

July 2006

Online Student Advising Pilot Project

Introduction

Transfer students often take extra courses on their way to a bachelor's degree because they have neglected to meet with college advisors or to plan their coursework early in their studies. The state's four-year colleges often require different courses for admission, or evaluate previous work differently when deciding whether it meets their admissions requirements. Thus, students need to be well informed on which classes to take in order to be admitted to the institution(s) they choose.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) proposes to create a statewide online student advising system to aid community college students who plan to enter the four-year system. The system will provide students with an online environment in which they can explore requirements for admission, requirements of different majors, and audit their progress toward a degree. The first step in creating such a system will require that the HECB collaborate with community colleges and baccalaureate institutions to determine requirements, gather user feedback, and identify risks to implementation before proceeding statewide.

The K-20 Education Network recently awarded the HECB \$225,000 to engage in a pilot project with a private-sector partner to test an online advising system. The HECB intends to work with a public community college, a public baccalaureate institution, and AcademyOne¹, a software company based in Pennsylvania, to test a Web Advising System prototype (WAS) against the needs of students and institutions.

Project Description

The WAS pilot project will be carried out in five phases (identified and described below), beginning on July 25, 2006 and ending on June 30, 2007. Each phase carries with it associated timelines, milestones and deliverables. The HECB is currently developing a contract with AcademyOne that bases payments on deliverables associated with each phase.

WAS Pilot System Research Project Kick Off: July 25, 2006

¹ AcademyOne is a small, privately owned company whose mission is to develop Web-based applications that serve the transfer-related needs of postsecondary institutions and students. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education has contracted with AcademyOne to provide these Web-based transfer applications to Indiana's 2- and 4-year institutions.

- Create detailed project implementation plans, including an updated project charter.

Phase 1: Discovery, Benchmarking, and Data Collection

- Identify participating institutions: one community college (Bellevue Community College, Clark College, Tacoma Community College, or Cascadia Community College) and one baccalaureate campus (University of Washington or the Washington State University campuses). The HECB decided to include branch campuses in the pilot project because of their dependence on transfers from community colleges to meet their enrollment expectations. Inclusion of the branch campus' primary feeder community college guarantees an adequate volume of transfer students to test the on-line system and provide feedback.
- Document the advising processes used by participating institutions:
 - Identify critical success factors related to these processes. Special attention will be given to identifying factors that are specific to advising transfer students.
- Data collection also will include preparation of electronic versions of course catalogs and participating institutions' existing course equivalencies (as well as the course catalogs of other relevant public institutions, if possible).

Phase 2: WAS Pilot System Set-up and Integration

- Load the course catalog data collected in Phase 1 into the central, Web-searchable AcademyOne database.
- Integrate the AcademyOne system with the degree-audit systems of participating institutions.

Phase 3: WAS Pilot System Orientation, Training and Activation for Institutions

- Hold orientation and training sessions for designated staff members at participating institutions. Staff members will represent the admissions, registrar, and academic roles that are responsible for evaluating transfer applicants and approving course equivalencies.
- Testing of the pilot-system functionality that is designed to automate the development, negotiation, publishing and maintenance of articulation agreements and course equivalencies.

Phase 4: Development and Testing of WAS Student-view Functionality

- Develop and test the WAS pilot-system functionality for students. Participating institutions will designate staff (faculty advising, student services, financial aid, admissions, etc.) to facilitate integration with existing systems.

Phase 5: Student Testing of WAS Pilot System and WAS Pilot-System Evaluation

- Promote, launch and support the WAS pilot-system Web site address for participating institutions' students. This phase is scheduled to begin in November 2006 and continue through June 30, 2007.

The WAS Pilot Project will incorporate the AcademyOne Web applications system, which is designed to (1) provide institutions with a centralized database of courses, course schedules, and course equivalencies that will enable institutions to identify, negotiate, publish and maintain additional course equivalencies; and (2) via interfaces to participating institutions' degree audit system(s), provide students with accurate program requirements, course-credit transfer information, and related Web-advising services.

In addition to subscribing to AcademyOne services, participating institutions will work with AcademyOne staff to integrate their student-information and degree-audit systems with the AcademyOne Application Service Provider (ASP) system. The requirements for this pilot-system integration will meet security standards for the protection of student information (i.e. FERPA and related technology standards).

Prior to pilot system activation, AcademyOne will benchmark the critical success factors used by participating public institutions to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing student- and course-credit transfer processes and services, including any systems used in support of student-advising services. Following activation of the pilot system, participating institutions will assist AcademyOne in collecting the data necessary to measure any changes – positive or negative – in the benchmark critical success factors.

Additionally, AcademyOne will generate Web reports designed to provide the participating institutions and the HECB with institution-usage data and, when the functionality becomes available, student-usage data (in aggregate). The AcademyOne Web applications environment includes Crystal Reports; AcademyOne will provide the HECB with the opportunity to specify reports and report content appropriate to project goals.

Project Goals and Benefits

The pilot project will benefit students and the state's public higher education institutions. By gathering detailed information about system requirements and the challenges to implementation, the HECB will be in a better position to advocate for state funding to extend the system to all of the state's baccalaureate institutions and community colleges. A proposal to extend the system after completion of the pilot is included in the HECB's agency budget request, under tab 6 of the board's July meeting materials.

Project goals are to:

- Provide students with a user-friendly, on-line environment in which they can search available courses and programs at participating institutions in the state, evaluate their progress toward a degree, and plan ahead.

- Provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of a single on-line-advising Web site for college students (i.e. both prospective students and students currently enrolled at participating institutions). A focal point of this research will be to measure the impact that the WAS pilot system has on issues that are specific to the transfer-student population, e.g. taking courses that don't apply to a degree or aren't accepted at the time of transfer. The research will capture data and information in aggregate, from students as well as faculty advisors; using the WAS pilot system to assess the incremental value of Web advising over current advising practices.
 - Data collection will include assembling student interface requirements that would be critical in ensuring that students use the system.
- Assess the benefits, including potential cost savings, of utilizing a central Web site for the development, negotiation, publishing and maintenance of articulation agreements and course equivalencies for participating postsecondary institutions. A pre-pilot benchmark study at participating institutions will provide a reference point by which the value of the automation provided during the pilot-system test can be measured.
- Record the data and information that will enable the HECB to (1) substantiate the benefits and value of the proposed statewide WAS, and (2) secure state funding for WAS in the 2007-09 biennial budget.
- Develop an assessment of implementation risks and planning adjustments that will help design an effective RFP process and statewide roll-out process.

Principal benefits of the WAS pilot system research project include:

- Identifying the potential contribution (quantitative and qualitative measures) that a statewide WAS can make toward increasing the number of degrees awarded to the transfer-student population;
- Identifying the potential for improving services to postsecondary students;
- Identifying the potential increase in the productivity and job satisfaction of faculty advisors;
- Identifying the potential increase in efficiency of the admissions and advising staff that will result from process improvements related to the identification, negotiation, publishing and maintenance of course equivalencies;
- Identifying and/or building upon the end-user requirements; and
- Identifying the key components of successful RFP and statewide implementation processes.

Anticipated Project Costs and Timelines

Invoice/ (Cost)	July 06	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 07	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
Project Mgt (\$95,000)	5,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	10,000
CEMEA Subscription (\$21,000)		1,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
CEMEA Services (\$7,000)		7,000										
Interfaces (\$30,000)			10,000	10,000	10,000							
Travel, etc (\$10,000)		4,000		4,000								2,000
Grants to Institutions (\$30,000)			10,000	10,000	10,000							
HECB Admin/ Contingency Costs (\$32,000)	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
TOTALS (\$225K)	8,000	25,000	35,000	39,000	35,000	15,000	15,000	10,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	16,000