Currently American Samoa is unable to achieve its full potential because of technological limitations. Internet access is limited in American Samoa which affects specific limitations to business development, residential access, education & training in American Samoa. Internet is not available to everyone in American Samoa. Availability is restricted by geographic constraints and prohibitively high access costs. Location, terrain, and tree density limit who has broadband access in many parts of the Territory. High-speed internet costs are too expensive for most users. Currently, dial-up internet access costs approximately $25 per month while residential costs approximately $75 per month. Residential bandwidth ranges between 128kbs and 256kbs but speed varies because the bandwidth is shared between users. Business currently costs approximately $150 per month for 256kbs shared, and whereas business costs approximately $2,500 per month for 256kbs managed. Dedicated broadband prices average $27,000 per month for a full T1 circuit. Businesses in American Samoa face a number of IT issues. American Samoa does not have the resources or the capacity to provide the standard of services afforded to businesses in the mainland United States, and so businesses must often subscribe to residential services. Lack of adequate broadband infrastructure on the island makes it difficult for businesses to connect to the internet. As such, several businesses with remote locations or multiple offices do not have the option to establish network connections between their offices. The remote location of the island makes the shipping cost of technological equipment prohibitively expensive for most businesses. As a result, some small businesses are forced to operate without computers or other necessary equipment. Since a large part of the workforce is technologically illiterate or has limited computer skills, positions are often left vacant and it is nearly impossible to find qualified IT staff on island. Given these technological restraints, there is virtually no e-commerce in the Territory. Residential computer and internet access is limited in American Samoa. Most people in American Samoa cannot afford personal computers due to low average GDP per capita income is one-sixth per capita in the mainland US and the high cost of shipping computers to the Territory. Very few homes in American Samoa have access to personal computer. Often personal computers have been donated by offices or family members and they no longer run properly. This problem is further exacerbated by a lack of qualified IT staff on island. The high cost broadband internet remains prohibitively expensive for most households. Very few homes in American Samoa have internet access. A majority of the homes that do have internet access have dial-up access which runs at extremely slow speeds and prevents users from being able to benefit from many of the capabilities provided on the internet. On average dial-up is ten times slower than broadband connections and the service providers are often unreliable because the current copper infrastructure is outdated. Downloads and uploads are nearly impossible and is not
possible to stream video or listen to audio with dial-up connection. (CITSDP) Despite the recognition that American Samoa may not be able to compete in 'high' technology industries, the American Samoa Economic Advisory Commission (ASEAC) and the Strategic Plan for Information and Communications Technology Development (ICT Dev) for American Samoa have identified areas of market opportunity where American Samoa might be able to compete. These areas include the following: data entry and data preparation; marketing of IT products and services in the Pacific Islands region; call centers; transcription services; application software development and support; and professional and academic training in IT related fields locally and in the region. ASEAC (Commission) further recognized that ICT is important to local businesses and has the potential to increase the efficiency of local businesses. As a result, the Commission found that 'the industry that has the most potential to generate the greatest economic benefits is ICT and e-commerce. Although the business opportunities in all areas are highly competitive, especially given the levels of globalization in the industry, American Samoa has some uniqueness that could provide competitive advantages. The advantages include: ' An English-language speaking population; ' A wage scale that is much lower than other U.S. communities and tax incentives; ' Same wage scale that is much higher than the rest of other Pacific Island in the South Pacific region; ' Grant programs; ' Flexibility in its immigration policies; ' A fair internal telecommunications infrastructure; ' A cooperative consortium of government departmental agencies; ' Organizations, both public and private sector involved in ICT; ' Access to the Pacific Island countries (regional market) with critical needs and demand for technology and technology professionals; ' Become an academic leader in technology; ' Become a regional model for other island nations; ' Become a strategic technology location for the US Government; ' Become a model for rural villages in the US mainland; Location, Geography and Climate American Samoa is the only United States territory south of the equator. It is the eastern part of a 290-mile long island chain, and shares the heritage, traditions, and culture with Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), an independent nation (DOC 2005). It is made up of seven islands with a total land area of 76 square miles. Located in central South Pacific, it is 14 degrees south of the equator and lies between 160-173 degrees west longitude. This group of islands is some 2,300 miles south-southwest and five hours flying time from Honolulu, Hawaii or 4,500 miles and a ten hour flight from Los Angeles, California (DOC 2003). Sydney, Australia is about 2,700 miles further to the southwest, while Auckland, New Zealand is about 1,600 miles southwest (DOC 2005). Tutuila, American Samoa's largest island, is the center of government and business. Tutuila's nearest neighboring island is Upolu, the second largest island in the Samoan archipelago. Its largest town is Apia, the seat of the Independent Country of Samoa. A flight to Apia takes forty minutes from Pago Pago International Airport (DOC 2003). Tutuila's land area is estimated at 56 square miles, which is 72 percent of the total Territorial land area. Tutuila supports more than 90 percent of the Territory's population on a relatively flat but narrow coastal bench that lies between the shoreline and the foot of the steep mountainsides, which reach to 2,142 feet for the island's highest peak, Mt. Matafao. Tutuila's famous Pago Pago Harbor is one of the Pacific's deepest and most sheltered harbors (DOC 2005). The other islands of the Territory include Ofu, Olosega, and Ta'u in the Manu'a group located 60 miles east of Tutuila. Aunu'u is a small island one-quarter mile off the eastern shore of Tutuila. Rose Atoll is a wildlife refuge 60 miles east of Manu’a. Swain’s Island, geographically a member of the Tokelau island group, is 200 miles north of Tutuila (DOC 2005). The prevailing Southeast trade winds result in frequent rains and a warm tropical climate. The year round temperature ranges from 70 to 90 degrees, depending on the warmth of the surrounding ocean. The
humidity averages about 80 percent during most of the year. The rainfall at Pago Pago International Airport is 130 inches per year, while Pago Pago Harbor, only four and one-half miles away, averages 200 inches per year (DOC 2005). Usually, the dry months are June through September and the wet months are November through May. However, heavy rains or extended rain periods can occur in any month (DOC 2007). Despite the heavy rainfall, there are no lakes and only a few perennial streams in the Territory due to the steep topography, limited land mass and porous volcanic soils (DOC 2003).