Rationale for a Student Technology Fee:

1. The ability to understand and utilize technology is a critical determinant of success for virtually ALL our students. The importance of such an understanding will not abate in the future. Therefore, it is imperative that we create and maintain a modern information technology infrastructure. Such technology is subject to rapid obsolescence, therefore, ongoing expenditures will be necessary. **UWF must make an institutional commitment to providing a base level of service as part of its institutional educational mission.**

2. Although tuition costs continue to increase at a rather alarming rate, Florida SUS tuition and fees are still among the lowest in the United States. This fact suggests that some room must exist in a student’s budget for a student technology fee. However, increasing tuition with the expressed goal of earmarking the funds for IT is no guarantee that the funds will be spent for IT. The more clearly targeted technology fee greatly increases the likelihood that the funds will be spent as planned.

3. Technology expenditures can be made visible (as the student technology fee expenditures should be) and good technology will assist in recruitment and retention of high caliber students, both of which are critical concerns for the University of West Florida.

The level of Fees

As part of the Strategic plan for IT, we must make an analysis of historical expenditures for IT and some estimate of the degree to which they have failed to provide the level of technology we would deem desirable to have. We also must make a projection of the secular trend in IT expenditures to try to arrive at a funding gap, possibly 3-5 years out. We can plan to phase in the technology fee to fill as much of that gap as possible and to arrive at a level for the fee that is reasonable for our students and that will support clearly defined portions of our IT capability.

Notes:

1. The EDUCAUSE document alludes to the setting of a technology fee at a level that is deemed politically feasible. This is a pragmatic, but essentially bad approach since by its very nature, it does not present a convincing case for why
the level of the fee is set where it is. It is probable that we will have to consider a
level that is in some sense palatable to our student constituencies, but if we have a
clear idea of what we want to do, how much it will cost, and the actual funding
level we will have, then we are in a position to enumerate the things that we won’t
be able to do given any shortfall in funding that we may confront.

2. It is clear that the technology fee must be considered in the context of the
Strategic Plan. I presume that the technology fee will constitute an important
component of the overall funding for IT. It is important to make judgments
regarding what categories of things to fund with the technology fee and what will
be funded by the traditional IT allocations. Another way of looking at the
technology fee level is to try to make a judgment regarding the optimal
percentage of the total IT expenditures that should come from the technology fee.

3. Is the STF to be used to augment the existing level of technology spending or is it
going to be used to replace the existing level of technology spending. Let’s be
open about this issue. Lottery money was to be used to augment education, but in
reality the legislature cut educational spending by the amount of lottery revenues.
The STF should be used to augment the level of technology directly related to
educational efforts, and not for administrative relief. Projects should be very
specific, very tangible, and very visible.

4. Do we fund pedagogical creativity and innovation? Many universities use a
portion of their STF for faculty projects designed to explore ways to use
technology to create new and innovative pedagogical strategies that are consistent
with the university’s mission.

Options with regard to how to assess the fee:

- Flat fee per student – I think a question of fairness must be considered here. Will
  it be the case that some students subsidize other students’ technology to a
  significant degree? This seems like a blunt-axe approach.
- Based upon headcount/credit hours generated – another blunt axe, akin to flat fee
  per student
- Based upon “technology intensity of the course.”

Good points: – this approach is the most fair if this is administered equitably
Bad points: more total effort will be required to administer this approach
It could be that faculty would disproportionately claim that their courses are
“technology intensive” in attempts to get funding. However, if there is a fairly
steep ramp in costs for a higher tech-intensive rating, it would mean that
disciplines that do not really need the technology put unnecessary financial
burdens on students by inflating the technology rating in a course.

- Hybrid method. A modest flat fee for enhancements directly related to the
universal educational mission. Then a tiered structure for program specific or
service specific requirements. For example, if a digital graphics course requires
specific software that is unique to that course or major, then assess a fee for that
purpose. The question is what constitutes discipline software and what is
considered universal. How widely used does a software package (or other technology enhancement) have to become before it is “universal” rather than program specific. We have a diverse student body with diverse sets of needs. These vary significantly between on campus students and commuter students, between younger students and more mature students, between distance learners and classroom learners.

Alternative Ways to utilize the funds:

- For Hardware/Software that students can use. Seems to be the most direct benefit to students of all the categories. However, it begs the question of whether or not we might require all students to have their own computers. This is a big issue we must resolve in the Strategic Plan. I presume that the answer to this question (probably NO), as put forth in the strategic plan, will have significant impact on the size of the student technology fee. If the STF is universally applied, then there must be consideration that benefits should derive universally to all students, not just specific segments of the student body. For example, many off campus students have their own computers, software, and pay for their own ISP. What benefits will they STF provide to these students. If they receive none, then should they have to pay for one? Or will the STF follow the model of the student athletic fee where all students assume the burden for supporting the UWF athletic program.

- For Network Infrastructure – our discussions of ubiquitous computing and wireless access would seem to indicate that such capability is a high-priority need. The question is whether this should be incremental based upon course need (I do not see how to make a general case for that although some disciplines might gain more by having their classrooms set up for wireless than others) or consistent across campus. Care must be given to certain aspects technology expenditure such as network infrastructure. For example, does an upgrade of the network infrastructure result from an increase of administrative usage or from an increase in pedagogical usage or from an increase in general service usage. STF should definitely not fund the first. But how do you separate out the minimum level of service provided by the university as part of its instructional mission and what part is related to university administration and what part is usage by UWF stakeholders as a general service.

- To hire more Personnel – less visible than some of the other categories. Also somewhat less defensible. I would think that faculty who present technology intensive courses have some responsibility to assist students in the use of the accompanying technologies. As an example, in my undergraduate studies, I had some faculty who assigned programming, but would not help students debug programs. Such help fell to the student assistants. This seems fundamentally wrong to me. Faculty who want to incorporate technology into courses should know how to use the technology themselves.
To maintain/upgrade Facilities – We must have a plan to continue to upgrade and maintain technology in classrooms. The question here is whether this is part of the student technology fee or the general IT budget. We would like to see the direct benefit to distance learning in this document & the support for laboratories that provide their own software support, upgrades, etc.

—Add the Student Technology Fee to the overall IT Budget – a blunt axe. I think we should target the technology fee so that the students who pay the fee gain the benefits.

ResNet seems to be a big problem. If the technology fee is a universal fee, then ResNet should NOT be a candidate for funds from that universal fee, other than as a percentage directly proportional to the number of residence hall students to the general student body. A better solution to ResNet, and similar situationally specific situations would be to assess a tiered STF where only the students benefiting from the specific situation (e.g. dorm residents) would pay a separate STF designated for use in the specific area. One university I read about on the web went to a tiered service charge for dorm residents. You want higher bandwidth, then you pay a higher service charge.

A guiding principle: Making Results Visible is HIGHLY desirable. In years past when the local sales tax was new, signs were erected that stated “Your local option sales money at work.” UWF should adopt a similar approach to publicly and visibly identifying where and for what the STF funds are being used.

Authority to decide how to use the funds:

I think this power should reside with a fairly broad group including:
1. A subcommittee of UPC-IT
2. The Provost
3. Representatives of operating units/faculty
4. Student representative(s)

The UPC-IT committee has representatives from all these units, including a student representative as soon as one is appointed.

The following is “borrowed” from the Technology Fee Guidelines for the University System of Georgia, Student Technology Fee Evaluation, 1999 as found on the Valdosta State web site.
The Review Team recommends that technology fee expenditure guidelines should be based upon two fundamental principles. Student technology fee revenues should not be used to supplant current levels of technology fee expenditures. Institutions should provide evidence that overall institution technology expenditures clearly reflect that expenditures based upon fee revenues are above and beyond normal levels. The focus of the student technology fees should be on academic or instructional technology and distinctions should be drawn between expenditures for administrative applications or scientific and laboratory equipment, and instructional technology.

With respect to the second principle, technology fee revenues should be directed toward those needs that directly meet the educational value criterion established in the Chancellor's approval letters: i.e., the fees provide added value to the educational experiences of the students. We define this value to be instructionally oriented and not oriented toward other services such as housing, registration, advising, record keeping, etc., important as these services are to a student's overall collegiate experiences.

- Technology fee revenues should be used primarily for the direct benefit of students to assist them in meeting the educational objectives of their academic programs.

- Technology fee revenues should be used to assure that there are sufficient campus licenses for primary productivity tools such as those found in the Microsoft Office product suites and for discipline specific software.

- Technology fee revenues should be used for hardware and Network related expenditures that include support of general purpose or special purpose laboratories used by students for body productivity and more discipline related activities.

- Technology fee revenues may be used for training of students and, to a lesser extent, staff and faculty.