Is Information Technology a Valid Academic Discipline?

One entire panel discussion, moderated by Provost Marrett, was devoted to the question of whether or not Information Technology is a true academic discipline, and further, if an institution were to develop a major in this area, how would IT exist among other academic disciplines?

Key statements by panelists and small group reactors:

- The word "technology" implies a product, not an educational activity; a change is in order
- There is a growing consensus that IT is a discipline with a set of core components
- IT, or Informatics, or Information Science and Engineering must be an agile discipline: it is evolving and poorly defined at this time.
- There are multiple constituencies who would be interested in such a program
- The discipline could be organized in a College or as an interdisciplinary major
- It must be organized across present colleges with a champion for the program and some base funding
- UMass must understand that the burden of teaching courses in the IT program is not just a Computer Science burden/problem. All schools and colleges must cooperate and contribute to the curriculum. This will require a meta-organization at UMass.

The discussion turned to more details on program substance. Major points are provided in Appendix D.

Overall Recommendation: UMass cannot wait until the discipline is defined, rather. UMass should be a leader in defining the discipline. IT should be established as a primary future strategic direction for UMass as it has been for a number of universities throughout the country, such as James Madison, the University of Texas, Penn State and others. We have a clear need to participate in the further development of the area and have students who can profit from that commitment of energy and resources.