

Notes from Administrative Systems Management Constituent Group Meeting at EDUCAUSE 2000 – October 11, 2000

Group leaders: Eric Bird (Boston Architectural Center) and Kevin Shalla (Illinois Institute of Technology)

Approximately 65 people attended. Two vendor representatives who attended, despite a request in the schedule not to do so, were asked to leave.

Introductions, and topics of interest to attendees (number of votes for each topic follows in parentheses):

Reporting (15)
Web access (15)
Selection (11)
Staffing/retention (11)
Portal strategy (10)
Moving away from SSNs as ID numbers (8)
Best of breed vs. ERP (6)
Survey (5)
Electronic signatures (1)
E-commerce (1)
Consultants/outsourcing (1)
Web management (1)

ASM Group GOAL 1: Create and disseminate a survey to schools, as a tool for determining comparison information on systems, budgets, staffing, etc.

- Who would fill out the survey? Answers might vary depending on the respondent
- Is this information that schools would be willing to share publicly?
 - CONSENSUS: Start by sending survey to ASM members.
 - Limit distribution of results to those who participate
 - Solicit questions for the survey from ASM participants
 - Seek to be as detailed as possible
 - Be sure to include schools that have home-grown their systems, they have valuable info to share
- Issues the survey should cover:
 - Assess complexity of institution: what is your functional environment? (several schools/departments? Amount of functional expertise, turnover. Different types of degrees? Etc.)
 - Where is IT support: centralized, or in functional units?
 - During last implementation, who drove the process (who was the customer?) Who was the system intended to benefit?
 - What is/was your motivation for a new implementation? I.e., what problem are you trying to solve? What was wrong with your old system?

[use multiple choice/groupings, not open ended q, for easier comparison]
(like need better interface, easier reporting, better speed, more base functionality, use later technology)

- How was network infrastructure impacted?
- What timeframe is being considered for planning purposes? (i.e., what do you consider to be “long term”)

ASM Group GOAL 2: Seek documentation and dissemination of best practices. There was general agreement that as each school does its own research, it’s usually not disseminated beyond that school, even though the same information would be of interest to others. Perhaps the ASM group could play a role in facilitating the dissemination of info.

- recognize that variation in organizations makes comparing best practices quite difficult
- consider the “continuous improvement” model—is any ERP implementation necessary/worthwhile?
- SUGGESTION: use an outside source to evaluate *your* organization.

Other issues discussed:

- How else do schools gather information for use in the systems selection process?
 - Outside consultants
 - Read materials not necessarily devoted to higher ed; gives interesting perspective
 - Be sure to audit responses from vendors—read them carefully and analyze them to make sure comparisons are valid
- Best of breed versus ERP: choice often depends on availability of on-site knowledge. ERP will entail long-term dependency on a vendor; best-of-breed will entail dependency on internal staff and institutional memory. Best-of-breed gives better functionality for users of selected data, but requires building interfaces to other systems, while ERP tightly integrates applications, but may require programming additional functionality. A partial ERP implementation gives the worst of all worlds – complex to implement, less functionality for users of selected narrow data, and still requires building interfaces to other systems.
- # of IT support staff needed is dependent on the number of software programs in use, *not* the number of students.
- How much customization is appropriate? Organizational complexity leads to increased software modifications
- ERP and other packaged software are not student-centric; they follow an old “silo” model. Makes it difficult to operate in new student-centric environment.
- If you outsource IT: how do you integrate that into your existing culture?

- Get direction from above: what is the institution's goal with regard to technology?
- Don't forget: when you migrate, some elements will inevitably be *worse*.