



**Nomination Proposal
SACUBO 2008 “Best Practices” Award**

**Texas A&M University Employee Service Center
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Abstract

Due to Texas A&M University's decentralized approach to human resource and payroll operations for its 8,500 full time and 7,500 part time employees, it is hard for employees tasked with this function to keep up to date on the many changes in benefits, leave, and retirement rules when this is typically an add-on to their duties. In response to this challenge, the Employee Service Center (ESC) was established to be an employee's primary resource for any employment-related issue, including benefits, pay, leave, retirement, job opportunity, workers' compensation and employee development and training. Combining these functions in one area has also helped to streamline processes where duplication of effort was identified.

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Texas A&M University Overview

Texas A&M University (Texas A&M) is the seventh largest institution of higher learning in the nation, with an enrollment of more than 45,000, including approximately 8,400 studying at the graduate level, pursuing degrees in more than 100 fields. Its 2,500-member faculty is nationally and internationally renowned, with winners of the Nobel Prize, Pulitzer Prize, World Food Prize and other top awards among its ranks. The university is nationally ranked for enrollment of National Merit Scholars (136 in its current freshman class), its research (totaling more than \$550 million annually) and size of endowment (more than \$4.4 billion). It is one of a select few institutions to hold triple federal designation as a land-, sea- and space-grant university. It is the oldest public institution of higher learning established in Texas, opening for classes on Oct. 4, 1876.

A 5,200-acre campus valued at over \$1 billion houses more than 100 buildings and a 434-acre research park. Texas A&M's Colleges of Agriculture, Business Administration, Engineering, Geosciences and Veterinary Medicine are among the largest in the United States, and its Corps of Cadets is the nation's largest uniformed student organization outside service academies. From the university's early focus on agricultural and mechanical studies, it has expanded to encompass ten colleges offering 151 fields of undergraduate study, 147 at the master's level, 105 at the doctoral level and two professional degrees: Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

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Texas A&M's Division of Finance, led by Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, K. Sue Redman, is comprised of five components, over 2,000 employees and an annual operating budget of \$82 million. The five components are: Business Affairs, Chief of Staff, Controller, Employee Services and Finance and Strategic Sourcing. The division is the most demographically diverse in the university with 43.5% non-Anglo employees and 63.3% women employees.

Texas A&M University Employee Service Center

Texas A&M has a decentralized approach to human resource and payroll operations for its 8,500 full time and 7,500 part time employees. With 225 departments across campus, this function is an add-on to an employee's duties. It is hard to keep up to date on the many changes in benefits, leave, and retirement rules when this is a small portion of an employee's job.

In the past, when employees had an employment-related question, they were unsure whom to ask and often were shuttled among the many subject matter experts. The Employee Service Center (ESC) was established within the human resources and payroll function, known collectively as Employee Services, as the one-stop shop consisting of individuals who have the knowledge to respond quickly and correctly to these employee's questions. The ESC is the employee's primary resource for any employment-related issue, including benefits, pay, leave, retirement, job opportunity,

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workers' compensation and employee development and training. Putting all these functions in one area has also helped to streamline processes where duplication of effort was identified.

Values of the ESC are centered on exceptional customer service by focusing on customers, demonstrating a service excellence philosophy and then delivering on and being managed by these values. The ESC is also leaning on the *Excellence in Higher Education*/Malcolm Baldrige Award format for guidance in customer service.

The ESC idea began with research on leading-edge concepts for providing service in one central location; evaluating the opportunity to incorporate this concept into a planned reorganization of the Human Resources and the Payroll Services departments to the Office of Employee Services; and determining the ability of Texas A&M to implement this format within the guidelines of university and State of Texas requirements.

Initial staffing for the ESC was drawn from current employees in both the human resource and payroll areas; customer-focused management was sought. Employees with specialized knowledge in the subjects that employees questioned most were pulled together from the two separate departments and put into one team in May 2006. This

team was involved in intensive process mapping guided by Dr. Bryan Cole, Professor in the Educational Administration and Human Resource Department in the College of

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Education and Human Development, with special interest in continuous quality improvement in education. (Dr. Cole also is a senior Baldrige examiner.) The new group learned to operate as a team and rely on each others' knowledge as questions came in. Process mapping also worked to spread the knowledge of issues to all members of the team so that any one of them could answer virtually any employee question. Employee Services' specialists also were called upon to transfer their extensive knowledge, making each member a generalist in all subjects.

After the group was formed in May 2006, training occurred during the summer and the ESC opened its doors on September 1, 2006 at the peak of the fall hiring season. Then and now, a team huddle has been held for thirty minutes each morning to discuss issues that arose the previous day. This time together allows singular transfer of knowledge on specific, as needed items and discussion amongst the team members, opening different perspectives from each. It also broadens the viewpoints on delivering service as discussions revolve around these issues.

Since its opening, the ESC has worked to continuously improve its performance. Daily it receives more than 200 calls, visits or emails, answering the phone in at least three seconds and responding to the questions in less than twenty-four hours. The ESC has received many accolades from employees across campus. The ultimate compliment has been a slight shift by employees to pose questions that are not just about the employment relationship; the staff are receiving inquiries on a variety of university topics, because

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Texas A&M employees have learned quickly that the ESC will find and deliver the correct, personalized answer.