

Title Page

Electronic Completion of Registration

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Abstract

The University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM) has expanded over the last two years to include two technical colleges, University of Arkansas at Monticello-Crossett and University of Arkansas at Monticello-McGehee. Other forms of distance education classes such as CIV, Web based, and online have also increased the University's enrollment. With the closure of some major manufacturing plants in the area, non-traditional student enrollment is more common. These students work during the day and attend classes after regular business hours. These three factors contributed to the need for more access to the cashier's office for finalizing their registration outside of regular business hours. It is UAM's policy for students to sign their bill stating that they will attend or pay their bill to assure they will attend. This alleviates some of the responsibility for Financial Aid to verify students that received all F's did attend classes. It also assists in the control of the accounts receivable balance. We do not inflate the accounts receivable by recording revenue for students that we are not certain are in classes. This in turn allows us to not have such a large bad debt expense and collection of bad debt expenses.

In our search to accommodate these students' needs, we had to evaluate how we could meet these needs through conventional methods. For local students we changed the cashier's office hours from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. We also opened offices in Crossett and McGehee to assist all students with new expanded office hours. All of this helped ease some of the students needs but did not address the need of all students.

When spring 2005 registration began, it became apparent that we were not meeting the needs of our students. We were not available in an office to answer their questions and at times it was not convenient for them to come to the campus at Monticello, Crossett, or McGehee to have their questions answered or simply sign a piece of paper. It was also inconvenient to have them fax the information as most would have to pay to have this done. With this in mind Data Base Administrator, Anissa Jacks and Assistant Controller, Lindy Hester began looking into secure ways to allow students to use our web site to finalize their registration or contact the cashier's office. We came to the conclusion that the use of a new Jenzabar PX, formerly POISE, product would allow us to do this. The student has a unique identification number and pin number that is known only to him. This allows us to verify that the student is the student requesting to finalize or requesting additional information.

Anissa then worked on a way to allow the students to finalize their registration at anytime by accessing the university's home page and selecting the Campus Connect option. The students would then be able to finalize their registration at their convenience or even ask a question. The student would receive confirmation of his completing registration through the campus e-mail system. The student's identification number would then be added to a batch that automatically runs every night to flag the student as completed. This process decreased the expenses of mailing, telephoning, and printing. It also does not allow for human error in processing a student's account.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Arkansas-Monticello was established in 1909 by act of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas to serve the educational needs of Southeast Arkansas. Originally called the Fourth District Agricultural School, the University opened its doors September 14, 1910. In 1925, the General Assembly authorized the school's name to be changed to Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College. Arkansas A&M received accreditation as a junior college in 1928 and as a four-year institution in 1940.

Arkansas A&M became part of the University of Arkansas system July 1, 1971 and was renamed the University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM). The University is governed by the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees.

On July 1, 2003, UAM expanded its mission to include vocational and technical education when the UAM College of Technology-Crossett and the UAM College of Technology-McGhee became part of UAM to create a comprehensive system of postsecondary education in Southeast Arkansas.

The University of Arkansas at Monticello is located three miles south of the city of Monticello on a wooded campus adjacent to United States Highway 425. Monticello, the county seat of Drew County, is located 100 miles southeast of Little Rock and 84 miles north of Monroe, Louisiana.

Situated in the pine forests of Southeast Arkansas on the edge of the rich Mississippi delta, the University is ideally located to serve the state's educational needs and provides an excellent setting for the state's only School of Forestry.

Statement of the Initiative

One of the challenges that faced UAM as we began to expand through mergers with technical institutes and the growth of our other forms of distance education was how we could continue to follow the procedures set up to ensure that revenue is recorded only for students that have signed documentation that they are planning on attending the University.

Design

When facing this challenge, we were at the end of a semester and students were accessing Campus Connect to view grades. At the same time UAM had just purchased a new version of Campus Connect from our administrative software provider, Educational Systems Products (ESP). This new version could be modified to accomplish our objective. To access Campus Connect a student has to use a unique student identification number and pin number. The use of this system assured us that it was secure and we could be fairly confident that the student was the person accessing this information. Anissa modified the screens in Campus Connect that are connected to our billing programs to allow students that were enrolled in spring classes to finalize their bill or ask a question. There was no extra cost involved.

Implementation

To inform the students of the new system several e-mails were sent giving step by step instructions on how and where to access the new version of Campus Connect. This project was implemented shortly after finals when students were accessing the web page to check on their grades for the semester and their e-mail accounts to receive communications from various offices on campus.

The first semester we had 80 students with credit balances from financial aid take advantage of the electronically finalizing their bill. These students were completed during Christmas break when the office was not staffed. It took minimal time and effort for us to monitor the system to ensure that it was available for the students. The second semester we had 243 students take advantage of electronically finalizing their bill. Students also used the system to pay their bill and ask questions.

Benefits

Time savings for the students and office staff is the major benefit that we see in using this new program. Students do not have to wait in long lines at the cashier's office or pay for faxing or mailing a signed statement. Office staff does not have to manually process these students and a copy of the e-mail stating that a student has finalized is automatically processed to the imaging system. Costs have been reduced for telephone usage, postage, storage space, and office supplies. The automation of this procedure also ensures less human error. Students have been very complimentary about using the new version of Campus Connect. Distance learners were very glad to have something that they could use to connect to UAM staff at their convenience.