IWU IT Help Desk Evaluation Project

Fred Miller
Assoc. VP for Information Technology
Illinois Wesleyan University

This is a proposal for a project that will evaluate the Information Technology Help Desk at Illinois Wesleyan University. The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the services and operation of the Information Technology Help desk. The project will look at existing information as well as collect original data from the campus community on their use of the Help Desk. This proposal presents detailed information on data needed, a survey instrument, and resources needed to complete this evaluation. It is part of an ongoing program to evaluate and assess the quality of services offered by Illinois Wesleyan University’s office of Information Technology. This is a feasible and necessary evaluation that will help the University better serve the technology support needs of its community.

Illinois Wesleyan and the IT Help Desk

Illinois Wesleyan University is a highly selective, private liberal arts college located in Central Illinois. The University community includes about 2100 undergraduate students, and 575 faculty and staff. U.S. News and World Report magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan among the top national liberal arts colleges.

Illinois Wesleyan’s office of Information Technology (IT) provides help desk services primarily from its offices at the IT House on 1311 North Park Street. This service includes walk-in support from 8AM to noon and 1pm to 4pm, Monday through Friday. Telephone support is also provided, with calls outside these time periods going to a voicemail system.

Student workers normally staff the help desk. These workers receive training and are supervised by the Information Technology Services Coordinator, a member of the University’s technical staff. The University’s telecommunications coordinator, a support staff position, will also handle help desk support as needed and as time allows.

There are three phone lines assigned to the Help Desk. During peak periods, such as the start of a semester, all three phones will be busy with calls and overflow will be routed to voicemail. Phone logs indicate that these three lines average over 900 incoming calls per month.

The office of Information Technology also makes available a web-based help request system at http://help.iwu.edu (the “3900 system”). Members of the campus community can enter requests for help desk support directly into this system. Staff and student workers at the help desk will also enter calls into the 3900 system if they are unable to resolve the call immediately, or if the calls needs the attention from another IT professional (second level support.) All members of the office of Information Technology are encouraged to log calls to the 3900 system which require additional follow-up. The number of calls logged to the 3900 system averages about 100 per week, although we have seen weeks, such as the start of the Fall semester where as many as 400 calls have been logged in a single week.

In addition to the help desk support from the IT House, other areas of the office of Information Technology provide support for the campus community. Most notable are the computer labs in
the Buck Memorial Library. The Buck computer labs are open 8am to 11:30 pm Monday through Thursday, from 8am to 5pm on Fridays, noon to 5pm on Saturdays, and Sundays from 11am to 11:30pm during academic semesters. The Microcomputer Lab Supervisor, a technical staff position, supervises the student workers staffing the Buck labs.

All members of the Information Technology staff are responsible for providing second level support for the help desk as needed. This is primarily accomplished by assigning support calls needing secondary support via the 3900 system. Additional information about Illinois Wesleyan’s 3900 system is available from the EDUCAUSE information resources library

Purpose of the evaluation
The primary purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the university IT help desk is effectively meeting the needs of the campus community. Questions we expect this assessment to address include:

- Are callers pleased with the level of IT support from the current help desk structure?
- Are the IT workers responding to calls dealing effectively with customer service issues as well as technical services?
- Are the current level of first and second level IT support adequately addressing the IT help desk needs of the campus community?
- What possible changes could the University make to improve IT Help Desk support?

Information needed
In order to effectively evaluate the IT Help Desk, the University needs to collect and examine information about IT Help Desk services at Illinois Wesleyan. This information would include details about student, faculty and staff use of the IT Help Desk services. The evaluation also needs to consider student, faculty, and staff satisfaction with the quality of the IT Help Desk Support. We will also need to review existing quantitative data including number of calls logged to the IT Help Desk system, telephone calls to the IT Help Desk lines, number of users requesting personal computer repairs, and counts of students using the Buck computer labs.

Sources of Information for the Evaluation
Obtaining this information will require assembling data from existing sources as well as collecting original data. Existing data sources include statistics from the 3900 system, and call data from the University’s telecommunications system.

The bulk of the work in this evaluation will come from administering a web based survey for students, faculty and staff. These surveys are to be administered in the Spring 2005 semester, pending approval by the University's Institutional Review Board. We anticipate using the web survey capabilities of Zoomerang.com for presenting and collecting this survey.

Design of the Survey instrument
The survey will be designed to be answered in just a few minutes of the respondents time and will fit on a single web page. A cover letter will be sent as an e-mail to each survey participant inviting them to participate in the web survey. This e-mail will have a link to the web survey. A prototype of the survey instrument accompanies this document.
We plan to send the survey invitation to faculty, staff, and students (approximately 2600 population.) There will be no follow-up request for response.

Confidentiality, Risks, and Benefits
All survey results will be confidential. Student, staff, and faculty surveys will be anonymous. Since we are using Zoomerang, we will upload the list of Illinois Wesleyan e-mail addresses to their server, but this information will not be used by anyone other than office of Information Technology staff responsible for sending the survey. Links from the survey invitation e-mail will include an embedded identification code. This code is solely to track whether a respondent has already responded and to prevent multiple response from survey participants. It cannot be used to identify an individual responding to the survey. There are no risks to survey participants. The benefit to the participants is a potentially more successful IT Help Desk program for the University.

Resources needed
The funding and resources for this survey will be from the office of Information Technology using existing IT budgets. The costs for subscribing to the Zoomerang zEducation service is $350 per year. The Information Technology Services Coordinator will use report tools from Zoomerang to prepare reports of the survey results. We anticipate using 12 hours of the Technology Service Coordinators time to prepare the Zoomerang survey and tabulate results.

The Associate Vice President for Information Technology will analyze the resulting collected data with assistance from the Information Technology Services Coordinator. It will likely require 25 hours to analyze and prepare a report of the results of this data collection. The evaluation report will be presented to the University's Teaching Learning and Technology Roundtable, and the Provost for their comments on the report and its recommendations.

The data analysis and report are to be complete before the end of May 2005. This will provide time to determine whether we need to change the IT Help Desk for the Fall 2005 semester.

Conclusions
The IT Help Desk evaluation is a necessary and feasible evaluation project. It considers existing information as well as collecting original data from the campus community. This evaluation proposal provides detailed information on data needed, survey instrument, confidentiality, risks, benefits, and resources needed to complete this evaluation. This evaluation project is an effective strategy for Illinois Wesleyan University to determine whether it should continue or change its IT Help Desk service to better serve the technology support needs of the University community.