

**ONLINE BILLS AND PARENT NOTIFICATION AND TRAINING SAVES
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Approximately 5 years ago, we decided to put our bills online and initiated block rate tuition. Customers were complaining that the hard copy bill was always wrong, and when we investigated, the students were correct because student accounts are a moving target. Before the last day to drop, students continually changed their schedules, which made their financial aid incorrect. The students would register, Financial Aid would adjust their aid, and before we could get the bill printed and mailed, the students would drop or add hours again, and that made their financial aid incorrect. The financial aid office tried to keep up with the drop/adds, but the students were dropping and adding so often, that this was an impossible task.

Our solution was to put the bill online and go to block rate tuition. The Computer Center personnel devised a system that figures financial aid based on the number of hours a student has. If the student is less than full time, they get no financial aid. The program knows if a student has 6 hours, they can get loans, and at what point they are no longer eligible for Pell Grants, etc. Anticipated Financial Aid shows as "expected" on the bill and remains there until after the last day to add classes, at which time the Financial Aid is posted to the account, which moves from the "expected aid" column to the "payments" column, where it is set in stone for the semester. Now, instead of sending hard copy pre-bills, we refer all students to the web. Our bills are online through what we refer to as Lipscomb Central. Students check their holds online, search for class's online, register online, and pay online, etc. twenty-four hours per day. They are given an ID and a Password to use for this purpose.

Because we do not send out pre-bills and because of FERPA laws, parents are communicated with and trained to read the bill at Advance (Freshman Orientation). In my training with the parents, I go over how to read the online bill and tell them that if they are paying the bill, it is a good idea to get the ID number and PIN number from their student (if the student is willing). I also created a parent email list. At the appropriate time, I email the parents on my list and tell them that it is time for their students to check their holds, pay their bill, and any other important information that needs to be communicated. The parents can then prompt the students to do what is appropriate to complete the task at hand, and we don't break any FERPA laws. In addition to that, I send emails and post cards to the students when it is time for their bills to be

paid. Parents are happy because they know it's time to ask the students for the information, and students are happy because their bills get paid in a timely manner.

As a result of our efforts, receivables have consistently gone down in the past three fiscal years due to more accurate bills and leading to more collection success. We are better stewards of the environment and have saved a considerable amount of money since we are using less paper, and we've saved money because we are using less postage.

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Lipscomb University

Lipscomb University, founded in 1891, is a small private Christian university located in the beautiful Green Hills area of Nashville, TN. Enrollment in the university is approximately 2700 students, representing more than 40 states and 37 foreign countries.

Lipscomb also is affiliated with the David Lipscomb Campus School (Pre-school through 12) with an enrollment of approximately 1370. With the campus school, total enrollment exceeds 4000.

Problem/Initiative:

The problem we were having is that the hard copy bills were incorrect by the time the student received them. Because students were constantly dropping and adding classes, the Financial Aid office could not keep up with the adjustments to the student's bills. Customers complained that the bills were always incorrect.

Design:

Because we were already using Banner Software, no new software was needed. Banner already has the capability of having web based tools. Many hours were spent in meetings to decide the best format, best uses, and how the online bill would look and be calculated. Committees were

set to make decisions on each of these areas. The Computer Center personnel had a member on each of the committees. The Registrar's Office, Financial Aid Office, and Student Accounts Office were all involved in the process. Students were asked what ideas they had, and still are asked to do a survey each year to see how the online registration and bill can be improved. The outcome of all these meetings was an online registration process, called Lipscomb Central. There are four steps involved with the process, with the last step being viewing and payment of the bill. The cost of implementing this process was very low. It just required staff already on campus to meet and determine the best ideas to implement. The savings were great compared to the cost of implementing the program. I can send more information on this, if requested.

Implementation:

Certain dates were set for each phase of the implementation process. We began during fall semester and wanted the process completed by the following fall semester. The Computer Center personnel drove much of the timeline since they were the ones who had to figure out how to set everything up and make it work correctly. One specific person from the computer center was charged with overseeing the work and implementing most of the technical processes. The rest of the offices involved simply had to come up with ideas and work with the Computer

Center timeline. With a lot of hard work, we were able to implement the online registration and bill on time.

Benefits:

The students and parents like our online registration and billing process, and like being able to pay their bill online. The bill is available to them twenty-four hours per day, so they can pay their bill at midnight if they choose to do so. The cost savings in printing and mailing bills have been great. (I can provide further information on this, if requested.) The benefit that we had not anticipated is fewer phone calls to Student Accounts personnel. The students can see their bill, and don't have to look through stacks of junk mail to find their bill. All they have to do is log on, so we get fewer calls about balances and fewer calls to pay by phone.

Retrospect:

When we first implemented the online registration process, too many students were allowed to select classes at one time. Too many people on Banner at one time slowed down/even shut down the system for anyone using Banner. Adjustments had to be made for registration times to be spread out farther apart, and fewer students were allowed to register during each time slot. From the student surveys, we've had to streamline some of the registration processed because the students thought they were too cumbersome.

