newsletter to more audiences. *“I think going on a road show of communication ... the vision, the structure and the major projects that are on the table right now without forgetting about all the little projects and communicating that as well. I think that would be good.”*

Contact & Process Confusion

The third major theme expressed through the diverse campus voices is that there is confusion about who to talk to or how to complete specific tasks. For example, one person stated it simply as *“you don't really know who to contact or you don't know what you don't know.”* This can be seen in participants' frustration with the current case management system and *“confusing”* categories. In the current system, a lack of technical literacy can cause requests for assistance to be routed to multiple locations before the problem is properly articulated or comprehended. This experience generates an inherent frustration with the process of receiving support and represents a roadblock for users.

One additional finding is there are also inconsistent behaviors and processes throughout the ITS organization. ITS utilizes multiple support systems and each ITS unit handles enhancement requests and repairs differently. For example, a participant used three different modes to communicate with ITS depending on what department he is working with, *“Depending on the situation ... pretty much CRM or TSR, and sometimes they use email.”*

Continuous Support

The final major theme uncovered through the VOC research was that individuals struggle with the current ITS support structure. People want to be able to resolve their issues quickly and effectively by either calling the ITS Service Desk, searching for resources to resolve the issue on their own or having a fast-track to advanced technical support.

This is an area where major improvements can be made. Solutions include a new customer relationship management system, audience-targeted support to provide specialized support based on the needs of the user and a knowledge base where users may quickly find the resources and training they need on available FSU technology services or recently released features and system updates. *“Would it be possible to have some sort of centralized place where you could learn about what else is out there or available to use?”*

Data Management (Faculty)

In addition to the overall issues identified, one concern unique to faculty members was made evident. Data management is a top priority for faculty members, yet ITS' response is very limited. As a Research 1 institution, research is one of the main faculty priorities and there is a desire for more support towards that mission. There is a need to collect, store and share data with other researchers, both internal and external to FSU.

Some faculty members are aware of the internal data management resources provided by FSU, but choose to use an external platform (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox). Faculty members attribute external platform utilization to ease of usability or personal efficiency. In fact, more than half of the faculty interviews referenced that technology should make their lives "easier." One person stated succinctly, *"I'm constantly trying to find ways to utilize technology to not only make my job easier but any other person that is supporting students."*

Administrative Processes (Campus Partners)

The majority of the campus partners who participated in the listening sessions already have an existing relationship with ITS. Participants stated they have an established partnership with ITS and know how to get support, but improvements could be made to processes and relationship building. The sentiment from campus partners was that good work is being done, but more clarity, transparency and consistency is needed. *"[Communication] needs to be more at the beginning or more in the middle before the contract. So, I think whatever ITS can do to be more proactive and position themselves as a partner to campus would be great."*

In the area of transparency, there is a desire for clarity in the billing statements and funding model. There is concern that units are unclear what they are paying for or how the fees are assessed. Likewise, campus partners feel items billed at a straight cost-per-unit model do not represent the true cost of materials and labor when purchasing in bulk. *"We need another billing model. Something that makes more sense, something more transparent and sustainable at the end of the day."*

Seamless Experience (Students)

Students' reported experience is vastly different than the faculty and staff members. Students had very little complaints, but want to ensure a high expectation for consistency remains. Students demand that technology is integrated throughout their experience and is *"not a nice to have, it's a need to have."* Interruptions and outages are problematic for students and hinders their ability to be productive when time is most critical. Additionally, students look to ITS to provide innovative and cutting-edge technology available for students to use.

Our students not only expect FSU to provide innovative technology but they also want their instructors to use modern teaching techniques with the provided classroom technology. Several of the participants expressed a desire for their professors to better comprehend and utilize the

technology within their classrooms, which would ultimately enhance the student learning experience. *“I think a lot of professors are not up to date with the technology in the classroom. A lot of them don’t know how to work both screens or projectors.”*

ITS

Juxtaposed to these external impressions, our ITS internal perception survey results provide evidence that the ITS staff feels the organization is “providing exemplary support to the university community,” with 64 percent of ITS respondents rating the statement as strongly agree or agree. This variance between internal ITS personnel perceptions and faculty or staff perceptions may be attributed to a core issue of not understanding each other’s business and lack of managed expectations. With intentional effort, this area can be improved.

Additionally, ITS staff would like leadership to invest in staff members’ learning and professional development. Only 44 percent of ITS staff agreed or strongly agreed they received adequate training from ITS for their current role. This leaves room for improvement in on-the-job training and individualized development plans. Formal and informal training could include communities of practice, professional development and personalized pathways for professionals who are looking to continue to learn and grow.

Tensions

Naturally, these themes do not occur in silos, and the solutions to these challenges will be complex and interdependent due to the dichotomous nature of technology support at FSU. There are tensions that occur within ITS, between ITS and the university community. Unclear expectations on both sides of the relationship causes tension and lack of transparency.

For example, while there is communicated need for ITS to be a better partner and *“come to the table,”* there is also a clear message that some entities want autonomy to manage their own systems, servers, data storage and machines.

Likewise, the campus community is very critical regarding the lack of consistency and communication of existing processes and procedures. Yet, when there is consistent communication surrounding these processes and procedures, there is often a lack of campus compliance. With an institution as large as FSU, it has been difficult to have 100 percent compliance with policies and procedures. ITS must be prepared to provide evidence on why decisions are made and the benefits of using the provided services.

Additionally, ITS has to be ready to be actively engaged, seeking to collaborate with campus partners to identify their needs and implement tools and methodologies that best meet the campus needs, versus interventions that work best for only the internal ITS organization. This strategy would lessen the gap between the services provided and the preferred services that participants believe would *“help them be personally efficient.”*

ITS must increase transparency regarding the ongoing technology initiatives and efforts to support campus needs. ITS must become a more active partner for change, better communicating the vast array of services currently available to campus, clarifying existing organizational business processes, identifying opportunities for improvement and providing more user-friendly support to users needing assistance.

Conclusion

Participants were thrilled to be asked to share their voice within our community. Their comments, opinions and observations brought into focus several clear areas for improvement. Now, the real work begins. The Voice of Community will merely be an ill-fated public relations campaign if ITS leadership does not take steps to make measurable change. The FSU community provided their feedback and perceptions as well as several tactics they believe will improve ITS processes and augment partnerships and relationships across the university to improve the technology experience at FSU.