Managing Technical Staff

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- Learn what's there: Listen to the Tech Staff before you make changes. Faculty tend to assume that everybody has the same tech needs as they do. This is not true.

- Establish a decision-maker: Tech Staff cannot be left to the mercy of every faculty member. You, as chair, must set priorities, but a trusted member of the Tech Staff should then be empowered to make penultimate decisions and prioritize tasks.

- Pay attention to finances: Perhaps more than any other part of administration, the monies to run the Tech Staff come from a wide variety of sources: student fees, operating line items, gifts, overhead return, research grant contributions, infrastructure grants. All of this money comes with restrictions on its use. Tech Staff must support the teaching, research, and administrative functions of the department – while surviving audits, hackers, and privacy and security policies!

The decision-maker managing the Tech Staff must master the budget and manage to your priorities under that budget.

- Look for ways to increase funding: Tech needs seldom decrease; they simply shift. Someone in the department must constantly look for new funding opportunities for tech support: gifts, proposals, new institutional programs, etc.

- Custom configuration is a killer: Unless you have

unlimited resources you must decide what you will support and what you will not.

- Say "no, but": Make sure the Tech Staff digs down to figure out *why* a faculty member wants some impossible-to-support service. Perhaps Tech Staff can provide 75% of what is needed. Don't just say "no."

- Create a culture of service: Your Tech Staff knows things faculty don't and, often for security

and privacy reasons, must keep some of that private. This can lead to arrogance. The Tech Staff must be trained to think of itself as an expert *service* organization. Listening to and appreciating the users is critical.

- Leverage the academic environment: When resources are limited, look for partners. Is there a central IT organization that can provide some of the necessary services? Are there other departments or units who can share the load?

- Gain institutional respect: Your Tech Staff is probably the best at the university. You cannot provide tech support for everybody else. But you can ask your Tech Staff to participate in institutional committees and other IT leadership forums, thereby gaining the respect of others and helping to shape the policy climate in which you operate.

- Tech people are professionals: They resent being treated as lesser beings! They want a voice. They

need not have the controlling voice but they are smart, problem solvers and appreciate direct interaction with the faculty to help shape solutions. And remember: most of your Tech Staff could command higher salaries outside!

- There are no perfect solutions: In academia, most of the players – including the Tech Staff – seek perfect solutions. These are almost always impossible in tech support because of limited resources and myriad demands from a wide

variety of customers. Accept that everybody will do the best they can and be prepared to adjust constantly.