Support Services Task Force
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INTRODUCTION
Charge: Create an infrastructure of support services and processes which is flexible enough to deal with the changing needs of our campus community, and where each person is consciously promoting the mission of WPI.

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In an effort to determine the key issues and needs of WPI's Support Services, the Task Force first set out to define who, in fact, should be included under the heading "Support Services." It was determined that all non-academic offices and services should be included (see list in Appendix) for the purposes of our research.

Each office was solicited for a mission statement and had an opportunity to sit down with a member of the task force to openly share information regarding key current and future issues, both large and small. It is important to note that the Task Force asked for a sampling of staff for these meetings that could include - where possible - support, mid-level, and management employees from each office. Please refer to the outline of "talking points" used for these conversations, along with mission statements and meeting summaries by office, in the Appendix.
What follows is a list of common key issues and recommendations that emerged from those meetings as well as from the Open Campus Meeting, held on February 11th. In every case, the issues reflect the opinions not only of the members of the Task Force but of most members of the Support Service community. The Task Force made every effort not to be bound by current organizational or departmental structure but rather, identify key functions when considering effectiveness.

Lastly, as you read the following key issues and themes, please note that the Task Force believes that each is of the utmost importance and needs to be addressed - in both the short and long-term. Until then, it is impossible for the WPI community to respond proactively to opportunities and it will, instead, remain operationally reactive - where innovation and quality will continue to suffer.

**ISSUES**

**Campus Culture**
As members of the task force visited various Offices around campus, we found many unfortunate barriers that divide Support Services from Faculty--and worse yet, Support Services from one another. Some of these barriers are tangible (buildings and facilities not grouped appropriately) and will be touched upon elsewhere in this report. Equally disturbing, though, are the non-tangible barriers that exist in the WPI community.

While most individuals feel good about the office in which they work, they have a hard time understanding where their operation fits into the bigger picture (see Fragmentation). There is little partnership that spans offices and divisions. Managers protect and isolate their areas rather than share and understand one another's ideas. There is little time or encouragement for interaction between faculty and staff. An "us versus them" mentality clearly exists and divides our community.

**Fragmentation**
Support services are fragmented and isolated with each one separately responsible for their own budgets, processes, goals, and objectives. There is no overall systemic planning on campus for continuous review of major functions
and processes, how they should be performed, and who should be responsible. The current organizational structure of Divisions creates virtual walls with very little cross functional process planning.

Many problems have arisen due to lack of joint planning. One of the specific problems that was brought to the attention of this Task Force, for example, is the fact that students are required to schedule their courses for the upcoming school year before the summer school schedule has been released. Students who need to repeat courses, or simply wish to attend the summer session, are at a scheduling disadvantage due to the separate information releases. Several support areas have been adversely impacted by the fact that there is little coordinated campus wide planning or opportunity for input into new initiatives such as the Massachusetts Academy, UTC, and Waltham Campus.

The result of this fragmentation is that there is unnecessary duplication of work within various offices, a lack of cohesive processes specifically designed to meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff; ineffective response to problems; turf issues; and a sense of isolation on the part of staff and administrators who often have little idea of what functions are being performed by other areas and who to contact for assistance. Administrators feel isolated in purchasing decisions and see a need for coordinated purchasing planning. Departments are often aware of only their particular piece of a total process which actually involves many other offices; many homegrown and separate systems and databases have been developed with no concept of the overall system needs. Several departments expressed the need for improved communication, their frustration with decision making in a vacuum, and the lack of a forum for support area issues.

Space
One of the concerns most often mentioned had to do with "Space" which, for this purpose, we will break down into three categories: a) room for office, staff or students, b) scheduling space for events, and c) storage concerns. The most prevalent of the space concerns was that directly affecting the primary mission of an office. It was noted by Financial Aid, SocComm, SGA and Student Life that their offices should be in close proximity to other specific offices and/or central to the campus in order to create a hub of student services. On this issue,
as well as others, the "Campus Center" was frequently mentioned. Nearly all groups thought that more general space for their staff would result in higher quality service. Similarly, more residence hall rooms would ease mounting problems of tripling and afford possibilities of housing certain staff to address many of the twenty four hour a day concerns.

The second grouping of space issues has to do with the scheduling of rooms. There were a variety of concerns expressed ranging from "inconvenience" to "very frustrating". Several offices suggested that having access to an up-to-date database listing of available space would be most efficient. It was suggested this may be accomplished electronically with full inquiry access. Some of the concerns dealt with the lack of coordination between several different offices or departments regarding the scheduling of rooms and buildings.

The third grouping of space concerns pertains to storage. There were several comments received during the interview process about the insufficient amount of space for storage of records and supplies. Further there was concern expressed about the proximity of the storage space to the related function. Residential Services, for example, points out that they must store furnishings, such as desks, at a Holden site while other offices on campus utilize areas in the dormitories.

**Budget, Purchasing & Payroll**

Several issues pertaining to the purchasing function arose during the interview process. Comments about the inefficiencies of the fragmented and decentralized process, the lack of trust in a more central process and the perception of being punished through curtailed support if recommended vendors were not used caused this issue to be specifically noted. Purchasing was identified as an area in which opportunities are available in the near future to improve efficiencies by adopting "credit card" procedures for small purchases and through the relaxation of controls of purchase orders by requiring these documents only for large purchase items.

The budgeting process has been identified as a significant barrier to creating a strong and vital system of support services at WPI. Problematic characteristics of the current budgeting process are the absence of both flexibility and a
commitment to long range budgeting. The economics of higher education cannot support increased investment in all service areas. The reengineering of support services for the Year 2010 will require a budgeting practice which is flexible and capable of focus. Perhaps, incremental change in support services can be accommodated through a one year budget plan, but strategic change will remain out of reach so long as the process continues to be done year-to-year. Currently, WPI does not practice long range budgeting.

Administrative Computing
The current administrative computing environment is fragmented. It consists of mutually incompatible systems; some "home grown," some highly modified third-party systems. There is not one central, integrated database. This has resulted in "work-arounds," batch interfaces, and redundant data entry -- all very labor intensive for the CCC staff and for users. The existing situation is both expensive and inefficient.

Interviews with support departments revealed common frustrations with the CCC. Many people voiced confusion about who to contact in the CCC when they need help. It appears that while the CCC sees their role as primarily "support," the user community sees their role as "leadership and support." There is no one who is the recognized "technology leader" at WPI, and many believe this is one reason we have fallen behind with regard to administrative computing.

Assessment
From accurately tracking costs to obtaining feedback from our students, WPI does not measure the effectiveness of its operations. We have no established mechanisms in place to evaluate student satisfaction with our operations, to quantify the effects of changes to existing processes or to determine which activities add value and which ones do not. Other than making broad generalizations based on anecdotal evidence, we have no way to assess how well or how poorly we are doing. And these are only internal measures. We are doing very little external benchmarking to determine how we rate in relation to our competition.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Campus Culture

One of the key premises of The Plan is to learn to work collaboratively as partners toward a common goal. We are leaders in educating our students in this manner. Unfortunately, this same type of partnership has not been translated well, and in fact on many levels does not exist, in our day-to-day operations. We need a shared vision in order to create, encourage, and foster a sense of community that will not only go a long way in promoting positive good will on campus, but will enable better communication and coordination, less duplication, and will promote loyalty.

WPI needs to more closely define what "a better place" means, and make a genuine commitment to support that vision. If we want to attract more minority students and women, we need to hire and retain them on our faculty and staff. If we want to foster a sense of community where employees and their families are valued, we need a more inclusive process to address issues such as Day Care. People, from top to bottom, need to feel valued and validated, recognized and respected in ways both large and small. Half of the strategic plan is creating a shared vision; the other half is committing to, supporting, and sustaining a campus culture that can make it happen.

Fragmentation

We should begin at once to review the current organizational structure of Divisions and Departments and develop various models for an improved, function oriented, more flexible structure. There should be a focus on the interaction and integration of processes rather than the separate actions of each department. WPI, as a university, is comparable to a large jigsaw puzzle with no one responsible for how well the pieces fit together or what it looks like. Members of the WPI community should be included in working through the many issues involved in changing to a more effective organizational structure which will focus on continuously improving functions which meet the lifelong needs of students from the point of their initial inquiry to their status as alumni.

This review will need the full support of top administration and require the assistance of an outside consultant. The review should also focus on analyzing and recommending solutions for some of the most frequently cited support service problems.
Space
We suggest that organizational boundaries which currently exist should be ignored while we are scrutinizing functions. We may find, for example, that certain functions should share space (office personnel, storage, etc.) and, therefore, proximity might then no longer be an issue. We recommend WPI maintain a shared data base on the network which could be accessed, for inquiry, by everyone on campus. This data base would supply information on the status of all space on campus. Of course we will touch on some long-standing, sensitive issues relating to "whose" space it is and "who" has the authority to schedule such space. We believe in order to be very efficient WPI needs to immediately address all "turf" issues, whether it relates to storage areas, offices, classrooms or laboratories.

Budget, Purchasing and Payroll
Opportunities exist for the integration and quasi-centralization of the purchasing function at WPI. World class operations have shown significant economies can be achieved by maintaining closer, cooperative relationships with a few good vendors. In an integrated system the central purchasing agent establishes a reliable knowledge base on the purchasing needs and current sources for procurement. An integrated system is all about disseminating knowledge and not about acquiring control.

We recommend, therefore, the Steering Committee consider the efficiencies of a more centralized procurement process including a central receiving facility. We also recommend WPI proceed with efforts to implement "credit card" purchasing for small dollar items and amend policies regarding purchase orders to apply to large purchases only. If WPI is to undertake structural change in their support services, then a skillful practice for long range budgeting will be necessary. A healthy infrastructure of support services at WPI requires a budgeting practice which takes a fresh look at the relative cost-effectiveness of current services. That is, some consideration for zero based budgeting philosophy is necessary. This effort will be given some direction as WPI identifies the strategically critical programs which will need support in the Year 2010 and beyond.

Administrative Computing
We recommend the implementation of an integrated administrative computing system that would meet the following criteria: utilize a single shared database (e.g. Oracle), provide distributed access and control to users, and employ a graphical user interface. Let us be clear that we are not recommending a specific software package or vendor. In this environment, users and CCC staff would be freed from spending time on "work-arounds," batch interfaces, and redundant data entry.

To address the need for leadership, we recommend the establishment of a "Chief Information Officer" (CIO). This would not necessarily be an additional position. It would be this person's responsibility to track trends in computer technology, and to keep up-to-date on what other universities are doing. He or she would be responsible for providing leadership, implementing changes as new opportunities present themselves and overseeing support.

Assessment
The concept of continuous improvement is becoming increasingly prevalent in private industry as well as in higher education. In fact, ABET's new criteria for engineering programs requires that each program set goals, conduct an annual evaluation based on those goals, and obtain feedback from students, faculty, and alumni. To decide whether or not to invest in certain strategic initiatives, we must be able to quantify the impact. Quality is not a "program;" it is the objective. It is not about acronyms or jargon, it is common sense applied in a disciplined manner. We must set goals in order to achieve our mission, and we must evaluate ourselves based on these goals if we hope to improve our services.

CONCLUSION
In summary, the Task Force found within the WPI community a general condition of many dysfunctional processes. We found restricting boundaries between divisions and departments, fiefdoms, a culture of separateness and fragmentation of effort, duplication of work in some areas and stress amounting to burnout in others, inefficient administrative computing systems, ineffective space allocation and scheduling, and an absence of cross functional, systemwide planning.
If we opt not to address and act on these issues our existing culture, processes and organizational structure will only serve to perpetuate the problems identified in this report. Systematic attention to entire processes rather than fragmented tasks is needed to create a smoothly functioning support network. This change effort will need the commitment of WPI's highest administrators and trustees. There is much work to be done internally as well as benchmarking with other institutions and investigating outsourcing opportunities. Our Task Force did not conduct benchmarking activities but did review the findings and recommendations from the group who visited Carnegie Mellon in August of 1995. (see Appendix).

There is no question that the academic mission is central to WPI's success, but inattention to administrative functions has resulted in a drain on academic resources. External evidence abounds, in both industry and higher education that addressing these issues will ultimately result in improved quality, reduced costs and a redistribution of resources to support academic priorities.

Therefore, the Task Force urges WPI to adopt and act on the following recommendations:

1. That WPI constitute a Re-Engineering Task Force and that funding be made available to secure a facilitating consultant to work with this Task Force and others on campus to address and resolve the issues which are currently barriers to integrated services. The consultant should have demonstrated success in leading and facilitating successful re-engineering change on college campuses.

2. That WPI investigate and implement an integrated administrative computing system with distributed access and control to users in order to create a centralized information system, eliminate numerous home grown databases and duplication of effort, and be a vital link in a smoothly functional network of support services.

3. That WPI establish the position of Chief Information Officer to provide leadership and direction for campus wide computing efforts as well as addressing the very real support needs of all constituencies.

4. That WPI engage in a complete review of its budgeting, purchasing, and payroll practices. A revised budgeting process, focused on funding
strategically critical programs with appropriate dollar amounts will be a significant factor in creating a strong system of support services.

A clear vision of the future must be the driving force for our restructuring effort. Powerful pressures are already forcing change and a growing awareness of the need for change. A major issue for WPI is whether we are going to lead these change efforts or be forced into them by external factors. We need to make the decision to act now.

APPENDIX: LIST OF SUPPORT SERVICES
Academic Advising
Accounts Payable
Admissions (undergraduate)
Alumni Office
Bookstore
Business Affairs
Campus Police
Career Development Center
Central Mail
College Computer Center
Cooperative Education
Dining Services
Events Coordinator
Financial Aid
Graduate Admissions
Human Resources
Instructional Media Center
Lens & Lights
Library
Minority Affairs/Outreach Programs
News Services
Newspeak
Office Services
Payroll
Peddler
Physical Education/Physical Fitness
Plant Services
President's Office
Projects Program
Property Administration
Provost's Office
Publications
Research Administration
Residential Services
Scheduling (academic)
SocComm
Sports Information
Student Accounts
Student Activities
Student Development/Counseling Services
Student Government
Student Life
Summer Sessions
University Relations