THE INSTITUTE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Second
First Draft of a Charter

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THE INSTITUTE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Relation to University Strategy

The Institute for Information Technology is an integral part of the announced strategy of George Mason University to become outstanding in four areas:

- Fine and Performing Arts and Humanities
- Information Technology
- Public Policy
- Undergraduate General Education

Primary Activities

As part of the emphasis that George Mason University will place on information technology, the Institute for Information Technology necessarily must be heavily involved in the following activities:

- Interacting with that part of high-technology industry in Northern Virginia that stresses information technology
- Interacting with the graduate programs in George Mason University that prepare students for leadership roles in high-technology industries
- Acting as a cooperating agent in efforts to attract new high-technology industry to Virginia, and especially to northern Virginia
- Projecting an image of George Mason University around the nation and throughout the world as a leader in information technology
- Serving as an advocate and generator for high-quality, unique applications of information technology to help assure the long-term viability of information technology in northern Virginia, and to help create a valid image of leadership and innovation rather than simply one of running with the crowd
- Conducting research in the Institute itself in order to stay ahead of the pack, and to validate the Institute in the eyes of the world technical community
Critical Factors

Four factors appear to be critical for the operation of the Institute. These are:

- Considerable autonomy
- High degree of focus and discipline
- Partnerships with constituencies
- Relationship to the Center for Innovative Technology (CIT)

Considerable Autonomy. Leadership invariably involves risk-taking and flexibility. The Institute must maintain a high degree of autonomy in terms of the means employed to carry out the Primary Activities. Leadership is not attained by following the crowd, or by taking the course that seems obvious to those close to but not heavily involved in carrying out the Institute's mandate. If all that were needed to lead is to follow the obvious courses, everyone could lead; but leadership is in short supply almost everywhere.

Focus and Discipline. While considerable autonomy is needed, so is a high degree of focus and discipline. Risk-taking and foolhardiness are opposite poles. The Institute must conceptualize specific areas in information technology where there is strong need for effort, but where there is little significant activity or where prevailing research directions are demonstrably loose in terms of fundamental thinking and connection with the corpus of knowledge. Also the Institute must gain skill in assessing potential payoffs to society in general from program proposals, and refine the assessment in terms of northern Virginia's situation.

Harmonious Partnerships. The Institute should maintain harmonious working relationships with the industry constituency and with the George Mason University constituency, since the potential is clearly present of benefits to flow in all directions among the relevant parties. However the Institute must not place this factor at the top of its priorities, because overemphasis on this would relieve the Institute of its capacity to maintain the autonomy and focus that are essential to its success. The Institute must work toward a position where its leadership is accepted by the industrial community (a one-or-two-year likelihood), and by a significant part of the George Mason University community. Faculty acceptance at George Mason University will require a
period of interaction, exposition and testing of ideas, support for certain faculty research interests and activities, and careful winnowing of what is consistent with long-term excellence and what is not. Many subtleties will have to work themselves out in this area.

Center for Innovative Technology (CIT). The kind of relationship that may evolve between the Center for Innovative Technology and the George Mason Institute for Information Technology is indeterminate at the present time. Observations of what has happened so far with CIT do not allow a reasoned estimate of whether CIT will be a plus insofar as the Institute is concerned. Until that picture is clarified, the Institute prefers to remain at arms length from CIT. If it becomes clear over time that the CIT is taking on a posture of a savvy, research-oriented, responsible, insightful organization, with the ability to communicate and to create and stick to commitments, the Institute for Information Technology could attain a very close relationship with CIT and work in a synergistic and virtually organic way with CIT. That time is not at hand. For the present the Institute prefers to carry out only those activities involving CIT that are assigned to it from the Presidential or Vice Presidential levels of George Mason University.

Institute Evolution

The immediate plan for evolution of the Institute for Information Technology is as follows:

(1) Develop a family of Centers, each of which will share the kinds of activities described earlier for the Institute.

(2) Each Center will take on a specific application area for information technology, in order to provide the focus that is necessary (though not sufficient) for success.
(3) To the extent possible, each Center and the Institute itself will strive to become self-supporting in all of its research activity. Whenever feasible and consistent with other George Mason University plans, the faculty of the Institute and the Centers will engage in teaching that is compatible with the research being done, and thereby strive to advance the teaching programs of George Mason University.

(4) An exchange program whereby faculty move into and out of the Institute is desirable from the point of view of the Institute.

(5) An Information Technology Research Council (ITRC) comprised of industry representatives will meet with Institute staff and others about three times a year to offer advice and counsel.

(6) A George Mason University faculty committee should be formed to hear Institute plans and directions, and to offer advice and counsel on them.

(7) Develop cooperative relations with all George Mason University faculty and staff whose evolutionary visions are compatible with those of the Institute.

(8) Develop in cooperation with other George Mason University faculty short courses and a modest newsletter to offer capsule appraisals of activities and achievements of the Institute, as well as technical opinions on high-technology issues.