

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

feature

Student Records **goes live** on **BANNER**: *Students register for fall classes on PRESTO*

On Monday, April 19, 1999 at 9 a.m., the BANNER Student Records module officially went live when the first students logged on to the PRESTO system to register for classes.

Registrar and SR team leader Lori Gumpf is both relieved to have this first registration over with, and faintly surprised at how relatively smoothly things went. "It actually went better than I thought it might," Gumpf says. "It could have been a real disaster. I was afraid that the phone might ring off the hook and students would be in the office with lots of questions. We did have questions, but it really wasn't too bad."

Associate Registrar Ken Gilson agrees. "Overall, things did go well," he says. "Several big problems that we were concerned about didn't happen."

SR's production cutover differed in some significant ways from previous BANNER live dates. Since the registration function requires both the BANNER database and the PRESTO web system to be live, this "go live" often seemed like two implementations in one to the SR team. In essence, there were two new systems to test, update, maintain, and worry about.

On the BANNER side, all the necessary data (such as student name, address, total earned hours, major, etc.) had to be converted from the legacy SR system into BANNER and the processes tested over and over again to be sure that the system would work behind the scenes. In addition, the web product that runs PRESTO also had to be constantly tested and updated to make sure that it was in synch with the BANNER database. PRESTO also had to be redesigned to reflect the special needs of Oberlin during registration.

getting ready: memos and demos

Another difference between previous cutovers and SR's live date was that registration marked the first time that such a large segment of the

addition, the Registrar's staff (who were actually "live" on BANNER about a week before registration began) had to prepare to answer the inevitable barrage of questions about a brand-new system.

Since so many people would be involved in registration, the SR team knew that getting everyone involved in and educated about the new system was critical. As a result, the days and weeks before the April 19 live date were filled with "memos and demos": memos to students and faculty about PRESTO and the new procedures; pamphlets and booklets that explained how to use the new system; and demonstrations of the PRESTO system to students, faculty, and the departmental AAs.

In addition to setting up and testing the computerized system, a complete overhaul of every single

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Lori Gumpf (wearing her "Queen of PRESTO" crown) celebrates going live at the BANNER SR reception on May 12, 1999.

campus community was directly involved in a BANNER function. When HR went live, for example, anyone who received an Oberlin paycheck was involved, since paychecks were produced out of BANNER for the first time. That involvement, however, was indirect; no one except the HR and Payroll staff actually touched or saw BANNER in action.

For the SR cutover, BANNER was very much on display across campus. Everyone involved in registration would either have their hands on BANNER or be touched by a new process or procedure. That included all students, most faculty, the departmental AAs, and any staff who participate in student services, such as academic advisors. In

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written piece of communication relating to registration was necessary. That included the memo known as the “green registration letter” (which contained the PINs students needed to access PRESTO), the numerous letters to faculty about their courses, the Registration Supplement (containing updated course information), the material regarding instructor consent, and any other written material that referenced registration.

Part of the reason for this memo-and-demo blitz was the necessity of preparing the campus for the upcoming changes before those changes actually took effect. Some of the difficulty here lay in the fact that many users were perfectly happy with the old registration system and from a practical standpoint, saw absolutely no reason to change.

Furthermore, many registration processes that the academic departments and students were accustomed to were about to change. For example, in the legacy registration system, students registered for consent classes by obtaining a Consent Access Number (CAN) from the instructor; plugging that number into the system would then register the student for the course. PRESTO, on the other hand, provides a way for the instructor to enter consent electronically, not the student. The consent mechanism in PRESTO is fairly simple: the instructor goes onto the web and enters the student’s BANNER ID into a web screen—this allows the student to register for the course during his/her session with PRESTO (instructors also have the option of giving the student a Consent Add Label, which would be handed into the Registrar’s Office).

There were plenty of other changes to prepare the campus for as well: reports would look different, access would be different, and in some cases, functionality that was available on the old system would not yet be available in PRESTO. For example, in the legacy system, department AA’s could print out instructor class lists; in PRESTO, that functionality hasn’t been set up yet, which meant some frustration on the part of academic departments and some scrambling to find alternative ways of doing business.

Perhaps the most challenging part of preparing for April 19 was

calendar of events

5/5-7	Financial Aid functional training
5/3-4	Finance year-end functional training
6/28-30	Student functional training
7/6-8	Financial Aid functional training

the fact that in many ways, no one really knew exactly what would happen when PRESTO was up and running for the first time. The mock registrations in the late winter had answered a lot of questions, but the SR team knew that there were still some unknowns that wouldn’t be uncovered until the registration period had begun. “There were just some things we couldn’t know from testing,” says Lori Gumpf, “and the hardest thing was identifying how to deal with the questions that came up, since this was all new to everyone—me, the staff, and the CIT.”

in the eye of the storm: registration begins

April 19, 9 a.m. : When Anthony S. Melone, a senior English/Jazz major and the very first person to access the new system, logs in to PRESTO at 9 a.m. on April 19 and begins the process of registration, there is a huge sigh of relief heard from the CIT across to the Registrar’s

Office. One sigh that is particularly loud is from Dave Waldron, the Analyst/Programmer in the CIT who is responsible for the web server that runs PRESTO: he had originally thought that registration times started at 8 a.m. rather than 9, and had a moment of panic when he began monitoring the server at 8 and saw absolutely no traffic.

April 19, 11 a.m. : Things go smoothly until about the middle of the morning, when Waldron, who is spending this day and almost every other day of registration glued to his computer screen closely monitoring the traffic on the PRESTO server, sees that some users are getting frozen out of their sessions. The problem turns out to be what the techies call a “thread error”:

when a user does anything on the system, he or she is in essence using up one of many “threads” that carries a request from the web to the database. The errors are coming in because too many threads are being used up. Waldron patches the problem (basically by adding more threads) and crosses his fingers.

April 19, 1:30 p.m. : The early afternoon is historically the busiest time for registration activity, and this registration is no different. Unfortunately, PRESTO isn’t cooperating: the system continues to generate thread errors, and some users are still getting locked out. Finally, Waldron (with the help of Database Administrator Darrick Strange and Systems Manager Jane Kramer) has to take the system down completely for about 20 minutes to fix the problem.

April 19, 3 p.m. : PRESTO is finally in a good mood: the thread fixes seem to have worked and there are no more errors so far today. Waldron has designed a PRESTO feedback form that comes up on the web screen once users have finished registering, and the good news is that a lot of the feedback forms are actually coming back with positive feedback! That’s music to the SR team’s ears, but there are

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Members of the Registrar’s Office staff at the PRESTO party: from left to right, Dorothy Auble, Janet Simonovich, Carol Nitchman, Jan Blanco, Helen Fields. Staff hiding or not pictured: Sue Kropp, Sheila Harley, Ken Gilson, Sharon Bartok, and Lori Gumpf.

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no celebrations yet. This is only Day One of registration: there's still an entire week left to go.

April 20 and 21: So far, so good. A few more errors have been discovered, making it necessary for Waldron to reboot the web server before registration begins in the morning. But otherwise, things seem to be working: nothing has crashed, there are no major complaints, and classes are indeed filling up. It looks like the unthinkable has happened: PRESTO registration is actually going well!

April 22, 9 a.m.: Not so fast. Lori Gumpf and the Registrar staff are getting calls about the enrollment counts in a number of classes: for some reason, several of the counts aren't keeping up with the actual registration in the course. Katie Styer, the Analyst/Programmer in charge of the SR database in BANNER, begins investigating.

April 22, noon: Katie Styer has been looking into the enrollment count problem and the news is not good: the mechanisms in PRESTO that monitor enrollments (they're called "counters") are not keeping up with registration traffic. There's a program that the techies are using to fix the problem, but that's not keeping up either. It's not a drop-dead-type problem—it's not keeping anyone from logging in to PRESTO and registering—but it is making it impossible to get a true picture of what the enrollment counts are.

April 23–26: For these three days everyone is on eggshells. Registration is still working fine—the original thread errors are gone—but the counter problem is turning into a major headache. This is especially true for Lori Gumpf, Katie Styer, and Ken Gilson, who have begun to understand the implications: a step-by-step, section-by-section check of enrollment counts for cross-listed courses and courses with reservations in order to correct any that are wrong in time for the extended registration period, which begins on April 30.

April 27–29: These three days, between the end of regular registration and the beginning of extended registration are, in a word, stressful. Gumpf, Styer, and Gilson are spending most of their time identifying and correcting the classes that have incorrect enrollment counts. Plus, they have to be quick about it because departments need registration reports generated so they can make decisions about courses before

extended registration starts. The stress level is high, both because of the count problem and because Murphy's Law has kicked in: Dave Waldron is out on jury duty all week.

From the trenches, Gumpf reports: "We've all teased about running away to Micronesia during the BANNER project, but I think the counters beat us to it!" she says. "Every time we thought we found all the courses with bad enrollment counts, we then discovered another related problem." Gumpf reports that she, Gilson, and Styer spent hours going over the enrollments between registration and extended registration, trying to locate all the erroneous counts. "By the Friday of the first week of registration, I was not enjoying BANNER at all," Gumpf says grimly. "About 6 o'clock that evening, I told Ken (Gilson) that I was going home, I'd had enough for the week. At that moment I wasn't too sure if I might not break something on purpose!"

April 30: Finally, the enrollment counts have all been fixed and extended registration begins. Since fewer students use the system during extended registration than during regular registration, the team's fingers are crossed that things will go smoother from now on.

May 1–5: Murphy's Law has been beaten into submission. Now that she knows what to look for, Katie Styer can correct the enrollment counts when they get out of synch. PRESTO seems to be handling the load of extended registration with very few problems. Plus, Dave Waldron is back after a week serving jury duty. They say it's always darkest before the dawn, and at this point, it looks like daylight is here. The system is working, students are registering, and the process is moving forward. Whew!

May 6: The first student registration with the BANNER system is over. There are a few enrollment counts to be fixed, but by now Gumpf, Gilson, and Styer not only know exactly what to do but have the luxury of concentrating on how to avoid the problem in the future. Everyone is exhausted and Gumpf can barely talk because of a bad cold, but it's over. And most importantly, the system has worked: despite the problems, the vast majority of students have registered successfully with PRESTO, a fact that everyone now has the time and presence of mind to take some pride in.

Congratulations to the BANNER SR team on a successful production cutover! ■

opus note

Summer schedule for *The Score*

The Score will be on a summer publishing schedule after this issue, with a single issue in July featuring the Student Accounts and CBORD production cutovers. *The Score* will be back on a regular monthly publishing schedule with the September issue, which will feature coverage of the August registration on PRESTO and updates on the Admissions and Financial Aid Offices' migration to BANNER. Readers should continue to check the OPUS World Wide Web site at www.oberlin.edu/~acs/opus throughout the summer for updated information and documentation. ■

department of miracles

Believe it or not, several Oberlin students actually had positive things to say about the new PRESTO web registration system. The following comments are from the PRESTO web feedback forms that students were invited to submit during their session on PRESTO:

"Registration was easy, fun, and fast. This is really great. I registered for all of my courses in less than 3 minutes. Now back to homework. Thank you all."
-Conservatory Junior

"I think PRESTO is a good change. Number-wise (i.e. having 17 CRNs to register for courses) was annoying, but it was much faster and smoother than REGISTER."
-College Junior

"This is GREAT!!!! I LOVE it. Much better than ocvaxc. And faster."
-College Junior

Okay, we're live. Now what?

The SR team looks ahead to more deadlines, more cutovers

Now that the Student Records module of BANNER is live with web registration via PRESTO, it's time for the BANNER SR team to sit back, relax, and enjoy the luxury of being live, right?

No one's falling for that line anymore. As anyone involved with any part of a BANNER implementation is well aware, going live is just the beginning of a period of intense work. This is especially true for the SR module, because bringing registration live is only one small part of the entire Student Records piece of BANNER.

"The SR team still has a great deal of work yet to do," says OPUS Project Manager Monica Wachter. "Bringing registration live on PRESTO is an extremely good start, and we've had a successful production cutover, but we've got to keep our nose to the grindstone and not lose sight of the other SR deadlines coming up in the summer and fall."

One of the major deadlines is the next registration period. First-years register for their classes during the first few days of orientation in August, and the add/drop period—a very busy time for registration—takes place for returning students a few days after that. "We really need to start getting ready for August registration now," says Katie Styer, the lead Analyst/Programmer for the BANNER SR module, "since August registration is quite a bit different from April and we need to be prepared."

Lori Gumpf, Registrar and team leader for BANNER SR, is already in the midst of making those preparations. Now that the April registration period is over, she and Associate Registrar Ken Gilson are working with Styer to implement the fix for the enrollment count problem in PRESTO (see cover story). In addition, Gumpf will be spending the summer designing a multitude of new forms for the BANNER procedures: new grade sheets, new class lists, new transcripts, and new enrollment material, just to name a few. She's also working on the BANNER setup for all those "uniquely Oberlin" things that need BANNERizing, such as Winter Term and ExCo.

There are also feeds to other systems to think about now that the BANNER SR module is considered the "system of record" for the College's student data. Data from BANNER will need to feed into a number of databases, both old and new. The Financial Aid office, which won't go live on BANNER til next spring, will need student data from BANNER fed into its legacy system, and data from that legacy system will also need to be fed back into BANNER so the Student Accounts Office (which will go live in July of this year) can bill students correctly. There are also feeds to the new CBORD system in the Office of Residential Life, the AT&T OneCard system, the OBIS system in the Library, and the Benefactor system in the Alumni/Development office.

And Gumpf isn't the only one with her hands full. Two submodules of BANNER SR are scheduled to go live in the next six

months: the Accounts Receivable portion, which provides for functionality in the Student Accounts Office, and the Admissions portion. The implementations for these two submodules are being coordinated by David Laczko, Assistant to the Controller, and Maryann Stillwell, Office Manager in College Admissions, respectively. Both Laczko and Stillwell are busy testing their systems, populating data tables, designing new forms and procedures, and getting ready for entirely new business practices in their offices.

The Analyst/Programmers are also getting ready. Dave Waldron, who managed (and continues to manage) the PRESTO web server, is also the lead A/P for the Student Accounts piece. He's been working closely with Laczko and Todd Rasmussen, Manager of Student Financial Counseling, to make sure that everything is ready for July, when student bills will be printed out of BANNER for the first time. And Katie Styer is now turning her attention to the Admissions implementation, working with Stillwell to convert the legacy Admissions data, prepare the system to generate reports, and coordinate testing. Admissions will officially go live in October, when the College and Conservatory Admissions staffs will begin entering prospective and actual

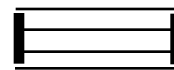


The Accounts Receivable team, working on the next stage of the BANNER SR module. From left to right: Todd Rasmussen, David Laczko, and David Waldron.

applicants into BANNER.

And once all that's over, there's still plenty of work for the SR team to look forward to: producing grades, managing graduation, and printing transcripts will all happen out of BANNER for the first time this coming winter and spring. "We're all very much looking forward to the summer of 2000," Lori Gumpf says. "We're counting on a very large party and some serious recovery time!" ■

The Score



The Score is published monthly by the Oberlin College Center for Information Technology and the Oberlin Project for Unified Systems.

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