

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: January 11, 2023

TO: Faculty Chair, Faculty Vice Chair, Faculty Senators, and C11

CC: CALS Dean Shane Burgess

FROM: CALS 2022-2023 Faculty Council

SUBJECT: University Information Technology Services (UITs) Centralization Concern

Dear Faculty Senators and Committee of Eleven,

We write to you with concern for the proposed transition to UITs Centrally Managed Services. We, as CALS/CES Faculty Council Representatives, feel a sense of responsibility to bring this issue forward given that many of our fellow faculty members have brought us questions and concerns. In addition to faculty concerns, we have also been approached by ALVSCE's IT staff, our technology and cyberinfrastructure experts, who have unique concerns about the project. Below we document our understanding of the different aspects of the proposed plan mandates, as well as concerns and questions that have emerged. We believe that without careful thought and planning, the trajectory of this plan is reckless and negligent and will result in a real threat to university research activities and mission, as well as a threat to UITs staff's capability to conduct their daily work responsibilities.

As we understand, the proposed transition will include mandates to departments related to managed cloud services, secure device procurement, and software management. First, the managed cloud services mandate means that individual units will no longer support their current data center operations, including file servers, application servers, and web servers. Any service would be offered by UITs through their Amazon Web Services (AWS) licensing. Additionally, with this mandate, units would be required to move *all of their data center operations to the cloud and begin incurring monthly data storage costs*. The cost implications, for some labs, especially those with large amounts of data, will be severe. For example, based on current estimates (\$1200/TB per year), one lab in the School of Plant Sciences that stores over 800 TBs worth of data, would pay over \$1M per year for cloud storage. Not all researchers have this amount of data; in fact, few do, but storage of any amount of data will have associated costs, and there has yet to be clear communication about how the university will fund AWS storage, and whether this will be a college, unit or even individual research responsibility. Adding to concerns is that some federal funding agencies have transferred data storage expectations to universities and are unlikely to financially support these expenses outside of Facilities and Administrative (FOA) costs. Likewise, while data storage and sharing is an explicitly stated expectation, some grant funding may not be able to be used to pay for storage of data generated using a separate (expired) award. In addition, several groups have unique data management needs, with on premise instruments streaming high volumes of data to local storage servers and migration to AWS cloud services will not provide the requisite data transfer performance. Examples include DNA sequencers and high-throughput imaging platforms. These systems also require unique data processing capabilities including specialized accelerators (e.g., GPUs, FPGAs) that are either not available in the offerings from AWS or are provided at costs exceeding what can reasonably be accommodated by these research groups. If the centralized server management plan moves forward without careful consideration of these needs and associated costs, these projects may not be able to fulfill the contractual obligations in their awards (often federal).

Adding to this concern is the immediacy that this mandate is being pursued. Relocating data to third party sources in a rushed, unspecified manner is very problematic and could be detrimental to the research mission of the University. Indeed, Cloud storage is desirable in the long term, but mandating this move without a clear and transparent plan and explanation is irresponsible.

CALS/CES Faculty Council calls on re-evaluating and re-assessing this Secure Server Management plan. We request more transparency and consultation with faculty and staff before this moves forward. We request the formation of a committee which includes UITs leadership, CALS Cyberinfrastructure leadership, and CALS Faculty to implement a project plan, complete with timelines, milestones, and stakeholder impacts before proceeding.

Second, the proposed transition includes technology lifecycle care (TLC), which would require that units no longer purchase or service their own desktop computers for individuals. Interestingly, this mandate was issued in response to an Arizona Board of Regents cybersecurity audit from 2018-2022 in which a few randomly-picked units within UArizona failed on data security. Importantly, the last round of audits selected non-academic units and overall, UITs shares some responsibility in the foundational infrastructure being evaluated. On the surface this mandate seems desirable ("I get a new computer every 4-5 years") but in practice, the implementation of this mandate, financial implications, and ability to support over 15,000 faculty and staff computers across campus has not been thought out. Presumably, units will be taxed to fund the TLC program. With increased taxation, UITs centralization cost will jeopardize the ability for units to fund tailored IT service at the department level. Departments may be forced to choose between central and departmental services when funding is limited.

Related, there is a growing concern among departmental faculty, staff, and in particular ALVSCE IT staff, that when certain services are taken away from local units, these professionals will be either fired or they will be forced to reapply to jobs with lower salaries. No communication about this process of how labor will change (or not exist) has been offered. We again request that the plan for this implementation be shared with our faculty and staff, including implementation timelines, milestones, and funding sources. As of this moment, we have not been provided with any of these.

In conclusion, we, as CALS/CES Faculty Council Representatives, do not believe that the implications of the proposed transition to UITs Centrally Managed Services have been thoroughly considered or communicated. The impact on research may be the most apparent leading to increased cost, reduced ROI, and potential loss of federal funding. However, it is clear that, as it stands, this mandate will significantly disrupt the mission of the University. Per ABOR meeting notes, it also appears that President Robbins will be financially incentivized for the UITs centralization, with a bonus given at the end of this academic year, adding to more concern that compensation is tied to rushing this plan along at the possible expense of research productivity and UITs job loss. We also note that CIO Barry Brummand's financial incentives, if any, are not public. Therefore, we request that all faculty shared governance bodies consider our request and call for the University to provide more transparency including a) a full report of the ABOR cybersecurity audit detail failures of units, b) a report of the discussions that led to the limited remediation plan and why other options were not considered, c) the proposed funding increase for UITs for each of the three services and how much each unit is responsible for, and d) transparency on potential financial conflicts of interests of President Robbins, CIO Brummand, and any other parties that benefit from the centralization mandate.

Approved by Faculty Council vote