

# The Score

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The monthly review of the Oberlin Project for Unified Systems for the staff and faculty of Oberlin College

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Functional training

## feature

### Preparing for OC's future: Admissions takes on BANNER

In Oberlin's A&S and Conservatory Admissions offices, the "season" has officially begun. Staff members are busy traveling around the country (and in some cases, around the world) meeting prospective students and hearing auditions, and applications are beginning to arrive in what will become a flood of paper in a few months.

For the Admissions staff, the cycle and the duties that accompany it are well-known: if you're a counselor or director, you travel, you interview prospectives, you spend months reading file after file to put together Oberlin's newest class. If you're an Administrative Assistant, you help enter and organize the enormous amount of data that comes with thousands of applications.

But this year's cycle has an unusual spin to it: it's the last one that will be done using the legacy systems that have been in place in the two Admissions offices for years. Next year, both the A&S and Conservatory admissions cycles will be administered out of the BANNER system for the first time, and the staff that are working on the implementation are looking at that October 1999

date with a mixture of excitement and apprehension.

#### living in BANNER-land

"My first impression of the BANNER system was not a good one," Maryann Stillwell says frankly. Stillwell, who is the Office Manager for the A&S Admissions office, is managing the BANNER Admissions implementation. "We saw from the beginning that we were going to have a hard time making the Oberlin processes 'fit' into BANNER," Stillwell says, "and we also saw that the BANNER forms were going to take much longer to populate with data than our current system's forms."

Stillwell points out that part of the difficulty in adjusting to BANNER-land was the Admissions staff's absolute satisfaction with the system they currently use. "We are spoiled!" Stillwell says of herself and her colleagues in the A&S office. "Our current system was designed by our analyst/programmers specifically for our office, and it works perfectly with our processes." And in the Conservatory, the system that currently processes applications was designed with a good deal of input from Director of Conservatory Admissions Michael Manderen, who was responsible for shaping the program that he and his staff now use.

So why switch to BANNER in the first place? Stillwell admits she asked that same question herself in the beginning of the project. "I kept wondering, why are we doing this when we already have a system that works so well? Why put everyone through this?" she says. "But the problem is that our system, as great as it is, is outdated in terms of the language it's written in and the computers it runs on."

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*A year and counting:  
Maryann Stillwell (left),  
team leader for the  
Admissions conversion,  
helps Beth Livermore,  
Administrative Assistant in  
A&S Admissions, prepare  
for the new system.*



## ...feature

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There's also that pesky Year-2000 problem: the current Admissions system is not Year-2000 compliant, and modifications have already been necessary just to keep the Prospect/Search functions of the system running until BANNER goes live. "With the way technology is going, the institution just doesn't have the resources to keep supporting and updating in-house programs," Stillwell says. "That's what finally hit home for me: that with technology moving so fast, the only way to keep up was to move to a vendor package. Of course, we always realized that the College as a whole will benefit from BANNER," Stillwell adds, "but for our office, the idea that we'd have to give up this great system was difficult to get used to."

### stretching the imagination

Another area of difficulty was creating the processes for the Conservatory and Double Degree admissions processes. BANNER, like all vendor software packages, is designed to accommodate standard admissions data and procedures, and as we all know, Oberlin is anything but standard. This is especially true due to the Double Degree program jointly offered by the College and Con. "One of our first challenges with BANNER was the development of an admissions process for prospects and applicants interested in the Double Degree program," Stillwell reports, adding that the trainer from SCT suggested that the Admissions team consult with other selective schools that were already live on BANNER to see if they had programs similar to Oberlin's Double Degree. "It did not necessarily have to be an A&S and Music combination," Stillwell says, "just any program where students applied to two divisions at

the same time and where two independent decisions were made on those applications."

The team tried to take the trainer's advice, but the results were less than successful. "We checked and checked, asked everyone we could think of," says Stillwell, "and we simply could not find a school that had such a process. Our DD program is really unique; for one person to file two applications at two divisions of a college, with each division making admissions decisions independent of the other, and the student possibly enrolling in both divisions, simultaneously, is something we didn't find anywhere else in BANNER-land."

In addition, Michael Manderen in the Con had the additional challenge of finding a place in BANNER for the fairly unusual data elements that go along with auditioning students. Finding spots for details like a prospective student's instrument or audition ratings took some time and creativity. "It took a real stretch of imagination to find a place for everything in the system," Stillwell says. "You would laugh to see some of the places we found to put the Con data!" But the stretch of imagination paid off: "The Conservatory hoped to put everything in one place in BANNER," Stillwell notes, "and we did manage to do that. We have also come up with a solution for how to process Double Degree applicants. It's different from how our current system works, but as long as it gets the job done, we're satisfied."

### a learning experience

As that October 1999 live date draws ever closer, the Admissions team has begun spreading the BANNER word to the staff that will eventually use the system. Administrative Assistants in both the A&S and

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## opus notes

### CBORD training scheduled for December 1-3

Originally scheduled for October, training on CBORD, the new housing management system in the Office of Residential Life, has been pushed back to December 1-3. According to OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter, this has not affected the system's timeline: "It's a little less comfortable, but still very much doable," Wachter says.

The real benefit of the system, however, will come when Res Life needs to process roommate matching over the summer for the incoming class in the fall of '99. CBORD has the capability to automate roommate matching, a process which in the past has always been done manually by Manager of Housing and Dining Sandy Hougland. In addition, CBORD and BANNER will share information about room assignments (which will be created in CBORD and stored in BANNER) and housing /dining fees. ■

### SCT Corp. sets new record for quarterly performance

SCT Corporation, the company that manufactures the BANNER software package, recently announced that its Education Systems division set new records in quarterly performance in the third quarter. During the quarter, the Education division (SCT also has a Utilities division, a Manufacturing division, and a Government division) signed agreements with 77 higher education institutions for its administrative software and service solutions; 16 of those signings were with new customers.

"It is very gratifying to experience this continued positive upswing in our revenue results," said Rod Everhart, president of SCT Education Systems. "We are confident that our solutions meet the expressed needs of college and university administrators, and the market's response corroborates our belief," Everhart said. "By listening to clients and offering solutions that address changes at their

institutions, SCT has committed itself to remain the leader." SCT's corporate headquarters are located in Malvern, PA. ■

### SCT techie assisting SR team

The BANNER Student Records team is getting a helping hand from another SCT employee. David Weiss, a technical consultant at SCT, is spending two weeks a month on site at the Center for Information Technology. Weiss's primary function is to assist Katie Styer, the lead Analyst/Programmer for the SR module, with the technical underpinnings of the BANNER module.

Weiss is the third SCT "techie" to work on-site with Oberlin's conversion to BANNER. Carrie Serum and Jeff Michael, both SCT employees, came on board to assist with the HR implementation and the Finance implementation, respectively. ■

## Terre Haute Report: OC staff attend BANNER Users Conference

Several hundred BANNER users from schools around the Midwest convened in Terre Haute, IN, on October 8-9 for the annual BANNER Midwest Users conference. The conference was attended by a number of Oberlin staff members, representing the Admissions Office, the Financial Aid Office, the Controller's Office, the Student Accounts Office, and the Center for Information Technology.

Maryann Stillwell, Office Manager in the A&S Admissions Office, notes that one of the most valuable aspects of the conference was meeting people who are also going through the difficult process of implementing BANNER: "I made some very good contacts," Stillwell reports, "and these people were very willing to share ideas and solutions they'd found during their own conversions." Stillwell also says that the conference made her appreciate how unique Oberlin is: "We

are very different from a lot of the schools using BANNER," she says, "because we are so much more selective in our admissions process. Not a lot of schools have such rigorous procedures and standards. I can understand much better now why BANNER is designed the way it is."

Katie Styer, the lead analyst/programmer for the Student Records module, also appreciated the sharing of ideas at the conference: "It's not like being in industry, where people are secretive and really guard their procedures," Styer says. "When you're working with people in higher ed, everyone is more than happy to help you out."

Dave Waldron, Styer's colleague in the Center for Information Technology, was also happy to meet fellow BANNER technical folks who were on various implementation timelines. "I was able to identify some schools who are on our same timeline and others who

have just gone live," Waldron says. "These contacts will be very helpful as we move forward, since we can use the schools who have already gone live as examples of what we should and shouldn't be doing."

Brian Lindeman, Associate Director of Financial Aid and the team leader for the FinAid implementation of BANNER, agrees that meeting users in different stages of the software conversion is valuable. "Making connections with other schools who are in various stages of BANNER was helpful," Lindeman says. "I'm looking forward to calling on those colleagues for answers when our own implementation runs into BANNER puzzles."

The OPUS team leaders will have another chance to connect with BANNER colleagues in March, when SCT's national users conference, the SCT Summit, is held in Orlando. ■

### banner update

## Bashing the bashers: BANNER pays off in Payroll

As more and more College staff members feel the impact of the systems migration, the newest game in town (or at least on campus) has become Blame It On BANNER, otherwise known as "BANNER-bashing." The only rule: blame everything that goes wrong on the new system.

Now, make no mistake: there are plenty of reasons to grouse about BANNER. It's new, it's different, it's frustrating, it's taking a whole lot of time and energy for users to master the system, and sometimes folks who aren't yet live on BANNER don't completely understand the hard work and time it takes to accomplish tasks that used to be routine. But that doesn't mean that all BANNER is good for is making you miserable.

In fact, BANNER is actually helping to *save* considerable time and energy on some processes. According to Assistant Controller Marcia Miller, the Payroll staff in the Controller's Office has been able to make some real improvements in several areas.

"TIAA/CREF remittance used to be processed by hand," Miller says, noting that every reduction, deduction, or benefit for every individual was manually transferred from a payroll register to a TIAA/CREF remittance statement. "Each page had to be sub-totalled and then grand-totalled, and that grand total had to match the payroll register. This was all done by hand, and you can imagine the hundreds

of records that Sharon [Jaycox, Payroll Clerk in the Controller's Office] had to go through if it didn't balance!"

That was before. Now, the whole process is done electronically in a fraction of the time: "Now a data file is downloaded from BANNER and transmitted electronically to TIAA/CREF," Miller reports. "This was a 2-3 day job and now it takes 30 minutes."

Miller also reports saving time on insurance reporting: "The Life/Disability/Accident insurance report used to be in an Excel spreadsheet which was updated manually," Miller says. "Finding changes, terminations, and additions was extremely time consuming—it took about two days to finish." But with the help of Millie Modic, the lead analyst/programmer for HR/Payroll, that time has been cut as well. "Now we have a BANNER report designed by Millie and myself that reflects all those changes," Miller says, "and now it takes less than a half-day to complete all the remittance forms. Wow!"

That's not to say that Miller and her staff are universally singing BANNER's praises; there are still plenty of issues to be resolved with the system, and the Payroll staff is still working long and hard to stay ahead of the curve. But as Miller points out, staff are beginning to see the benefits of the new system, and the College will see more of those in the future. Just don't let that loud and boisterous game of BANNER-bashing block your view. ■

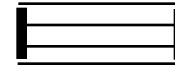
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Conservatory Admissions Offices have begun training on BANNER, and Stillwell is busy looking at additional hardware and software that may help to cut the data entry time for staff. "Overall, I would say working on the BANNER implementation has been a positive experience for me," Stillwell says. "I've certainly learned a lot, especially about the Con's application processes from working with Michael Manderen." Stillwell also notes that the BANNER project has allowed her to get to know colleagues outside of the Admissions offices.

"The implementation has provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the function of other offices on campus," Stillwell says, "and I've enjoyed the interaction with members of the college community with whom I would not otherwise have had the chance to work."

**The Score**



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*The Score*

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**reader survey**

# Score *The Score* and have lunch on OPUS

The goal of *The Score* is to be a reliable and enjoyable source for news about OPUS, and we'd like to know if we're doing our job. Please take a moment to fill out the reader survey below and tell us what we're doing right, what we're doing wrong, and what you'd like to see more of in *The Score*. We're so anxious for your feedback that we'll make you a deal: if you're the first person to send back a completed survey, we'll treat you and a friend to lunch at Lorenzo's in Oberlin

(who says there's no such thing as a free lunch?). In addition, if your survey is one of the first 25 to be received, you'll receive an "All Hail the FOAP" cap, just like those received by the BANNER Finance team on September 3 (see last month's *Score*, page 2). Make sure to write your name in the space below the address on the right; we'll separate the two sides to keep your comments anonymous. Thank you for your participation; we look forward to your feedback. ■

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*cut along dotted line and write your name below the address before submitting*

Please indicate your employee class:

- Faculty
- A&PS
- Administrative Assistant
- Security
- Trades
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you read *The Score*?

- Every time it comes out
- Sometimes
- Not very often
- Almost never

In your opinion, is *The Score* (please circle one)

Informative?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Well-written?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Relevant to you/your job?	Yes	Sometimes	No

What kind of information would you like to see in *The Score* in the future? (check all that apply)

- More practical tips about how to use BANNER
- More information about offices who are already using BANNER
- More information about when/how the systems migration will affect me and my office
- More information about \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments about *The Score*. \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send longer comments to ami.berger@oberlin.edu or opus@oberlin.edu*

*fold along line and send via campus mail*

*The Score*  
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