

## **Re-engineering Bookstore Service In A Multi-Campus Environment**

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## **Abstract**

*In 2004, Florida Community College at Jacksonville made a commitment to its students to provide world class customer service in our campus bookstores. To achieve this commitment, the College President identified process weaknesses, student government concerns, and a vision that included specific technological advancements.*

*Senior College administration visited the incumbent outsourced bookstore contractor corporate offices and shared not only specific concerns with the level of service provided but also identified numerous technological process enhancement recommendations they should consider to implement for all their national clients.*

*A College-wide cross-functional committee was organized and developed a multi-phased process to accomplish the initiatives to support the College-wide goals. The College utilized the opportunity it had with its existing contract nearing expiration to utilize a formal request for proposal to solicit competitive proposals that also included commitments to design and implement the identified technological advancements that were not available in the bookstore industry at that time.*

*The College's bookstore re-engineering efforts required a significant commitment of resources from the entire College community yet have yielded numerous and substantial best of breed benefits to students, faculty, and the College. We believe that other institutions would benefit from our methodical, comprehensive approach and that this same approach could be adapted to any size college and university.*

## **Introduction of the Organization**

Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FCCJ) is one of 28 community colleges in the state of Florida. Approximately 60,000 students enroll each year with 18,000 FTE reported.

The College has 5 campuses and 9 academic centers serving the citizens of Duval and Nassau counties. Five on campus bookstores service the needs of our faculty and students.

All five bookstores are managed by a third party provider. Each bookstore operates independently of the others and supports an individual campus or center. Online book adoptions college-wide are channeled through one of the campus bookstores.

FCCJ is committed to preparing its students for distinctive success in the global information age. As a result of this commitment, the College has been ranked number one nationally in technology by the Center of Digital Technology for the years 2003, 2004, and 2006. The College also maintains the largest information technology curriculum as well as the largest distance learning program in the state of Florida. FCCJ has been ranked second “Most Wired College” in the nation by Yahoo Internet Life. Additional achievements include a national ranking by the College in the number of Associate degrees in Liberal Arts and Studies conferred as well as 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the number of Associate degrees earned for all disciplines.

It was important that bookstore reengineering efforts reinforce this commitment to technology and world class customer service. It is the College’s professional opinion

that this goal has been achieved and has resulted in more effective and efficient processing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The College was concerned that the current bookstore processes were not positioned to allow maximize access of books to students timely or to provide students the lowest affordable option when purchasing books. There was no formal communication and measurement reporting process. Stock outs, slow response time to stock outs, and inconsistent pricing and service were questions that could not be quantified and addressed.

Operating in a multi-campus environment provided technology challenges that manifested in poor and inconsistent customer service. The College's growing distance learning program was not adequately supported and the bookstore web technology in use was not comparable to best practices observed at other institutions.

### **Design**

Senior management reviewed the College's mission statement and goals and developed specific goals related to bookstore service. Detailed initiatives and measures were identified to determine when a goal was successfully met. The identified goals were:

Goal 1: Establish and maintain multiple acquisition options to ensure every student has course material on the first day of class.

Goal 2: Minimize the total cost of education providing the lowest prices with the most selection of used books.

Goal 3: Maximize use of internet capabilities.

Goal 4: Adapt to the new electronic media world.

Goal 5: Fair returns to both the bookstore company and maximize scholarship resources.

A cross-functional college-wide committee was then established and began the process of preparing a gap analysis comparing existing bookstore business practices and current technological infrastructure to the goals and initiatives identified. A formal request for proposal (RFP) was developed and marketed to the industry. Competitive proposals were solicited to identify how the specific initiatives and measures would be met. Initiatives required in the RFP are listed below:

Goal #1: Establish and maintain multiple acquisition options to ensure every student has course material on the first day of class.

- Implementation of a networked bookstore inventory control management system.
- Implementation of bar code or RFID technology to maintain perpetual inventory of texts on all campuses.
- Improve communication and follow up with faculty and students on the status of out of stock text.
- Expand customer service training of all full-time and part-time staff to:
  - A. Implement fail safe processes.
  - B. Consistently meet expectations to offer to check another campus inventory.
  - C. Offer to inter-campus ship when texts are out of stock.

D. Offer next day air or define publisher lead time to ship the text.

- Re-evaluate use of statistical past sell through data to determine percentage to under order adoptions.
- Reduce response time to fill shortages to be transparent to faculty and staff.
- Expand training of staff to maximize use of FCCJ provided Q-Class Excel actual enrollment report.
- The College will explore standardization of textbooks.

Goal #2: Minimize the total cost of education providing the lowest prices with the most selection of used books.

- Implementation of integrated buy backs.
- Establish consistency in prices paid for used texts needed on all campuses to be 50 percent of current retail.
- Complete an on-line comparative pricing analysis to confirm eFollett.com packaging and shipping cost are the same or lower than other dot.com competitors.
- The College and bookstore will re-evaluate level change policies.
- If a book is returned in the same condition as purchased “and” the student purchases a level change text, the student would receive a full refund.
- Bundling C.D.’s with text:
  - A. Preference to unbundled text from C.D. or passwords.

- B. When re-bundling a used text, either inspect the quality of the CD or purchase a new CD to ensure the quality of the bundle being resold.

Goal #3: Maximize use of internet capabilities.

- Allocate IT resources to build a “user friendly” seamless interface link of FCCJ Artemis web registration system to eFollett.com.
- Expand eFollett.com website functionality to define the location of new or used texts in stock.
- Enhance eFollett.com to allow financial aid students to purchase books online.
- Explore implementation of sending automated email replies and updates to both:
  - A. IT resources to develop custom statistical textbook adoption process measurement reports
  - B. Students of the status of their eFollett orders, backorders, (i.e. picked and shipped on xx/xx/xx).
  - C. Faculty and staff on both timely updates of publisher new editions and the status of fulfilling text book adoptions.
- Assemble a multi-college faculty user group including FCCJ to evaluate opportunities to improve the existing on-line e-adoption system (i.e. allow for e-adoption changes and approvals).

- Provide the ability for each campus to check online which courses have not been adopted yet.
- Consistently utilize encryption on transmission of all student aid confidential files.
- Reduce process time for Follett to update their system once FCCJ sends a financial aid file.

Goal #4: Adapt to the new Electronic Media World.

- Explore the opportunity to help the College design, develop, and manage a cost effective distribution channel for FCCJ developed digital course material.
- Design an interface with the College developed course management system.
- Develop a faculty friendly course development template to interact with the College's digital course material inventory storage system.
- Develop the capability to sell course material, C.D.'s or passwords from the College's course management system.
- Re-implementation of copy right clearance and custom academic publishing ability.
- Partner with FCCJ to provide faculty custom academic publishing training workshops.

Goal #5: Fair returns to both the bookstore company and maximize scholarship resources.

Expand existing core services to support global clients like the D.O.D that requires 1-800 phone support and expanded hours of operation.

- Collaborate with the College to provide a legal review of Florida Department of Revenue recent findings that tax is due on bookstore rent and commissions paid.
- Customize and modify shelf labels to say "optional" books material versus "recommended".
- Explore establishment of a College Logo online store and expand FCCJ new logo merchandise being sold on campus with marketing pre-approval.
- Implement consistent use on-campus of aisle signage and campus related materials offered for sale (i.e. music, art supplies, etc.)

### **Implementation**

The process of re-engineering FCCJ's bookstore processes began long before the formal RFP was issued. The College reviewed market surveys comparing book costs to local and internet competitor costs. Higher education surveys of student satisfaction and timely faculty adoption percentages were studied. College administration attended national conferences by NACAS, SACUBO and NACUBO and internal College-wide meetings with faculty and students communicated needs and improvements desired.

The College President and senior administration used these resources when developing the bookstore vision of the College. The goals required a significant commitment by the

College's Information and Technology department and this support was sought and obtained early in the project. Once senior management support was secured, the campus-wide cross-functional committee developed and released the RFP.

The RFP process included a preproposal conference, finalist interviews, campus tours by finalists, reference checks conducted by telephone interviews and through site visits with finalist's current clients.

One of the most valuable parts of the RFP process was the site visits with the finalist's current clients. College personnel visited four separate institutions of higher education nationwide and came away from each one with a best of breed process improvement. The College had identified that operating in a multi campus environment required an integrated inventory system to allow the individual stores to maximize availability of books and provide consistency in pricing. At one institution, we observed an integrated inventory system in operation. At other institutions, we found sophisticated adoption collection techniques, online bookstore purchases technology, and formal communication and reporting procedures. Perhaps the most significant observation was the value gained in a multi campus environment of having an on site general manager responsible for all campus stores and personnel. FCCJ added this requirement to contract negotiations and reaped the benefit of this decision immediately.

Once the contract was negotiated a schedule of implementation for each of the identified initiatives was determined. After hiring a new general manager, the first initiative to be addressed was integrated inventory. The initiative stumbled and

successful completion of the initiative as well as those remaining was in doubt. The initiative suffered from a lack of a formal communication process between the College and its partner and a difference in understanding of some of the RFP requirements.

The problem was rectified by the bookstore provider assigning a project manager. The new general manager could focus on customer service improvements and the project manager managed the technology initiatives. In the beginning weekly management calls were needed to transition and implement processes. Personnel required on the calls included the project manager, bookstore operations managers, bookstore information technology staff, College technology staff, and College administration. The frequency of the calls has reduced but the project manager is utilized even today and continues to be the central person responsible for communicating and managing changes.

### **Benefits**

The benefits gained in the reengineering of FCCJ's bookstore processes have been substantial. While improvements and enhancements are on going, progress has been made toward each of the identified original goals. Below are some of the benefits received by the College listed by the goals accomplished.

Goal #1: Establish and maintain multiple acquisition options to ensure every student has \_\_\_\_\_ course material on the first day of class.

- **An integrated inventory system.** All five of FCCJ's bookstore can view inventory of other stores and request transfers of stock between campuses.

- **A centralized fulfillment center.** This center manages same day shipments between campuses and processes all online orders.
- **Weekly stock-out reports.** On a weekly basis the College's auxiliary services administrator is provided a list of titles that are out of stock, why and when estimated to be in stock.
- **Documented customer service training by all full time and part time bookstore staff.**
- **Installation of vending equipment to dispense common supplies.** Some of the more commonly used class supplies can be purchased through these machines even if the bookstore is closed.

Goal #2: Minimize the total cost of education providing the lowest prices with the most selection of used books.

- **Integrated buy backs and more used books inventory.** Previously, students would only receive the maximum value in buy back if the book was adopted at the campus where the buy back was performed. Now, maximum value is paid to student because buy back need is determined College-wide. Used book inventory is also maximized through this same process.
- **Better shipping options and pricing for students.**
- **Refund policies were improved.**
- **Textbook scholarships offered by bookstore provider.**
- **Cost comparison report of Top 100 titles.**

Goal #3: Maximize use of internet capabilities.

- **Online book purchasing process interfaced with the College's registration system.** Students can register in the FCCJ web registration system, choose Buy Books Now option, link directly to bookstore provider, and view and purchase all required and optional books for the classes in which they are registered. This process is so successful 80% of our students choose this method of purchasing their books online. The industry standard is 30%.
- **Improved web functionality allowing students to view online the availability of stock at all campus bookstores.** Before driving to a campus location, students can see which campuses have the book they need in stock and whether availability is new or used.
- **Improved search options for students purchasing books.** Previously a student buying online would have to identify themselves as a FCCJ student, then enter the campus they were attending, course code and finally class code before textbook adopted would be available for purchase. Students now have multiple ways of searching for a book online. They can simply enter the unique class number, or search by campus or course.
- **Allow financial aid students to use book authorizations to purchase books online.**
- **Improved online adoption process.** Bookstore provider conducted focus groups with faculty to determine enhancement needs to online adoption process. The College enjoys a 95% on time textbook adoption average.

- **Encryption standard implemented.** Encryption and secure servers technology used for all files interfacing between the bookstore and the College.

Goal #4: Adapt to the new Electronic Media World.

- **College-wide initiative of Sirius.** FCCJ developed digital material was developed and sold through the bookstore and resulted in lower initial textbook costs for students.
- **Interfaced FCCJ course management software with bookstore inventory system.** This allowed more timely information to be provided to bookstore on class additions and cancelled classes.
- **Established a service level agreement.** The service level agreement allows FCCJ to monitor and benchmark the bookstores online availability.

Goal #5: Fair returns to both the bookstore company and maximize scholarship resources.

- **Expanded service to allow military students to purchase their books from bookstore provider.**
- **Established an on line logo store for alumni.**
- **Improved ads in campus newspaper and online.**
- **Setup online surveys.** Surveys gauge customer satisfaction and provide students with discounts for completing.
- **Improved communication between provider and the College.** Hiring a general bookstore manager responsible for the operation of all bookstores provided a central point for problem and change resolution.

- **Provided faculty access to resource material.**
- **Redesigned and renovated bookstores infrastructure.** Improved access was achieved through use of more current layout and designs.
- **Mystery shopper program.**

### **Retrospect**

Reengineering of the College bookstore processes has been very successful and satisfying. However, in retrospect there are opportunities for improvement.

The most important is to require a project manager to manage the initiatives during contract negotiations. A lot of time could have been saved if an individual had been identified up front to administer and track progress.

In addition, more realistic timeframes for development and implementation of technology projects should have been established. Since our proposal included a number of technology improvements, the impact of the number of projects to the expected timelines was not adequately considered. More realistic timelines would have allowed financial incentives for timely implementation to be included in the contract.