In some institutions, competing interests exist between the library and IT units. If both units can unite behind a vision of student success, clarify each unit’s roles in that process, and find ways to objectively assess outcomes, then the institution and the students benefit greatly.

OUR SUCCESS STORY AT MERCER UNIVERSITY

Organized by function rather than location...

Mercer University is a widely distributed institution. We have, all together, six locations, plus we are approved to deliver distance education in 42 states and territories. Our students are engaged in service learning in various countries around the world. Therefore, it became necessary for the IT and library units to reorganize by function of the employees, rather than where their office is located. IT reorganized in 2013, and the library in 2016. Each unit now has a single organizational chart, with reporting lines reaching across campuses. We achieved efficiencies of communication and decision making by removing duplicate reporting lines. Reorganization along functional, rather than physical, lines removed the separation between the on-campus and distance learners, and enabled both units to provide a uniform user experience.

Collocated some of our services...

At our two largest locations in Macon, GA and Atlanta, GA, we located student-staffed IT Help Desks in the library. On the Macon campus, we have plans to actually build an office for the Help Desk leadership and staff on the main floor of the library. The two main libraries are now a one-stop shop for research and technological assistance.

Interaction of leadership...

The Executive Director of IT Client Support Services and the Associate Dean of University Library work together closely and often. The library Assistant Dean for Technical Services and Systems sits on IT committees, and recently the library collaborated with IT in writing a job description for a library systems vacancy. IT and the library both have presences on the Distance Learning Committee.

Cooperation through common interests...

With the exception of some specialized labs, all open computing is located in the libraries. Virtual Desktop Infrastructure technology was implemented across the university for open computing, which took troubleshooting out of the hands of library staff and provided a consistent user experience across campuses. IT supports a guest network that is used primarily in the libraries by students with their own laptops or other devices. The guest network and virtual desktop implementation provide consistent, dependable research platforms in the libraries, while leaving maintenance in the hands of IT personnel. IT and the library are also working together to capture student data for assessing the use of library resources and the impact of library use on student success.

What Benefits Have Been Derived?

- Consistent student experience at all campuses
- Improved relations with students and faculty
- Librarians spend less time assisting with IT-related problems
- Processes have been streamlined
- Effective management of resources
- Improved communications with faculty and students

Why Has this Partnership Been Successful?

- Appreciation of each other’s function
- Excellent personal working relationships across units and campuses
- Leadership focused on a consistent, quality user experience
- Common vision of success for students
- Clear mission and vision from the institution
- Library leadership sees IT as partners, rather than support personnel
- University administration provides empowerment at the unit leadership level to make decisions

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