

The Score

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The monthly review of the **O**berlin **P**roject for **U**nified **S**ystems for the staff and faculty of Oberlin College

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Mock registration a success

That “whoosh” you may have heard on the morning of Friday, February 19, was probably the collective sigh of relief given by the BANNER Student Records team. The previous three days, February 16-18, marked the largest test of the BANNER SR module to date: a “mock” registration period involving over 200 Oberlin people on and off campus. The mock, which mimicked all three segments of student registration (registration, extended registration, and the add/drop period) tested the BANNER web registration process accessed through the PRESTO web system.

A mock registration is a common way for schools to test the BANNER registration process; the first question many soon-to-be-live schools ask each other at SCT conferences is “how did your mock go?” But for the BANNER SR team, led by Registrar Lori Gumpf, this was no ho-hum test: “The mock definitely settled some nerves for many of us working on the project,” says Gumpf, who admits to some nervousness about how the test

might (or might not) work. “Through the mock, I was able to see that some testing I had done earlier really was holding up and that helped reassure me also,” she adds.

The mock was also the first time that a large number of people outside the confines of the OPUS project had the chance to see the new system. 202 people officially participated in the mock, including students, faculty, and staff. “It was really great to have participants from so many groups across campus—students, AA’s, faculty, A&PS and several senior staff members,” Gumpf notes, “since each group brought a different perspective to our testing.”

getting ready

A mock registration presents several challenges in addition to the work associated with getting the BANNER system itself ready, since the purpose of the mock registration was really threefold. The first and most important goal was to test the data entered in the system to make sure everything was set up correctly. Secondly, the CIT folks wanted to know how the College’s computing infrastructure would respond to the load put on the network by registration processing. Last, the SR team was very interested how the College community would respond to the new system.

With those three purposes in mind, the mock effort got underway. Lori Gumpf created over 200 “mock IDs”: essentially, fake BANNER IDs for mockers to use, since using the names and records of real students would have been a big data integrity no-no. She also created a “mock supplement,” a list of courses already loaded into the system for which mockers could register, and continued testing on a small scale all the processes that would be tested big-time during the mock.

The techies were also preparing their side of things. Katie Styer, the lead Analyst/Programmer

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At right: OC President Nancy Dye and Registrar Lori Gumpf discuss President Dye’s schedule during the mock registration Feb. 16-18. Fortunately, President Dye got into all her classes.



Keeping up with BANNER security

One of the most challenging parts of the OPUS project is introducing the College to a whole new vocabulary. With BANNER, the way we refer to business practices has changed in a number of ways: account numbers are now "FOAPs"; student IDs will eventually be known as "T-numbers"; and on a larger scale, the programs we're all used to are suddenly "legacy systems" and the BANNER software moves in to become "the system of record."

But in many ways, the term "software" to describe BANNER can be misleading. When most people think of software, they think of products like Word, Excel, or PowerPoint: you open the box, stick in the CD, click "OK" a few times, and then magically, the software is loaded on your machine and ready to use.

That's not quite how it works with BANNER, as anyone with any exposure to the project can tell you. First of all, installing BANNER on your machine is pretty much a job for the techies, since a BANNER-ready machine must be able to receive data from not one, but two servers housed in the CIT. Then there's the training issue; BANNER is an extremely powerful tool, and users need to be trained in the processes they'll need to use.

And then comes the most important issue of all, at least from a data integrity point of view: BANNER security. Because BANNER is an integrated database (i.e., anyone with access to BANNER has the potential to see all the data housed in it), keeping a tight rein on security is absolutely critical. For that reason, each BANNER module has its own "security administrator." This is the individual who originally served as the implementation's team leader, and that security administrator is responsible for making sure that only people who need to see the data in their module have access to the module. It's a crucial role, and one that becomes more important as more offices go live on BANNER.

The security administrators for each of the modules aren't the only ones involved in keeping security tight. As OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter notes, there are actually three layers of BANNER security. The first is form security: this is where the security administrator decides which users should have access to

which BANNER forms. Forms are grouped into "security classes" (basically, groups of forms related to a particular job function), and the security administrator decides which users go into which classes. Once this decision has been made, Darrick Strange, the database administrator in the Center for Information Technology, gets involved. Strange is the one who actually goes into the BANNER database and sets the new user up, making sure that he only grants access to security classes as stipulated by the security administrator.

The second layer of decision-making is functional security. Not only do the forms need to be secured, but the data within the forms need to be secured. For example, let's say one College employee needs to be able to see payroll information for faculty and staff, but a colleague down the hall only needs to see payroll information for student employees. Those two users would have identical forms access, but different functional access; the second employee would need to be limited to seeing certain records (in this case, student records) in the database.

The third layer of security involves functions that use BANNER data, but don't take place in the BANNER database. This layer mostly involves reporting functions, since there are reporting tools external to BANNER that need their own security set-ups.

No matter what data you're talking about, securing that data is absolutely essential. It's also time-consuming, since each security administrator needs to be very careful about selecting the pieces of data that each user can see. "I've started very small," says Lori Gumpf, who is the team leader for the Student Records implementation. "I've been giving people access only to what they really need to know about at this very moment." Gumpf notes that her security "classes"—the forms and data viewable by different groups of users—will probably change as the SR implementation moves forward. "As we expand the data that is live in BANNER SR," she says, I will have to make adjustments to my security classes, moving people in and out as needed." Gumpf also points out that some users will never need anything except "view" access in BANNER, since casual users of the system will only need to look at information in the database, not change it. ■

opus notes

A new look for OPUS on the web

The OPUS home page has gotten a face lift in both form and content. The look of the page has changed, and users will find links to new and updated information. The updated site includes a link to the new PRESTO system, which will eventually offer functionality for staff and faculty as well as students. There are also links to BANNER documentation and information about each of the BANNER modules. The OPUS home page is located at <http://www.oberlin.edu/~acs/opus/opushome.htm>.

If there's information you'd like to see included on the OPUS home page, contact Ami Berger or e-mail opus@oberlin.edu. ■

Blair-Miller moves up at SCT; Oberlin has new account reps

Cindy Blair-Miller, Oberlin's SCT account representative since the College signed on with the vendor in December of 1996, has been promoted within the company and will no longer be managing Oberlin's BANNER account. Taking Blair-Miller's place will be Bill Byers, an SCT Senior Regional manager for the Eastern region.

According to OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter, these changes are part of SCT's continuing attempt to better service existing clients: "SCT has added a new tier to their regional support structure," says Wachter, who notes that Byers will be assisted by a

regional account representative dedicated to BANNER clients in the state of Ohio. The new account rep, Keith Miles, will visit Oberlin in early March along with Byers and Blair-Miller to ensure a smooth transition. ■

A Payroll first: BANNER W-2's

In January, all Oberlin College employees experienced another BANNER debut: the first W-2 tax forms to be run out of the BANNER Payroll system. Even though the Office of Human Resources and Payroll division have been live on BANNER for over a year, last year's W-2's could not be run out of BANNER since the data for 1997 was still housed in HRS, the HR legacy system. ■

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for the SR module, was working to get all the computer programs that run the processes necessary for registration in order. For example, the passwords that students need to get into the registration system are generated by a computer script, which needed to be tested and re-tested. And Dave Waldron, the A/P in charge of the PRESTO web product, had plenty of fine-tuning to do to make sure PRESTO was up to speed.

In addition, the search for volunteer testers began. The SR team used Oberlin Online, campus posters, and word of mouth to attract potential mockers. In the end, about 60 students and almost 150 staff (including 20 faculty members) offered their services. Each volunteer received a mock packet which included their BANNER ID and passwords, a registration instruction booklet, and the mock supplement. Volunteers were asked to log in to the system as many times as possible over the three-day mock.

In addition, volunteers were asked to try to log in at exactly 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday the 16th. Historically, the time between 1 and 2 p.m. is the busiest time for the College's network, and the SR team wanted to see how the network would handle a "big hit" from PRESTO during this peak time. In addition, the payroll staff participated in the mock by scheduling a payroll test at the same time as the big hit to add to the potential network load. And unbeknownst to the SR team, an online Admissions chat room for prospective students was also scheduled for Tuesday afternoon at the precise time of the big hit. If the system was going to die, it would die a truly spectacular death.

chaos becomes mastery

Fortunately, that spectacular death didn't materialize. Dave Waldron, who tracked the web traffic generated over the three-day period of the mock, reports that both the network and the server that runs PRESTO responded extremely well throughout and especially during the big hit. During the day on Tuesday, the first day of the mock, 202 logins to PRESTO were recorded, including 113 logins between 1 and 2 p.m.

Waldron, however, was less interested in the login numbers as in the number of requests transferred to the database, since simply bringing up the main page wouldn't really test the BANNER infrastructure underneath PRESTO: a user would have to register for a class, search for a class, or drop a class, for example, to actually touch the BANNER database. But here too, the system responded well: there were 4500 database requests made on Tuesday. 2108 of those came between 1 and 2 p.m., and 1146 of those came in during the most critical time: the fifteen-minute period between 1:30 and 1:45 p.m. "It's really great that we got so much traffic on the database during that time," says Waldron. "It really gave us the opportunity to see how the system would respond." After Tuesday's big hit, Waldron notes, those numbers declined, but were still high enough by far for accurate testing.

Even better, the volunteers' response to PRESTO and the web registration system was very encouraging, a real relief to the SR team.

Staff and faculty who participated in the mock had positive experiences for the most part, and many commented on how easy the system is to use. "No problems...really!" said Vicki Balzer, an Administrative Assistant in the Psychology Department. Laura Kuennen-Poper, Associate Dean of the Conservatory, agrees: "Very easy," she commented, "so simple even people over 40 can do it!" Wendy Kozol, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, tried to register for courses she knew would be full: "I deliberately tried classes I knew would be in high demand," Kozol reported, "so that I'd have to get another class or do a class search, which worked fine."

Student reaction to the mock registration in PRESTO was also generally positive, but with a bittersweet thread: why get rid of REGISTER at all? "Most of the problem is that I'm used to REGISTER," said one student mocker, "and PRESTO is very different." This sentiment was echoed by several student mockers, including one who noted "The confusion mostly came from the differences between PRESTO and REGISTER," especially the fact that PRESTO registration functions by users clicking on web links, whereas REGISTER operated via keystrokes.

Many students, however, recognized that they simply needed time to get used to PRESTO: "It took some getting used to," said one

student mocker, "and I felt a little more secure in REGISTER, but that's probably just because it's familiar to me. I didn't have any serious problems with PRESTO at all. I thought it was well-done and very clear." Other students commented that "PRESTO made everything much easier than the older system" and thought that "PRESTO was great, very comprehensive." And in the words of one particularly insightful student mocker: "It will probably be chaotic at first during the first registration, but after that, I think it will be easy for everyone to master the program."

Before chaos becomes mastery, however, there's still plenty of work for the SR team to do with PRESTO registration. Some security and access issues still need to be worked out, due to the many different web browsers (and versions of browsers) on machines around campus. Now that the mock is done, Lori Gumpf and her team will be busy using the data generated to test a number of processes, from running class lists to generating term bills. In addition, the database has to be made ready for the real test of web registration: April 19, which is when students begin signing up for their fall courses.

In the meantime, however, the SR team will reap the benefits of a successful mock registration. "We received some valuable input on how to make our documentation clearer, as well as suggestions for some minor enhancements to the web product," says Lori Gumpf. "We also stumbled onto some quirks in the system that we definitely want to remedy before we go live. All in all it was very positive," she adds. "I even managed to have some fun!" ■



OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter looks on as VP of Finance Andy Evans uses PRESTO during the mock registration.

Isn't BANNER *done* already?!

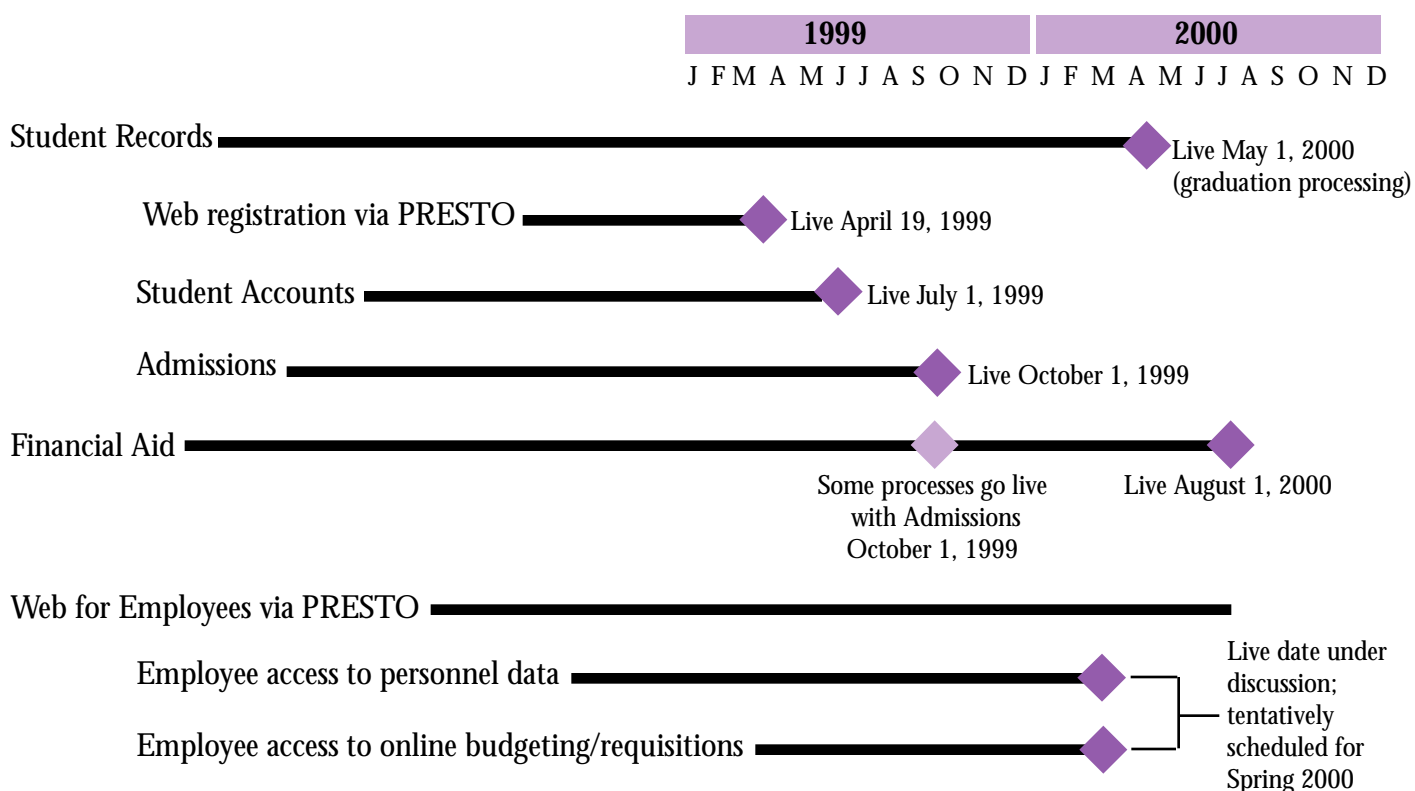
Keeping an eye on the OPUS timeline

It may seem like OPUS has been going on forever, but here's a reality check: the College is only about halfway through the project. Some of the most complex and far-reaching BANNER implementations are still in the future, such as student registration via

the web in April, student accounts in July, and the Admissions office in October.

In fact, one piece of BANNER that will probably affect employees of the College the most is still in the planning phase. Web for Employees, a web interface that will allow

faculty and staff access to BANNER data through the PRESTO system over the web, is tentatively planned for implementation in early 2000. See the box in the lower left for an update on PRESTO and the functions it will eventually include. ■

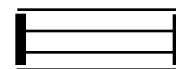


PRESTO update

The PRESTO system (Personal Records for Employees and Students at Oberlin) will have its official debut beginning on April 19, 1999, when students will use the web interface to register for their fall classes. But students aren't the only ones who will be using PRESTO in April: faculty members will also be using the system to view and print their class lists, view their own teaching schedules, and to consent students into classes that require instructor consent.

In addition, the ACS group is partnering with the Human Resources and Finance groups to set a timeline and production cutover date for the BANNER Web for Employees product, which will also be accessible via PRESTO. Web for Employees will eventually give users access to budget inquiry and online requisitioning over the web, and will also allow employees limited access to their personnel records over the web.

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