

# **The Financial Accounting Management Information System Security and Training Unit Best Practices**

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## **Abstract**

*We handle security clearance and training for Texas A&M University's Financial Accounting Management Information System (FAMIS). We service over 1,500 users. We use a combination of practices that make our unit successful, as shown below.*

- 1. We have approximately 250 **Departmental FAMIS Security Contacts** responsible for maintaining departmental files.*
- 2. We establish inquiry access within **48 hours** upon receipt of paperwork.*
- 3. FAMIS users must do either an instructor-led course or an on-line Introduction to FAMIS course.*
- 4. The **FAMIS Mentor Program** allows new FAMIS users to enter, approve, and/or sign purchasing documents in FAMIS without delays.*
- 5. Individuals schedule training using the **On-Line Registration System**.*
- 6. **Internet Prerequisite Courses** covering concepts and processes are available.*
- 7. We provide **monthly hands-on training**.*
- 8. We enter every FAMIS user into a **database** and print monthly reports summarizing access and training information. We deny access if anyone misses a training deadline.*
- 9. **FAMIS Study Hall** allows those who need extra help to make appointments to meet individually with experts.*
- 10. We create **reference materials** and keep them updated on the Internet.*
- 11. We perform **annual reviews** of the security systems to ensure accuracy.*
- 12. Monthly, we post a **FAMIS user listing** on the Internet for departmental review.*
- 13. We utilize an **electronic mail listserv** and a **shared email account** to communicate with users.*

*These practices combined help us to achieve the following goals:*

- 1. To establish security clearance to FAMIS for new employees as soon as possible.*
- 2. To provide quality training and get people trained to do their jobs on FAMIS as soon as possible.*
- 3. To maintain employee's security so that 1) each person has the correct security to fulfill job functions without any conflicts of interest and 2) to remove access to those who no longer need it.*
- 4. To have an efficient way of communicating important information to FAMIS users.*

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## **Introduction of the Organization**

Texas A&M University, the state's first public institution of higher education, is a land grant, sea-grant and space-grant institution opened in 1876 and located in College Station, Texas. President Robert M. Gates leads the University with an enrollment of over 45,000 students studying for degrees in 10 academic colleges, and over 200 departments, including academic and non-academic.

The Division of Finance, led by Vice President William B. Krumm, has business objectives that include the vision to be an organization knowledgeable of its customers and understanding of their unique needs as well as an innovative organization that anticipates the future and rapidly evolves by encouraging creative thinking and innovative use of technology throughout the organization. With these two objectives in mind, the Department of Financial Management Services – FAMIS Training and Security, under the leadership of Amanda Vanek Eisele, designed and implemented processes for granting access to our accounting system and providing training necessary for employees to perform their job functions. Our processes serve our customers well, and have created much efficiency within the department.

Our accounting system is called the Financial Accounting Management Information System (FAMIS). FAMIS is an accounting system that responds to financial regulations applicable to educational institutions, in particular to the members of the Texas A&M University System (TAMUS). All FAMIS programs access a common database that allows many different users to view and update identical information. FAMIS users can be given access to numerous on-line accounting functions. These functions are spread among four major FAMIS systems:

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1. Fixed Assets (FFX)
2. Sponsored Research (SPR)
3. Annual Financial Reporting (AFR)
4. Financial Records Systems (FRS)

As stated earlier, Texas A&M has over 200 departments. Each department is comprised of a business unit. The “business coordinators” are required to go to several training classes to enable them to pay their bills and inquire on accounting data, among other things, in FAMIS.

## **Statement of the Problem/Initiative**

Prior to 1994, all access into FAMIS was inquiry only and a few optional inquiry training classes were offered. However, things drastically changed in 1994 when Texas A&M decided to implement an on-line purchasing module that would allow departments to pay their bills by inputting them into FAMIS. This required security changes and training for **over 1,000 users**, an implementation that would take more than three years to accomplish. This would change the way the Security and Training Unit did business with the 200 plus departments.

There were a couple of procedures that departments had to follow before getting entry access into FAMIS. 1) The department would need to submit paperwork granting the access for each individual. 2) FAMIS Security would not allow individuals all entry capabilities until **AFTER** they completed several mandatory training classes, which could take up to a month.

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There were several problems with our methods at the time. Classes were only offered monthly, so if someone missed a class, they would have to wait another month to get training and access. All classes were classroom-based. An instructor had to meet with every person, even for the most basic of training. In essence, training procedures were time consuming, and waiting for the access was keeping people from doing their jobs. Secondly, if the training was not immediately applied on the job, then it was forgotten very quickly. Thirdly, the FAMIS Security was manually keeping track of who had been to what training, which was very inefficient and time consuming when granting access. After someone attended a class, they would have to pull paperwork, make sure the access was approved, give them the access, re-file the folder, and find some way to let the users know that their access had been updated. The same person's folder could get pulled and re-filed up to seven times! Lastly, there was no way to efficiently communicate system changes or notices to users – no website and no email lists, only snail-mail and phone calls. FAMIS Security was not keeping up with technology, and needed to make some major procedural changes, and fast! Most of the time was spent concentrating on changing security access and filing, and providing individual introductory-level training. Enhancements in the training development area were lagging because there simply was not time to spend on developing this area. During much of this time, FAMIS Security employed one full-time employee, and one part-time graduate student.

### **Design**

We implemented several procedures over time to meet our goals that satisfy our customers and help our unit run efficiently and effectively. Our first step was to

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develop a mission statement and goals. Our mission statement is to provide the best customer service possible to meet the needs of our FAMIS users. Our goals are the following:

1. To establish security clearance to FAMIS for new employees as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours upon receipt of paperwork.
2. To provide quality training and get people trained to do their jobs on FAMIS as soon as possible.
3. To maintain employee's security so that 1) each person has the correct security to fulfill job functions without any conflicts of interest and 2) to remove access to those who no longer need it.
4. To have an efficient way of communicating important information to FAMIS users.

To fulfill these goals, we have implemented the following practices:

## **Security Establishment and Training**

1. **Departmental FAMIS Security Contact.** We developed and implemented the Departmental FAMIS Security Contact. With over 200 departments on campus, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the two FAMIS Security Officers to keep track of all of the people changing jobs who also needed changes in FAMIS access rights. We also needed a way to ensure that FAMIS access requests were filled out correctly and signed by the appropriate personnel. Since the departments know their employees, we had each department head assign a Departmental FAMIS Security Contact. Each department head must complete a form assigning this job to someone, and the person must sign the form agreeing to do the job. A Departmental FAMIS

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Security Contact is someone in the department who is responsible for maintaining the departmental FAMIS files. These files should contain documentation concerning access levels for everyone in the department who has FAMIS access. We created a manual and placed it on the Internet in a convenient PDF format, which is emailed to every new contact. During the implementation stage, we provided classroom training to explain their responsibilities and showed them how to complete all paperwork. We had a very good response. Error rates on forms have gone down, and FAMIS Security has specific people to call if there are problems. The following is a list of Departmental Security Contact responsibilities:

- A. **Complete FAMIS access forms.** The FAMIS Contact should complete FAMIS access forms to 1) maintain control over who receives certain access in the department and to 2) guarantee that all paperwork submitted to FAMIS Security is correct to avoid access delays.
- B. **Analyze requests.** Contacts should analyze all FAMIS access requests. It is the department's responsibility to ensure that the FAMIS access given to the employees is correct *at all times* and is directly tied to the person's job duties *at all times*.
- C. **Maintain files/records.** Contacts should keep a file for each individual requesting FAMIS access. Since individuals sometimes change jobs within the department, contacts should also periodically review the access to ensure that it is correct at all times. If no FAMIS access records exist in the department, a FAMIS Contact may request copies from FAMIS Security.

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- D. **Notify FAMIS Security and Office Manager/Delegates of terminations or job changes.** *No individual should have any FAMIS access after he/she has terminated or transferred to another department.*
  - E. **Report security breaches.** Contacts should report any security breaches and/or password sharing to FAMIS Security for further investigation and possible disciplinary action.
  - F. **Brief new employees about FAMIS.** Individuals who know why they are attending training get the most out of the training. Explain what FAMIS is and how it will benefit their job.
  - G. **Schedule training.** Contacts should be aware of the scheduling procedures and ensure that FAMIS users get scheduled for all of the required courses needed to retain access.
  - H. **Communicate information to users.** Security Contacts should ensure that the appropriate people get subscribed to the FAMIS electronic mail listserv so that they do not miss important FAMIS information.
2. **Inquiry access established within 48 hours.** Once FAMIS Security receives the paperwork, they set up the person with inquiry access within 48 hours and contact the employee via e-mail. In the e-mail, the employee is instructed to call FAMIS Security to receive his/her temporary password to FAMIS so that he/she can complete the Introduction to FAMIS course.
  3. **Introduction to FAMIS Training.** The employee has the option to do an instructor-led course or an on-line Introduction to FAMIS course, depending on his/her learning style. The Introduction to FAMIS teaches employees about security and the process

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for logging in and out of FAMIS, and is mandatory. The majority of the employees choose the on-line training, as they can do it at their office and at their own pace.

Over 90% of the employees complete this course on-line, and it has been a very efficient and effective way of training users the basics.

4. **Training and Security Follow-Up.** Once the employee completes the Introduction to FAMIS course, FAMIS Security will grant all updating capabilities needed to fulfill job duties if the person has a mentor (*See # 7 Mentor Program*). This keeps employees from having to wait to get crucial access. FAMIS Security will contact the employee via e-mail again. This email will include information about the access rights and the training they are required to take to keep certain types of access, along with instructions for registering for classes. Since we offer numerous FAMIS training courses, individuals may now schedule themselves for all of our training using the **On-Line Registration System**. This has been very efficient because FAMIS Security does not have to keep scheduling and rescheduling people!
5. **Internet Prerequisite Courses.** Depending on what type of training the employee needs, he/she may need to take prerequisite courses, which are available on the Internet. We developed WebCT (Internet-based) concept and process courses that are pre-requisites to attending certain hands on training. These courses include the *On-Line Purchasing Overview* and *Introduction to Property Management at Texas A&M*. The on-line courses allow students to learn the concepts and terminology at their own pace without using time away from the office to learn the basics. Then, when they come to hands-on training, they can concentrate on the “how-to” instead of learning

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the terminology. The feedback from these courses has been very positive, and most people indicate in evaluations that they would not want to do them in a classroom.

6. **Hands-On Inquiry and Entry Training.** We provide monthly hands-on courses for entries and inquires into FAMIS, which include, but is not limited to the following: Financial Accounting Basics, Purchasing Document Inquiry, Fixed Asset Entry/Maintenance, and Purchasing Document Entry courses.
7. **FAMIS Mentor Program.** If employees need access in FAMIS to create and sign purchase documents, they are required to attend numerous training courses. We recognized the need for people to have the ability to create and sign documents immediately and not have to wait weeks to attend a mandatory class before getting the access. We also recognized the need for people to understand what they were entering into FAMIS. So, we created the FAMIS Mentor Program. The goal of the Mentor Program is to allow the new FAMIS user to enter, approve, and/or sign purchasing documents in FAMIS without delays due to mandatory training requirements. A FAMIS Mentor is someone who is assigned by the individual's department to assist him/her with inquiring and entering information into FAMIS until he/she has had a chance to attend all of the required training. More than one mentor may be assigned if this helps the department. If someone has a mentor and has completed the Introduction to FAMIS course, then FAMIS Security will give him/her all of the entry access needed to do the job for two months. During those two months, the person must attend all of the required training courses; otherwise, FAMIS Security will have to revoke entry access until he/she attends the required training. If the person completes all required training by the deadline, then access will not

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change. This program allows immediate one-on-one hands-on training by the department, in addition to mandatory training offered by the Division of Finance. This has been a successful program, based on feedback from the departments that utilize it.

8. **Database Entry.** Since some individuals must meet mandatory training requirements to keep their FAMIS access, we had to find a way of keeping track of everyone's training dates electronically rather than doing it manually. We enter every FAMIS user into a database, along with all of the access that they requested, and his/her training deadline. We also enter every training roster into the database. Monthly, we will print a report showing attendees, their training deadlines, training that they attended, and any training that they missed. If they missed their deadline, then we will deny that access. Inputting this information into a database is very helpful if an individual contacts us needing to know all of the training he/she attended and when. This information is very convenient to retrieve by the person's identification number.
9. **FAMIS Study Hall.** For people who need a little extra help after they have attended the required training, we have developed and implemented the "FAMIS Study Hall." Offered monthly, customers may make an appointment to individually meet with the experts if they have specific problems with their account statements or with making inquiries or entries into FAMIS. New and experienced users take advantage of this service.
10. **Updated Reference Materials on the Internet.** We strive to create helpful reference materials for our customers, and keep them updated on the Internet. For

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example, we created an account summary sheet that identifies account ranges and attributes for the accounts, FAMIS screen lists, and more.

## **Security Maintenance**

One of our goals is to maintain employee's security so that 1) each person has the correct security to fulfill job functions without any conflicts of interest and 2) to remove access to those who no longer need it. The following practices assist FAMIS Security with this role:

1. **Annual Reviews.** Perform annual reviews of users who have special update capabilities in the security systems to ensure accuracy and to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest in an individual's access. Supervisors must sign off on the review.
2. **Monthly User Lists.** Monthly, we post a FAMIS user listing on the Internet. Then, we notify the University's departments that the updated list is available via the FAMIS listserv. It is the department's responsibility to inform FAMIS Security if the department's user listing is not correct. This ensures that individuals who no longer work for Texas A&M University are getting deleted from FAMIS and that access gets properly changed for employees who transfer from one department to another. It has been expressed to us by Departmental Security Contacts that this helps them tremendously in keeping track of who has access through their department.

## **Communication with Users**

Since one of our goals is to have an efficient way of communicating important information to FAMIS users, we utilize an electronic mail listserv to keep the communication open between FAMIS Security and FAMIS users. To ensure that those

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who want or need to be subscribed to this list get subscribed properly, FAMIS Security has inserted a listserv option on the FAMIS Access Request Form where individuals can tell them if they wish to be subscribed. If they check “yes,” then FAMIS Security will automatically add the person to the list. This ensures that they will get subscribed to the list and will receive all of the important information. We also utilize a shared e-mail account. If a customer emails the shared account, it will go to all security administrators so that the request gets handled promptly.

### **Implementation**

These procedures are original ideas that were implemented over the course of three years. University's that would wish to mimic these ideas would need to have good organizational skills and training in web course development. A helpful technical staff is needed to develop databases and to help with the on-line event scheduling.

When we began implementing these procedures, a part-time graduate assistant developed our security database to keep track of access and training dates. Other than that, we did not have a technical support staff doing any work for us. We learned how to design web pages on our own, and developed Texas A&M's first FAMIS web page. We also went to training for WebCT to learn how to create our own internet-based courses.

Recently, the Division of Finance has hired more technical staff. We are now in the process of reviewing our procedures with them to see if there are any further technological enhancements that we can implement.

### **Benefits**

These procedures have streamlined our processes, and have allowed us to achieve our goals and satisfy our customers. FAMIS Security and Training has grown, and now

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employs two full-time employees. The graduate assistant position is no longer necessary to help maintain FAMIS security and provide one-on-one introductory training since it is now web-based. We have hopes of growing so we can provide even more training. We were able to decrease the amount of time spent on primarily doing security maintenance to developing and providing much needed training to the Texas A&M business staff. We have also been able to concentrate on providing web-based training, which is a very efficient way to train on basic terminology. This is clearly expressed in course evaluations. Additionally, the security systems we maintain are at an exceptional level of accuracy.

### **Retrospect**

In retrospect, I am sure that there are always better ways to do things, but I do believe that we implemented our FAMIS procedures in a very efficient way. Several of the other Texas A&M University System components ask our advice and utilize the reference materials that we have created. Why re-invent the wheel? Our responsibilities keep growing, as we now maintain seven security systems. In 2003, there are plans to implement even more security systems for the use of Texas A&M's employees that will be maintained at Financial Management Services. We already have plans to expand the FAMIS Security Contact's role to be a Security Contact instead. It will be a true blessing to have already implemented this! By working hand-in-hand with our technical experts and the Department Security Contacts, I am confident that we will continue to grow efficiently and effectively with the times.