

**2008 SACUBO BEST PRACTICES ENTRY:
“NEW DAWG” ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST**

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Abstract

Several offices on the campus of the University of Georgia heard comments from incoming students about the difficulties they were experiencing in finding a comprehensive list of items which needed to be completed prior to enrollment. Students would believe they had fulfilled all requirements and then be surprised to discover that they had not. This confusion over the steps required prior to matriculation could lead to loss of priority in receiving a housing assignment, loss of financial aid if applications were not filed early and correctly, and/or loss of place in the class if the commitment deposit was not made on time. Recognizing the validity of the problem and the potential to streamline the process, representatives of numerous offices joined forces to develop a single checklist of all enrollment-related tasks for students.

Representatives from the University's offices of Admissions, Housing, Student Financial Aid, Student Accounts and Auxiliary Services met for nearly a year to determine content and fine-tune the significant programming required for implementation. The collaborative effort of the team resulted in an electronic document—the “New Dawg” Enrollment Checklist—which is easily accessible from many home pages and which provides a one-stop shop for everything required to complete the enrollment process.

This customer service innovation benefits students by streamlining the enrollment process, and it helps UGA's staff as well, by improving the timely completion of forms and reducing the number of calls from frustrated students and parents.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Georgia (UGA), established in 1785 as the nation's first state-chartered university, is the flagship institution among the 35 colleges and universities in the University System of Georgia. With nearly 34,000 students, approximately 9,000 faculty and staff, and an annual budget of \$1.4 billion, UGA is the largest and most comprehensive educational institution in Georgia and a driving force in the state's economic growth.

The University of Georgia's academic reputation is on the rise, and admission is increasingly competitive. More than 17,000 applicants applied for the fall 2007 class of approximately 5,000 freshmen. For the past nine years, the University of Georgia has been ranked among the nation's top 22 public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*, and the institution is consistently recognized as one of the best values in American higher education.

The University's sports teams also are well known, and UGA recently finished twelfth (12th) in the Directors' Cup standings for NCAA Division I schools, presented for the best overall athletic programs. Cheering for the Bulldogs is an intrinsic part of the college experience at UGA, and the common rallying cry heard round the campus is "Go Dawgs!" Hence, the name of the new enrollment tool, the "New Dawg" Enrollment Checklist.

While the offices of Admissions, Student Financial Aid, Housing, Student Accounts and Auxiliary Services were the major players involved in designing the Web site, numerous other offices offering student services also provided information. These participants included Student Activities, the University Health Center, the Registrar's Office, Parking Services, Athletic Association and Disability Services, to name a few.

Statement (Restatement) of the Problem/Initiative

Several offices on campus heard concerns from incoming students about the difficulties they were experiencing in finding a comprehensive list of items which needed to be completed prior to enrollment. Students would believe they had fulfilled all requirements and then be surprised to discover that they had not. Such confusion over the steps required prior to matriculation could lead to loss of priority in receiving a housing assignment, loss of financial aid if applications were not filed early and correctly, and/or loss of place in the class if the commitment deposit was not made on time.

Recognizing the validity of the problem and the potential to streamline the process, representatives of numerous offices joined forces to develop a single checklist of all enrollment-related tasks for students. It became apparent that a single Web site was needed which would simplify the enrollment process at the University of Georgia. This would be accomplished by providing a list of tasks which must be checked off prior to enrollment and links to the offices where those tasks could be completed.

Design

Once the central issue was identified, a team—initially comprised of directors of the various student services departments—met and discussed the topic. This group identified specific areas of campus which should be represented on the working committee. The working committee members were contacted, and meetings began.

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of the Web site. One of the first steps was to determine the target audience for the checklist. The group decided to target the incoming first-year students (freshmen) and undergraduate transfers with plans to expand to other student categories (e.g., graduate school and professional schools) at a later date.

The planning team then identified the tasks that these two categories of students must or could complete prior to enrollment at UGA. The major difference between the two categories of students is the requirement of a commitment deposit. While first-year students are required to pay a commitment deposit by a specified date, transfer students are not. The planning discussions about the commitment deposit were enlightening. For example, the team learned that students/parents often failed to request housing assignments or to complete the financial aid process early because they assumed the commitment deposit had to be paid first. The commitment deposit deadline for the first-year students was identified as the core issue determining the specific tasks which first-year students can complete *prior to payment* as opposed to the tasks they can/must complete *once the deposit is paid*. The committee then began grouping the tasks based on this requirement.

A major challenge for the planning team was to develop a way to communicate clearly to the student/parent what they should do during the *pre-commitment deposit phase* versus what they must do during the *post-commitment deposit phase*. The communication also had to emphasize the need to submit the deposit on time.

After identifying the information that needed to be provided, technical staff in the Office of Student Financial Aid began designing the New Dawgs Web page. The goal was to provide a “one-stop shopping” checklist on the Web as well as a version that could

be printed for posting as a reminder at home. Numerous revisions were made to the design of the Web page based on committee review and suggestions. In addition to the unique information posted on the New Dawgs Enrollment Checklist, links were provided to the relevant areas of related departments' Web sites. The links provided convenience for the user and minimized the need for future revision of the New Dawgs site by the staff because the responsibility for updating specific data rests with the individual hosts of the linked sites.

Extensive personnel time was expended by committee members and technical design staff. However, no additional capital equipment had to be purchased; therefore, no additional budget ramifications occurred.

Implementation

The New Dawg Enrollment Checklist resides on the Undergraduate Admissions site at <http://www.admissions.uga.edu/newdawgs>, but it is accessible from many different home pages. The Admissions Office maintains the checklist and tracks hits. By providing a list in chronological order of requirements, incoming students are aware of what must be done first and what can wait. The Web site presents the information in a format that provides fast and friendly service and easy to understand information. Everything that students need to complete the enrollment process is provided in this one location via links and expandable sections, offering convenience and efficiency. Also, the document is easily accessible from many home pages; it can be printed to “post on the refrigerator”—where in many families' homes all important documents go—and, most importantly, it assures students that they have not missed a required task.

The Web site was introduced in December 2006 and met with immediate success. First-year and transfer students were informed of the checklist when they received their admissions acceptance packets from the Undergraduate Admissions Office. The number of hits per month was as follows:

- December 2006: 4,300
- January 2007: 3,936
- February 2007: 5,756
- March 2007: 8,021
- April 2007: 15,626

Obviously, some students visited the Web site on numerous occasions, but the total of 37,639 hits when 12,000 students were admitted is a significant sign of saturation.

Benefits

As the usage numbers presented in the previous section attest, incoming students are pleased with the New Dawg Enrollment Checklist. The creation of the tool significantly improved UGA's communications, providing service that is courteous, helpful, accessible, responsive and knowledgeable.

Implementation of the New Dawg Enrollment Checklist helps UGA's staff as well, by resulting in fewer calls and contacts from confused, frustrated students. It yields the added benefit of more timely completion of the enrollment process through the early submittal of student health forms, financial aid applications, etc.

An electronic survey conducted in late July indicated that 97.7 percent of the student respondents believed that the New Dawgs Enrollment Checklist provided them

with the necessary information to make a successful transition to UGA. Nearly two-thirds of the students who responded indicated they accessed the survey 3-13 times, revealing a significant return usage as they finalized their enrollment plans. Excerpted student comments from the survey demonstrate a high level of satisfaction:

- “Getting all the paperwork necessary for college isn’t exactly a walk in the park. I believe the Web site, along with dates and the deadlines in it, helped me complete the tasks I needed to feel comfortable that I was preparing myself for the upcoming year.”
- “There were so many duties involved when applying to many schools so it was very nice to have all that I needed to have completed laid out in front of me once I made my decision to come to UGA.”
- “I am the mother, but printed out the checklist and put it on the refrigerator. We checked off everything we needed to do. Very helpful!”
- “I would otherwise be completely bamboozled by the myriad of Web pages and worksheets to be completed.”
- “The information provided under each section helped keep me up to date. Several other students from my school system were also admitted to the school and none of them used the checklist. They ended up coming to me for information.”
- “It helped me to remember what I had left to do, kept me on track, and helped to heighten my excitement about being a New Dawg!”
- “It was a perfect way for me to organize my priorities and what I needed to do in order to be ready and successful for my freshman year. I found that UGA was one of the few universities to provide such an organized checklist.”

Retrospect

What would we do if we had the chance to introduce the New Dawg Enrollment Checklist all over again? We would have done it sooner! An email survey was sent to incoming students in late July, and initial feedback, as demonstrated above, has been extremely positive. Feedback has led the planning team to realize a few action steps for the upcoming admissions cycle:

1. Promote the checklist more aggressively, either through a condensed version that is mailed with the admissions acceptance letters or through a direct email to students upon their acceptance that features a link to the Web site.
2. Provide more links to student activities and opportunities for involvement.
3. Place links to the New Dawg Enrollment Checklist on additional campus Web sites such as Student Affairs, Financial Aid and Housing.

Currently, the first-year and undergraduate transfer students are the only ones who benefit from the New Dawg Enrollment Checklist. The enrollment checklist team plans to collaborate with UGA's three professional schools and the graduate school to determine if a similar document can be introduced. Implementation of this tool for students of all types is the ultimate goal.