

DASNR Faculty Council (AFC) Minutes

June 29, 2000

Members Present: Doug Needham, Ulrich Melcher, Glenn Selk, Tom Phillips, Gerald Horn, Francis Epplin, Mike Kizer, and Jeff Hattey

Members Absent: Carol Bender, Terrence Bidwell, Janice Hermann, Kathleen Kelsey, Darrel Kletke, John Ritter, and Don Turton

Ex Officio Members Present:

Non-Members Present: Randall Dahl, Doug Reed, Ed Miller, Wes Holley, Joe Schatzer, and two staff members

Call to Order:

DASNR Faculty Council Chairman Francis Epplin called the special meeting of the AFC to order and introduced Randall Dahl, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, who in turn introduced Doug Reed, Director SIS/Data Management.

New Business:

Randall Dahl expressed his concern over AFC's open letter to the OSU Faculty Council dated June 5, 2000, (appended) and, thus, requested an opportunity to address the issues at a special meeting of the AFC.

Dahl said that SIS is only one component of a multi-part administrative computing system, which includes SIS, FRS and HRS—a suite of systems from SCT. The decision process was made in 1997 to move toward this system in preparation for Y2K compliance. A Board of Regents decision to include seven other institutions, the four A&M institutions as well as the three branches of OSU made for an extremely complex system implementation project as the SIS system is not built to operate as a multi-institution system. The other systems (HRS and FRS) are built to operate as a multi-institution system. SIS is institutionally idiosyncratic; however, that is what the OSU SIS Project Team was charged to do. A decision was made early on by the University for “maximum vanilla” implementation, *i.e.* minimized modifications. Eight separate student systems were moved to one—SIS. OSU's grading and academic action rules are unusual in that OSU actually incorporates the grades, rather than just hours, being transferred from other institutions. Financial aid disbursement is particularly complicated at OSU and, scholarships often are in the form of waivers, rather than cash. Waiving tuition was basically not supported within SIS financial aid processing. Oklahoma has multiple state requirements affecting SIS operations (and FRS as well as HRS) that OSU cannot choose not to follow. Addressing these issues consumed an enormous amount of time and staff/technical resources for implementation.

Seven of the Big 10 Institutions encountered extreme problems with their Y2K SIS implementations; whereas, OSU came up with the critical business functions intact. However, we are still in a learning phase, as some processes and their respective problems are cyclical. Dahl indicated that although we lost much functionality with the initial system, we also gained some functions such as web-based enrollment. Also, Doug Reed and his staff have worked to rebuild 480 reports and programs from the old system that were not supported by the new system. OSU must deal with the systems it has.

Following these introductory comments, Dahl specifically addressed the letter's overarching questions relating to SIS as well as the specific concerns about SIS cited in the letter.

Question 1: What means are in place for faculty to communicate with the administration concerns regarding immediate and long-range priorities and needed improvements in SIS and CIS?

Dahl responded that several levels of user advisory groups are utilized to gain feedback about the system, *e.g.* there is an ongoing advisory group representing student academic services. Dahl agreed that it makes sense to have a faculty advisory group, and one is expected to be implemented this coming academic year. He wants to explore the options for solving the system's problems, both academic and administrative. The other mechanism for input is a division's dean. Dahl has presented several user forums over the past academic year—attendance has been poor. He also provided copies of an “SIS User Comment Form” that has been distributed at the user forums and at the Spring General Faculty Meeting. Wes Holley clarified that with the new system OSU really was not aware of usability until the system was in the hands of the users. He said, “Do we maintain the system running the institution or the institution running the system? This is the most significant issue as to what is

going to be done and whether CIS is going to do it.” Dahl commented that Wes has been an advocate of faculty and advisor usability of the system.

Question 2: What is the partitioning of efforts between improving the present functions of SIS versus implementation of other functions?

Dahl said that it would be ill advised to take a path of one or the other. There are pieces that are not yet implemented that will address some of these concerns. He said, “We can relatively quickly bring up the voice response system, *e.g.* many of the 18,000 calls that the Bursar’s Office receives could be handled by the voice response system. It is being worked on now.” When addressing problems, Dahl said he tries to address the size of the problem and associate it with the availability of the resources. Gerald Horn expressed his concern about how the priorities are being set. Dahl responded, “First is setting the relative importance and, then, determining the options for fixing.” He outlined four options for fixing a problem: 1) Get the vendor to fix the problem; however, the prospect is relatively poor. 2) Develop side systems. For example, the current system is very poor at tracking potential students, thus a side system may need to be developed to handle this data. 3) We must evaluate changing institutional policies and procedures. We [OSU] invent our own rules many times. Specialized needs cannot always be incorporated into generalized, vendor-generated systems. SIS, for example, does not provide an acceptable means to generate mid-term grade reports, thus OSU changed its policy and decided that mid-term grade reports would no longer be generated. 4) OSU can modify the systems. The decision was made at the beginning of the implementation project in 1997 to minimize system modification. SIS is substantially larger than FRS and HRS. The vendor [SCT] provides TOS (time of solution) patches on a continuous basis. In the first year over 900 TOSs were received and evaluated. These systems do not have unlimited lives. Our system is at the end of its life cycle from the vendor’s perspective. Migration to the next system is increasingly hampered by modification to the current system. Dahl wants modifications only for critical business functions. He indicated that he and his staff screen the modifications to determine how much they are going to modify the systems. SIS competes with FRS and HRS for developmental resources to implement modifications.

Additional discussion addressed issues detailed as “concerns and (or) priorities” in the letter.

Concern #1: General Utility to Faculty

Dahl stated that the two top priorities of SIS modification are 1) development of a comprehensive grade report and 2) enhanced support for academic advising functions. The grade report must indicate transfer work, advisor name, OSU name, general education designators, etc. In order to support OSU’s mandatory advising policy, the student PIN has been “corrupted” by using access to the PIN as a control mechanism to assure contact with the advisor. This significantly reduces the availability of the PIN to students to access web-based services in SIS. He prefers that a student’s first use PIN be the last six digits of the student’s birth date. Subsequently, the student determines his or her PIN. A student’s PIN is necessary for web access. Dahl wants new multiple screens to supply easier advisor/faculty navigation. David Bosserman, Anne Matoy, J.L. Albert, Russell Horner, Joe Weaver, and Randall Dahl serve on the committee to address these issues. Dahl indicated that management of web-based admission is also a critical issue. OSU is searching for alternatives to system modifications to provide this functionality.

Joe Schatzer questioned why the “advisor holds” portion of the system does not work. Doug Reed responded that the holds within the system were not user friendly and could not be handled by multiple colleges, thus making it extremely difficult for students advised in multiple departments or for students changing majors.

Ed Miller expressed that sometimes limitations imposed by the system are a source of misinterpretation that advisors are not trusted to input some of the data into SIS. Dahl thinks that broad access is important; however, security also is important. He wants to de-centralize some of the security, including physical security, software security, and behavioral security. Many of the complications of security can be removed if the latter is not an issue. For example, it is up to advisors not to enroll students before their enrollment date. Those who misuse the system have their access blocked. He commented that we probably need to have refresher courses for users. Reed commented that new users must go through Bonnie Stone’s training sessions and sign a security agreement before they are permitted access to SIS. Holley indicated that sometimes it is the student’s fault for enrollment mishaps, such as one created last semester by a student’s claiming athlete status when the student no longer qualified. Dahl was pleased with how few problems arose with enrollment.

Concern #3: Security and Confidentiality of Student Records

Gerald Horn commented that some faculty think they have access to more information than they should. Dahl indicated that faculty have access to see some information and update some information. He is interested in

how limited access should be. He is very concerned about “window shopping,” *i.e.* viewing information about students for whom one has no responsibility, but also balancing that with assuring faculty and staff access to the information they need to have to provide quality services and support to students. Dahl commented that we do not have to use social security numbers (SS#) as the student ID; although, we must have the student’s SS# in the system, and that using some other number as the student ID would require significant modifications. He noted that even the federal government is split on its view of SS# usage. The Social Security Administration says the SS# should not be used for any purpose other than social security, yet the Department of Education mandates that the number be reported for financial aid, and the IRS now requires it for the new Hope and Lifelong Learning Scholarship Tax credit programs. Holley advocates the availability of student information to aid in the advising role. He agrees that the individual who abuses the system should be blocked from the system. Dahl is also concerned about third-party disclosure, *i.e.* discussing with other individuals what one has seen on a system screen. Holley suggested a flashing “confidential” notice to remind users not to misuse information.

Horn questioned whether staff who assist with enrollment should have the same user profile as faculty. Dahl said there are approximately 70 different user profiles and that not all colleges work the same way, but that this is a topic worth further discussion. There are also 350-400 different screens in the system. Dahl noted that a screen may contain a few items that are important to view and yet several other pieces of information that are not needed. Holley would like to see new screens developed to show only desired information.

Concern #2: System Availability

Dahl said system downtime is a problem, but that is primarily a CIS issue. Significant batch processing occurs over night. Sometimes the batch process runs longer than typical. 12-14 hour access to the system per day is the maximum. Dahl is considering 24/7 availability of extracted data. This would not be live, updateable data, but would reflect data present prior to the batch process’ running. Dahl said so much time had been spent on programming and implementation of system functionality, that education of users about functionality and availability may have been too neglected.

Francis Epplin questioned hours earned that have not been included in graduation/retention hours earned. Dahl clarified that the policy revision is that graduation/retention drives everything at OSU, thus it is the intention that the system looks at “earned hours” on the cumulative graduation/retention hours to determine enrollment eligibility date. It was not intended to use “quality hours,” which would not include course hours from Pass/Fail-graded courses.

Horn questioned FRS reports. Dahl does not represent FRS. He will carry the concern to Bosserman.

OSU Faculty Council Report:

Horn suggested that the OSU Faculty Council should inform the DASNR Faculty Council as to the disposition of the letter referenced above. Epplin will ask Bill Weeks to report at the next AFC Meeting.

DASNR’s ad hoc Academic Rank Committee Report:

Ulrich Melcher reported that Dean Curl has appointed a committee to address academic rank. The university has its own description for the academic ranks, and the committee thinks DASNR should have rank descriptions, too. It will be a useful document at the department level.

Adjourn:

Next meeting is September 12, 8-10 A.M., in AGH 102.

Francis Epplin adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Needham,
AFC Secretary

June 5, 2000

An Open Letter from the Faculty Council of the
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources to the OSU Faculty Council

Statement of General Concern

At the 1999 Fall General Faculty Meeting President Halligan stated that increasing research output and scholarly activity remains a major challenge. He indicated that OSU would be developing a strategy for improving the productivity of research faculty. To that end, an ad hoc committee chaired by Dr. Stephen McKeever was formed. The committee conducted meetings with faculty to obtain input on this issue. The most frequently cited constraint to increasing research and scholarly activity was "time". Many faculty in our college are advising greater numbers of undergraduate and graduate students. This has posed an additional demand on their time. The value of faculty time has increased.

A major function of both the Student Information System (SIS) and Computer Information Services (CIS) should be to provide service to the institution and to reduce the amount of costly faculty **time** necessary to access and use the systems. The service provided over the last year by both systems has been a source of frustration, an embarrassment to the institution, and inconsistent with the goal of increasing scholarly activity.

The purpose of this communication is to provide a record of concern and to convey our sense of importance regarding efficient SIS and CIS systems. Three overarching questions are:

1. What means are in place for faculty to communicate with the administration concerns regarding immediate and long-range priorities and needed improvements in SIS and CIS?
2. What is the partitioning of efforts between improving the present functions of SIS versus implementation of other functions?
3. How are decisions made to upgrade systems (i.e., cc-mail to Lotus Notes)? Forced "upgrades" and the required clearance for use through CIS represent additional demands on faculty time.

The following are provided as a few exemplary concerns, and (or) priorities.

Student Information System (SIS)

1. *General Utility to Faculty.* The general utility of the system to faculty needs improvement from many standpoints. One example would be timely generation and transmittal to faculty of legible and complete grade reports that include a record of all prior coursework including the evaluation of transfer credit. (This information was included on grade reports prior to the new SIS system.) The system did not permit some students to enroll on the appropriate dates because it did not account for all hours earned.

2. Priority should be given to decreasing the times in which the system is not operative, and to decrease the number of incongruities between SIS and other OSU offices involved in student admissions and enrollment. Some faculty have been caught trying to enroll students when the system is down and (or) the information in the system is not consistent with information provided earlier by the student. This leads to lost efficiencies, embarrassments to faculty when students and student's parents are in their office, and a poor image for OSU.
3. *Security and Confidentiality of Student Records*. Presently anyone who is "cleared" to access the system can obtain social security numbers, grade reports, and other information. Obviously this could be a source of potential problems for students (and legal problems for the University). Social security numbers are often the keys to crimes of stolen identity. Improved security and confidentiality of student records should receive a very high priority. Until that is accomplished, it might be in the best long term interest of the university to periodically remind SIS users of the signed confidentiality agreement and any penalties that would result from breaking the agreement.

Computer Information Services (CIS)

1. *e-mail*. For many faculty the forced "upgrade" from cc-mail to Lotus Notes did not result in an improved system, but rather one which has increased delays and inaccuracies in e-mail transmissions, decreased efficiencies of communications, and has had negative effects on many of our public image of OSU.
2. *Financial Records System Account Statements (i.e., Monthly Account Reports)*. Receipt of timely and accurate account statements is prerequisite to management of research programs. Because of lost confidence in accuracy of the account statements and/or lack of timeliness of the reports, many faculty and departments have been forced to implement their own accounting system (shadow accounting) for tracking research and other accounts. This represents duplication of effort and reduced efficiencies of work for faculty and staff. This is clearly inconsistent with the goal of increasing research and scholarly activity.
3. *Network Downtime*. This is a serious instruction issue. When the network is down students are not able to access to class related web materials. It severely restricts the functionality of our student labs college wide. It is also an issue for multi-media classrooms.

Sincerely,

Francis M. Eplin
Professor and Chair

DASNR Faculty Council