

**Protecting Identity: The move to a unique, generated identifier for campus constituents**

**Lori Sundal**

**Director, EIS, Office of Information Technology**

**Georgia Institute of Technology**

## **Abstract**

*The Georgia Tech Identification Number, or gtID#, serves as a unique identifier for each individual in the Georgia Tech community, replacing the use of Social Security Numbers (SSNs) to identify Georgia Tech constituents. The gtID# is assigned at the beginning of an individual's association with the Institute. This identifier is generated for all campus constituents, including faculty, staff, students, and others. The gtID# is used across all campus systems, applications, and many business processes throughout the lifetime of the individual's relationship with the Institute.*

*Creating a new, unique ID eliminates using SSNs as the key identifier in administrative systems and applications and addresses two critical issues. The gtID# provides campuswide continuity in identifying all constituents regardless of their association with Georgia Tech, and by eliminating the SSN as the key identifier in automated systems, Georgia Tech is taking an important step in reducing the risk of identity theft for the Georgia Tech community.*

*Georgia Tech will continue to collect and use SSNs where legally required and in accordance with the Federal Privacy Act of 1974 and associated amendments, where disclosure of the use of the SSN when collected is an important aspect of the Act. However, SSNs will no longer be used as the key identifier in our automated systems. Again, this will help protect individual privacy and greatly reduce the risk of identification theft for the Georgia Tech community as established in the Institute's new Social Security Number policy.*

## **Introduction of the Organization**

The Georgia Institute of Technology, also known as Georgia Tech, is one of the nation's leading research universities, providing a focused, technologically based education to nearly 17,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Georgia Tech has many nationally recognized programs, all top-ranked by peers and publications alike, and is ranked in the nation's top ten public universities by *U.S. News and World Report*. It offers degrees through the Colleges of Architecture, Engineering, Sciences, Computing, Management, and the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts. As a leading technological university, Georgia Tech has more than fifty interdisciplinary research centers that consistently contribute vital research and innovation to America's government, industry, and business.

### **Statement (restatement) of the Problem/Initiative**

The need for a unique identifier for individuals at Georgia Tech became urgent a few years ago. We experienced increasing difficulties as the Institute moved toward more systems integration and implemented a data warehouse where many applications require both student and employee data. There is a unique number assigned to each student in the Banner Student Information System, and there is a unique number assigned to each employee in the PeopleSoft Human Resources application. A student who is also an employee has an identifier in both systems.

Integrating systems created situations in which we had to use SSNs to determine the identity of individuals with multiple IDs. This was not a good practice because it is well known that the casual use of SSNs as universal identifiers has led to increases in identity theft. Many individuals do not want to give their SSNs for uses other than official tax-related purposes. In addition, Georgia Tech is a very diverse community with many constituents from other countries who do not have SSNs upon arrival.

As a result, each business area developed its own process for assigning temporary IDs, and the problems resulting from having multiple IDs assigned to one individual increased. Complexities occurred in ancillary systems such as BuzzCard (campus ID card), Parking, Student Athletic Complex, Health Services, the Library, and the Athletic Association. The impact to campus included some staff members spending more than six hours per week resolving multiple ID issues, and campus constituents having to visit several different offices across campus to get information updated.

### **Design**

A campuswide cross-functional team investigated the multiple ID problems and the concern for protecting the campus community from identity fraud. The team's solution was to create a

unique Georgia Tech Identification Number (gtID#) for each campus constituent, and eliminate the use of SSNs as unique identifiers across all systems and applications.

The committee's solution was presented to Jean-Lou Chameau, Provost, and Robert Thompson, Senior V.P. of Administration and Finance, in October 2001. The gtID# recommendation was approved, and the committee was charged with forming an implementation committee and creating the project plan, including anticipated budget needs.

An implementation committee was formed in the spring of 2002 with a project "go live" date of March 1, 2003. The cross-functional committee was comprised of various representatives across the campus. The committee was tasked with the responsibility of making appropriate changes to all systems and applications to:

- Eliminate SSNs as the key
- Re-define business processes where necessary
- Be in full compliance with the Federal Privacy Act of 1974 and amendments, which established guidelines under which any state agency may request Social Security Numbers from individuals
- Ensure the Institute is taking all necessary precautions to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the Georgia Tech community

Discussions were also underway within the Board of Regents (BOR) of the University System of Georgia concerning the appropriate use of SSNs. In August 2002, the BOR issued "Protecting Student Identity, Principles of Good Practice", which encouraged institutions within the University System to implement the necessary business practices and procedures to replace the

use of the SSN as the primary student identification number. Also in August 2002, Georgia Tech approved a Social Security Number Policy for the Institute, to provide guidelines for policy and procedures on the proper use and disclosure of the SSN, and to ensure that the Federal Privacy Act requirements are met.

The hard costs of the implementation were \$83,000, which included new campus card readers to translate the SSN on existing cards to the gtID# so that the entire campus would not have to be re-carded. It also included new card stock for new constituents and those who wanted a new card, which includes a holographic image for security. Georgia Tech did not track any of the soft costs – people resources – as it was felt this was something that had to be done and was the right thing to do.

## **Project Timeline**

June 2002

- Finalize conversion methodology
- Organize subgroups, team leaders, and assignments:
  - Technical
  - Communication
  - Policy
  - Auxiliary
  - Ancillary Systems

- Develop project plan and assign resources

July 2002

- Begin analysis of all systems, applications, reports impacted by conversion
- Assess campus unit conversion requirements – Survey campus units (Administrators and Computer Support Representatives)

August 2002

- Establish Institute policy on SSN usage
- Collate survey results

September 2002

- Meet with campus units to identify systems and business processes that must be modified to conform to the new SSN usage policy.

November 2002

- Complete the analysis of:
  - Banner, PeopleSoft, custom systems and applications
  - Data Warehouse
  - BuzzCard system
  - External reporting
  - Department systems and applications

- Identify conversion methods and tasks

December 2002

- Generate test files, begin system and unit conversion testing

January 2003

- Initiate communication plan
- Continue programming and testing of major systems and interfaces
- Work with campus units to test and finalize business process changes

February 2002

- Continue communication activities
- Complete all programming changes and testing
- Prepare production environment

March 2003

- Go live! All systems and applications use gtID# as key instead of SSN.
- gtID# request processing initiated.

### **Implementation**

These are the key components of the Georgia Tech Identification Number implementation:

- We generate a unique identifier for every individual who enters into a relationship with Georgia Tech – faculty, staff, students, consultants, contractors, affiliates, etc. This unique identifier will remain with that individual throughout their “lifetime” at Georgia Tech. For instance, an individual may start out as a student, return a few years later as a consultant, decide to return to complete a Doctorate Degree, and return again years later as a faculty member. Regardless of the association an individual has with Georgia Tech, the individual will always use the same gtID#.
- Students are assigned a gtID#, which is the student identifier, when his/her application is received. When accepted, the student will use the gtID# number as his/her student identifier for all administrative transactions, activities and services provided by Georgia Tech. (If a student has a previous history with Georgia Tech they will continue to use the gtID# already assigned.)
- Faculty, staff, and all other Georgia Tech constituents (such as consultants, contractors, temps, visiting scholars, researchers, alumni, Athletic Association and Foundation affiliates, retirees, intensive English participants, ATDC (Advanced Technology Development Center) affiliates, Student Athletic Complex (SAC) program affiliates, spouses, family members, etc.) are assigned a gtID# upon request from an authorized campus administrator.
- Georgia Tech Administrators must be authorized to access the gtID# request application. The established security administration process for accessing production systems will be followed.

- Authorized administrators in each unit will request a gtID# for any individual as appropriate. The assignment of a gtID# constitutes authorization that this individual is entitled to the services appropriate for their title if faculty or staff, or to the type of relationship they have such as visiting scholar. Once the gtID# is assigned, the individual can start utilizing appropriate services. This new process will be especially beneficial for groups such as new faculty. They will be able to activate computer and email accounts, and access library resources and other services, such as parking, before the first workday.
- The BuzzCard (campus ID card) Center processes all non-student gtID# requests. The Banner Student Information System is the master repository for all gtID# records. Current BuzzCard holders do not need to have their BuzzCard reissued. All BuzzCards issued after March 1, 2003 have the gtID# printed on the front of the card.
- PeopleSoft HRMS captures the gtID# for each employee, keeping specific data elements in sync with Banner.
- The Georgia Tech Data Warehouse contains the gtID# and restricts use of SSNs except where required for federal, state, or officially sanctioned reporting purposes.
- All campus departments using SSNs as the key identifiers in internal applications were required to make the appropriate changes to systems and applications by March 1, 2003.
- All business processes that currently request or use SSNs should review all forms to ensure the request is appropriate, necessary, and in compliance with the Privacy Act of

1974. If SSNs are collected, the appropriate disclosure statements must be communicated appropriately.

- A Social Security Number Policy for the Institute will be established limiting the collection, use, and distribution of social security numbers.
- All future in-house or third party software cannot be developed or purchased that uses SSN as the key identifier.

### **Benefits**

The beneficiaries of this best practice are all Georgia Tech constituents requiring service on the campus – including faculty, staff, students, visiting scholars, contractors, and many others. The number one benefit to all campus constituents is greater protection and security of sensitive personal data and reduction of risk for identity theft. In addition, improvements in campus services were realized since all constituents are identified in all systems by the new, unique gtID#. Previously, there were difficulties identifying someone as the same individual in disparate administrative systems, thus reducing the ability to provide effective service to customers.

Using one identifier in all of the applications and business processes across the campus has reduced errors, confusion, and the inability to provide some services in a timely and consistent manner, while increasing efficiency and productivity. Much less time is spent having to manually try to match people between Banner, PeopleSoft, and our Data Warehouse to determine if they are the same individual. Because we were able to use the baseline functionality in Banner to generate the unique numbers, we did not have to develop another system to be maintained and supported for this process. We were also able to save costs and decrease impact

to customers by purchasing card readers that could translate data on our current campus ID cards to the new gtID# without re-carding the entire campus.

## **Retrospect**

As with all projects, there is room for improvements. The team held a post-implementation audit to review and compile lessons learned from the project. Areas identified for improvement include the following:

1. Clearly document action items and decisions so that time isn't spent on rehashing an item
2. Always expect the unexpected and build in extra time for the actual conversion to handle the infamous "Murphy's law"
3. Establish an institute policy early on with regard to the use and disclosure of sensitive data – like SSN.
4. Look at business process improvements in addition to focusing on technical solutions.
5. Most importantly communicate, communicate, communicate!