

# How Modern IT Departments Advance an Institution's Mission and Goals

HURON PARTNERED WITH THE NEWLY APPOINTED CIO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA TO REIMAGINE IT AND ALIGN THE IT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE WITH THE INSTITUTION'S STRATEGIC GOALS.

## IT's Evolving Role in Higher Education

The role of an information technology (IT) department in higher education has shifted in recent years. What once was a department solely focused on tactical

IT initiatives is now a strategic one that impacts and enables institution-wide transformation.

As technology evolves, chief information officers (CIOs) must keep pace with change by leading projects that address broad business strategies — shifting from a near-term focus on technical support to a long-term vision of a unified architecture. This shift in focus better positions IT leaders to directly support an institution's objectives and strategic goals.

Recognizing the critical role that the IT organization would play in shaping future successes at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), newly appointed CIO, Sonya Watkins, leveraged the opportunity to align the IT organizational structure with the institution's strategic goals.

## Assessing, Aligning and Advancing the Mission

UCO's leadership partnered with Huron to assess its IT operations and review the IT organizational structure. To gain a better understanding of the department's current state, Huron conducted interviews with UCO's senior leadership, academic

“Huron's engagement has provided an actionable framework which will not only help the IT department function more efficiently and strategically, but also ultimately function in support of our institution's mission to help students learn by providing transformative education experiences.”

**SONYA WATKINS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER,  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA**

and administrative management, IT executive leadership and staff across the institution. Huron also conducted focus groups and facilitated skills and activities surveys with the institution's distributed and central IT professionals. Finally, Huron completed an extensive data analysis, reviewing existing documentation that provided further context regarding the current state of the UCO IT environment. The information gathered in this initiative enabled Huron to benchmark UCO against peer institutions and industry best practices in terms of IT spend, staffing levels and service delivery efficiencies.

The assessment also provided a better understanding of the current organizational structure and staffing mix. Specifically, Huron evaluated the IT department's organizational structure for:

- **Capacity needs:** Are staff levels in line with IT's needs and priorities?
- **Capability gaps:** Do staff have the right capabilities and skills to address business initiatives?
- **Focus areas:** Are teams structured in the most efficient way to focus on key areas?

Using the findings from the assessment, Huron provided actionable recommendations across the people, process and technology dimensions and formalized guidance on how to structure the future IT team. The recommendations also included a roadmap sequencing how the initiatives should be implemented to stabilize, evolve and elevate the IT organization to new levels of performance. Huron collaborated closely with the CIO and her leadership team to ensure that the recommendations and roadmap were practical and appropriate for UCO's unique environment. Key points within the recommendations included:

- **Strategic plan development and alignment:** Aligning IT's strategy with the institution's mission.
- **Staff sourcing and training:** Attracting and retaining top IT talent in a local competitive market.

- **Organizational restructure and realignment:** Ensuring the right resources are focused in the right areas.

The partnership approach between Huron and UCO's institutional and IT leadership was particularly critical given the need for IT to continue in its strategic role at the institution. Huron's strategic plan, professional development and organizational structure recommendations were appropriately tailored to enable IT to realistically deliver on its goal of effectively enabling UCO's institutional level objectives.

## Strategically Using Resources to Support Student Needs

The way an IT department is structured dictates how it will operate. The assessment and review empowered UCO to reorient and align their IT operations with the institution's strategy. Developing an efficient IT service delivery model not only affects long-term success, but also day-to-day performance — help desk requests can be addressed faster, faculty are able to source technology resources more easily and IT staff have a better understanding of their focus areas. Overall, outcomes of the realignment strategy will increase productivity, focus funds on priority areas and improve the efficiency of IT operations.

As funding for higher education is likely to become more scarce, it is increasingly important for UCO to have an optimal organizational structure in place to make sound resource allocations. Having a well-aligned strategic plan and an appropriate staffing and capabilities mix enables the IT department to:

- Prioritize campus needs better
- Be more efficient on administrative spend
- Support and modernize the student and faculty experience
- Improve decision making with business intelligence capabilities

## HOW MODERN IT DEPARTMENTS ADVANCE AN INSTITUTION'S MISSION AND GOALS

UCO now has a solid framework in place for aligning the university's resources to meet the diverse and ever-evolving needs of its students, faculty and staff.

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The University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) is a public university offering an accessible and affordable education to nearly 16,000 students. Founded in 1890 and grounded in transformative learning experiences, UCO provides a high quality education to traditional and non-traditional students to meet the business, community and educational needs of the Oklahoma City metro area.

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