

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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PRESTO change-o: BANNER registration, part III

It's November, and for Oberlin students, faculty, and many staff, November means one thing: registration. The November registration period is a fixture on the Oberlin calendar, but the past few months have seen some changes to both the registration process itself and to PRESTO, the web interface that students use to sign up for their classes.

The changes come after a frustrating August registration, when computer hardware issues and bugs in the PRESTO system made things very difficult for some faculty, students, and the staff in the CIT who support PRESTO and the registration process. "During the last registration, we received reports of slow PRESTO sessions," notes OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter, "and we determined that the database server, Bravo, was hitting some performance limits." The CIT staff also observed some problems with the way the webserver software was connecting to

PRESTO; the problems were with processes called cartridges. "These cartridge problems explain why some faculty and students received 'unable to connect' error messages," Wachter says, noting that CIT staff did almost continuous monitoring throughout registration, manually controlling the cartridge processes to maximize the number of successful connections.

Wachter also notes that some changes have been made to Bravo since that August registration: "We replaced Bravo's two CPU's with two new CPU's that should increase processing speed by about 40%. We also added 1.5 GB's of memory," she reports.

In addition to the system changes made to the BANNER hardware, Registrar Lori Gumpf has also lengthened the registration period from one week to almost two. This allows for more registration windows with fewer students each, limiting the number of people attempting to register during each window and hopefully alleviating some of the heavy load on the system.

a bug's life

But the hardware problems weren't the only thing causing problems during August registration. "The BANNER software itself has a serious bug that prevents us from using the course reservation feature," Wachter says. Here's the problem in a nutshell: BANNER can reserve an entire class for a particular group (i.e., only freshmen or only majors), but it cannot reserve part of a class for a group. "This bug has necessitated the use of consent for many courses which would otherwise

At right: new Associate Registrar Ron Bowman (seated) works with Administrative Assistant Helen Fields while Registrar Lori Gumpf and Administrative Assistant Carol Nitchman look on



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...feature

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be controlled by reservation limits," Wachter says, noting that faculty can choose to web-consent via PRESTO, or can hand out CAL labels for students to submit to the Registrar's Office. "It is unfortunate that we have to resort to a workaround, but SCT [the company that makes BANNER] is working on the problem," Wachter says. "We expect that the reservation limit feature will be in place for April registration."

In the meantime, Registrar Lori Gumpf is encouraging faculty to use PRESTO to consent students into their courses, since a significant increase in the use of CAL labels would make it difficult for the Registrar's Office to enter all consents into BANNER, delaying the production of accurate class lists for professors. In order to familiarize academic departments with the web-consent feature in PRESTO, three hands-on information sessions were offered November 2-3 to faculty and their department AA's on how to use PRESTO to consent. Once a faculty member enters consent via the web for a student, that student can then register via PRESTO for that class.

the new addition

Aside from the changes in registration and PRESTO, the Registrar's staff has also had a new addition to the staff. Ron Bowman began his three-year term as Associate Registrar on November 1, just in time to help Lori Gumpf prepare for registration.

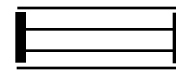
As the Associate Registrar, Bowman will assist Gumpf with the daily operations of the Registrar's Office, as well as the implementation and maintenance phases of the rest of the BANNER conversion. Despite the enormous amount of changes that have already taken place in the Registrar's Office, there's still plenty to come: the office will be producing grades out of BANNER for the first time this winter, and other processes—such as graduation and the Curriculum, Advising,

and Program Planning (CAPP) system—are waiting in the wings.

"Ron will certainly have plenty to help me with," says Lori Gumpf. "The primary purpose of his position is to manage the daily operations of the Registrar's Office and staff during the implementation of BANNER, including administration of student academic records, supervision of the staff, and preparing reports for offices around campus."

Bowman, the former Director of Admissions and Student Records at Notre Dame College of Ohio, is looking forward to his tenure at Oberlin: "my first few weeks have been very positive," Bowman says. "I'm looking forward to working with Lori and the staff, and I'm excited about calling Oberlin College my new 'home away from home'." ■

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opus notes

PRESTO consent sessions for academic departments

Three hands-on sessions were held on November 2 and 3 for faculty members interested in using the PRESTO web-consent feature for consenting students into their classes. Sponsored by the Registrar's Office, the sessions allowed attendees to practice entering consents into the system; Registrar Lori Gumpf is encouraging the use of the web-consent feature rather than the use of Consent Access Labels (CALs) in order to speed up the availability of accurate class lists.

Faculty and departmental Administrative Assistants who could not attend a session but would like more information on web-consenting via PRESTO should contact OPUS Communications Manager Ami Berger at 6643 or ami.berger@oberlin.edu.

Individual or group sessions to review the consent process are available. ■

Summit 2000 in San Francisco

The annual BANNER users' conference, the SCT Summit, will be held March 19-22, 2000, in San Francisco. The conference is a chance for BANNER users from schools across the country to meet and discuss the software; the conference provides tracks for Student Records, Finance/Accounts Receivable, Human Resources, Financial Aid, as well as a number of other sub-categories of BANNER functionality, including Admissions, Student Accounts, Reporting, and Institutional Research. For more information on the conference, visit the Summit 2000 website at www.sctcorp.com/summit/. ■

The Score is a winner

The Score has been awarded second-place honors in the 1999 ACM-SIGUCCS competition for university publications in the Printed Promotional Materials category. According to the SIGUCCS web site, the competition, sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on University and College Computing Services, "recognizes outstanding publications developed at college and university computing centers, and provides SIGUCCS conference participants with an opportunity to review model publications that may help them develop or enhance their own work." *The Score's* award was presented at the SIGUCCS User Services Conference in Denver on November 7-10. ■