The Score

Volume 1 • Number 1

September 1997

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

in this issue

calendar of events

9/15-18 Human Resources functional training

9/22-25 Student Records functional training

9/23-25 FAMIS planning meeting

10/14-16 Finance functional training

feature

Welcome to OPUS!

In the year since the Oberlin Project for Unified Systems was announced to the Oberlin community, it may seem like not much has happened. Nothing could be farther from the truth. An enormous amount of work is currently underway in preparation for January 1, 1998, when the first department at Oberlin—Human Resources—"goes live" on the new system. Several departments, including Finance, Student Records, and the Physical Plant will follow suit soon after, and OPUS will begin truly changing the way the College does business.

OPUS will eventually mean a lot of changes to get used to: new software, new computers, and new ways of doing the day-to-day business of the College. But OPUS isn't just about learning which buttons to hit on your keyboard to make the right report print out. It's about working within a unified system (the *US* of OPUS). For OPUS to be successful, we'll all be learning new ways of working with computers as well as new ways of working with colleagues. Get ready.

A brief history

About two years ago, it became apparent that the College's current administrative computing systems were fast becoming obsolete. The systems in different offices couldn't communicate with each other, the Computing Center couldn't keep up with the need for support for the numerous systems, and staff frustration with the system was growing.

Most pressing, however, was the "Year 2000 Problem", the potentially apocalyptic fact that once the date turns over to January 1, 2000, the vast majority of computers around the world will think that it is actually January 1, 1900. The implications of this for the College are enormous, and rather than trying to update all of the different systems to deal with the problem, the Administrative Computing Advisory Committee (see photo, below) decided to replace Oberlin's current computer systems with a new one designed to accomodate the new millenium. The new system is primarily based on an higher education software package called BANNER, manufactured by the SCT Corporation. The process of implementing BANNER was named OPUS, the Oberlin Project for Unified Systems.

But Monica Wachter, the project manager for OPUS, notes that "we could have just as well named it OPUS for the Oberlin *Process* for Unified Systems. A system migration does not mean coming into your office one day and finding a new computer system all ready to go. It's a continuous, ongoing process."

Taking it step by step

In the case of OPUS, that process is made up of five parts, each designed to help offices and departments become educated and comfortable with the new system before using it for day-to-day functions.

Phase one is called the *operations analysis*, where office members write down, step by step, the tasks that they do to accomplish their work. This process is necessary in order to convert those tasks to the new system, and also provides a unique opportunity for colleagues to gain a better understanding of how their work relates to the work of others.

continued on page 2...

Members of ACAC pay homage to their leader, Ross Peacock, Director of Institutional Research, seated center

...continued from page 1

An operations analysis also includes sharing that information with other offices. Ellen Sayles, the Assistant Dean of the Conservatory, took part in the Student Records operations analysis this summer and found it surprisingly helpful. "One of the unexpected but very useful part of the operations analysis for me was the sharing of information between offices," says Sayles. "For example, I learned that there is a report available by which mailing labels for advisors can be batched off and run by the computing center. We mail to advisors at least twice a semester so this would save us much time."

Registrar Lori Gumpf also found the analysis enlightening, especially hearing how other departments got their work done. "While listening to departments discuss what they do and a bit of how they do it, I said to myself several times, 'you do what?' Some of the time it was out of sheer surprise knowing that an office performed a certain task, but other times I was surprised that folks still did things an old-fashioned way." Gumpf observes that "Pulling people together into the same room and discussing common tasks helped many of us have a better understanding of what others did and how we could assist one another."

After the operations analysis is completed, the *functional training* begins. This is when key office staff actually sit down with a computer and learn how to navigate the new system. Phase three is the *system adaptation*, when offices run the old and new systems simultaneously (called *parallel processing*) and work on converting data into a form that can be integrated into the new system. Then there is *user training*, when the rest of office staff is trained on the new system. The final phase is the *production cutover* (also known as "going live"), when the old system is abandoned and the office uses the new system for all its business.

Okay, but what's in it for ME?

Buzzwords are nice, but most people aren't as concerned with the lingo as with what the new system will actually be able to do. "What information will be available to me through OPUS," asks Linda Grashoff, editor of *The Observer*, "that either was available in a different way before or maybe wasn't available at all?"

In other words, "what's in it for me?" Good question. Here's the answer: data that belongs to BANNER or the auxiliary software only needs to be entered into the system ONCE. Once the information is in the system, it can be pulled into different offices for different functions without having to enter the data again.

In addition, many administrative and academic functions that are now done manually will be managed within the system in the future. For example, Accounting Manager Marcia Miller in the Controller's Office will no longer have to track AA sick time manually; BANNER will automatically print the information on an individual's paycheck. Andrea Thornton-Hill, the Assistant Director of Financial Aid, will no longer have to plow through 1400 student reports to check on student eligibility; BANNER will print out a report listing only those students with discrepancies, saving her an enormous amount of time and allowing her to assist students with problems much more quickly.

Faculty will also see BANNER's benefits. For example, faculty (and students as well) will eventually be able to run a 'what-if' scenario against a degree program to determine how a student is progressing towards a certain degree. "An advisor won't have to wait for batch runs to see the latest version of an advisee's transcript or to check on a student's progress toward fulfilling graduation requirements," says Gary Kornblith, Associate Professor of History and the director of OCTET (Oberlin Center for Technologically Enhanced Teaching). "Eventually, OPUS should make it easier for faculty to help students maneuver their way through the institutional maze."

Kornblith also notes that the broader implications of OPUS should not be forgotten. "OPUS should make the underlying system that supports teaching and scholarship more responsive and

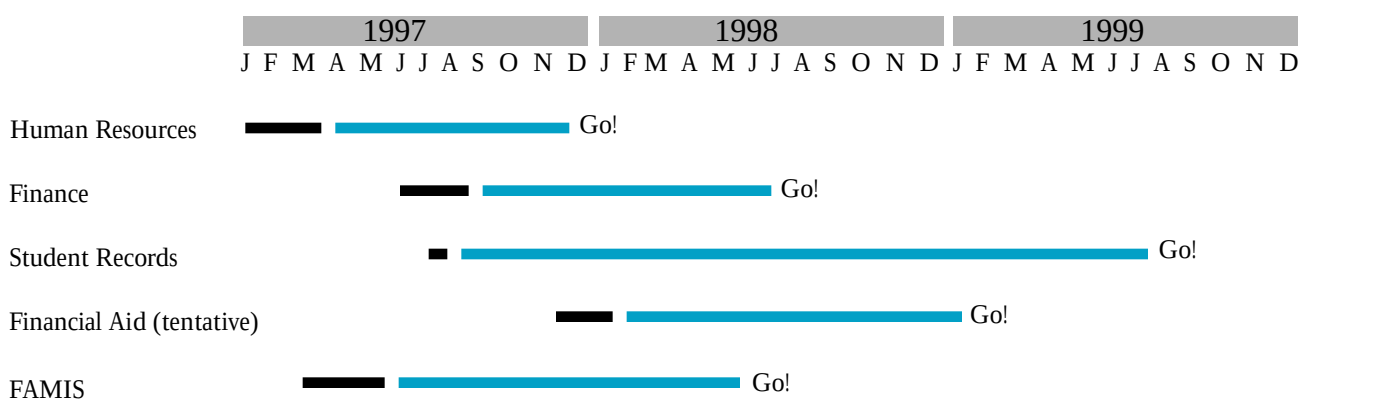
continued on page 3...

timeline

Timing is everything

= operations analysis
= system adaptation and training
Go! = production cutover

The question every staff and faculty member at Oberlin has in common is "when is OPUS happening to me?" The timeline below outlines the tentative schedule for the operations analysis, adaptation/training, and production cutover of five OPUS modules: HR, Finance, Student Records, Financial Aid, and FAMIS. If you're unsure about which module you fit into, or have any questions about the timeline, e-mail OPUS@oberlin.edu.



I know you're trying to help me, but...

I can't understand what you're saying!

Here's a not-so-hypothetical situation: you're walking back to your office after lunch, and you run into one of those computer-techie-type people that you know is working on that OPUS thingee. Just to be polite, you ask how OPUS is going. Without warning, the techie-type begins speaking in a language that sounds sort of like English, but isn't! The strange vocabulary and weird acronyms ring in your head!

Never fear. We've put together a OPUS Glossary that will help you translate what the techie-types are saying. And don't worry—there's no quiz. Terms in italics are defined elsewhere in the glossary.

ACAC stands for the Academic Computing Advisory Committee, whose members are both A&PS and faculty members. ACAC was formed in the fall of 1995 to make recommendations about the College's future computing needs. ACAC was responsible for reviewing a number of different academic software packages, and eventually decided on *BANNER* higher education software.

ACS stands for Administrative Computing Services, one of the departments in the computing center. The ACS staffers (especially the five analyst/programmers) are primarily responsible for the technical aspects of OPUS.

Auxiliary software is a term used to define software that is involved in *OPUS*, but is not *BANNER* software. The Physical Plant, Ticket Services, Security, and Residential Life will all be migrating to new, non-BANNER software packages that are specific to their needs.

BANNER is the software package that most offices will use once the *system migration* is complete. BANNER is manufactured by *SCT Corp.* Human Resources, Finance, Student Records, Student Accounts, Admissions, and Financial Aid will all use BANNER

Conversion process refers to the conversion of information from its current format (used by the *legacy system*) into a format that can be used by *BANNER* and the *auxiliary software*. The responsibility for converting data will be shared by the Computing Center and individual offices.

FAMIS stands for Facilities Administration Management and Information System. This is the software that will be implemented to streamline the physical maintenance of the College grounds.

Functional training involves the leaders of an office team sitting down with the new software and learning the ins and outs of the system. This training helps the team leaders decide exactly how the software will be used in their office. The second step of this process is *user training*, when the team leaders go back to their offices and teach their colleagues how to use the features of the system that they'll need to do their work.

Going live (or *production cutover*) refers to the point where an office transfers all their daily work to the the new system. After a few months of *parallel processing*, offices will stop using their *legacy systems* and begin solely using *BANNER* or the *auxiliary software*.

Historical data basically means "previously stored data". Such data could be anything from address or name changes to pay periods or semester registrations. Historical data is stored in the *legacy systems*, and eventually will need to be either converted to a form that interacts with the new system, or thrown away for good.

Still feeling dazed and confused? Part II of the OPUS Glossary will appear in next month's Score

...continued from page 2

efficient," says Kornblith. "By reducing the amount of duplicated record keeping and promoting more consistent business practices, the new, integrated system should process faculty requests faster and keep better track of a lot of the little requests that currently fall through the cracks."

"Lots and lots of cooperation"

Eventually, the entire College—staff, faculty, and students—will benefit from the systems migration. But the key word here is "eventually"; there's a lot of work to be done before those benefits really start to take shape. Monica Wachter stresses the elements that will make the project sucessful: "Hard work, reasonable planning, institutional committment, and common sense will all play a part," Wachter says, "as well as cooperative spirt and a sense of humor among all College employees."

John Bucher, Director of the Computing Center, agrees, especially in terms of the mutual support and effort OPUS will require from all faculty and staff. "The only thing that will make the migration successful, " Bucher states, "is lots and lots of cooperation from all sectors of the College. Period."

If you have questions about a particular element of OPUS, or would like to share your views on the project, e-mail us at OPUS@oberlin.edu. And be sure to check out the OPUS World Wide Web site at <http://www.oberlin.edu/~acs/opushome.htm>.

Michael Lynn, Director of Information Services for Operations, and the many computers that will soon operate FAMIS-ly

Becoming FAMIS

OPUS won't pass by the Service Building. Soon, a new computer system will streamline operations, provide more effective maintenance, and might even keep your air conditioning from breaking down. Next summer, the Service Building's current work order system—a ten-year-old program—will be replaced by a software package called FAMIS (Facilities Administration Management and Information System), manufactured by the Prism Corp. of Irvine, CA.

Current shortcomings...

Currently, the computer system in the Service Building performs two basic functions: it tells the trades worker what and where the problem is, and then collects the information about what the worker did in order to bill the appropriate department. But according to Michael Lynn, the Director of Information Services for Operations, there's plenty more that the system doesn't do. "In the current system, we have no way to track the actual cost of materials," Lynn notes. "Plus, it's a single-user system, which means that only one person can be on it at a time."

In addition, customers have no way to access the system in order to track their work orders. Lynn notes that this is a particular problem for "volume users" like Residential Life. "Right now, Res Life has its own system for tracking maintenance," Lynn says, "which means that all work order information gets entered into a computer twice—at least twice." When Res Life requests a work order, the data is entered once into the Service Building system, once into Res Life's own system, and then again in the Controller's office to keep track of charges. That means three different people are entering the same same data over and over again.

...and future benefits

FAMIS will change all that. Since FAMIS will be able to access data entered in BANNER and vice-versa, the need for repeated data entry is eliminated. Purchase requisitions, for example, will be made in FAMIS, and then passed to Purchasing, where they become purchase orders in BANNER. When purchased equipment is received, BANNER will record it and pass the information back to FAMIS for record-keeping. In other words, the requisition only needs to be entered once because it can be pulled through the entire system straight from FAMIS. "There's almost no data entry, and it all happens in a much more timely fashion," Lynn notes.

FAMIS will also help to put information into the hands of the trades workers who actually perform the service jobs. Lynn points out that "workers will be able to actually look up the piece of equipment in each room on campus, see what parts the equipment requires, and make one trip to the office with parts in hand to take care of the problem." In addition, they will have access to on-line floorplan drawings of each building and eventually other technical drawings such as underground utilities and conduits.

The trades workers themselves are an important part of the move to FAMIS: "A trades team made up of volunteers from the various crews is involved in the planning and decision-making process," says Lynn. "They've already helped identify some buildings around campus that need more organization and the Facilities Planning and Construction office is working on room numbering and signage for some of those buildings now. I think the trades team will make many valuable contributions to the process."

Such contributions will eventually lead to much-needed analysis and history of Oberlin's maintenance needs. FAMIS will allow users to track information about building usage, maintenance, and cost. "We'll be able to see what specific buildings—even specific rooms—actually cost to maintain," Lynn observes, "and that will help in all kinds of campus planning. For example, if Wilder has an air conditioning problem, FAMIS will help us analyze whether it's worth it to fix it or simply purchase new equipment. The history will be extremely useful."

Managing maintenance

But what does FAMIS mean to you, the staff or faculty member that just wants the light switch to go on when you flip it? The most important benefit will probably be FAMIS's ability to manage "preventative maintenance," as Lynn puts it. "FAMIS will be able to tell us what equipment will need maintenance when," Lynn says, "so hopefully, we'll be able to fix your air conditioner even before it breaks down."

A number of institutions, including Smith, Dartmouth, Stanford, and UC-Santa Cruz, have recently made the switch to FAMIS. Oberlin joins those ranks beginning in July 1998, when FAMIS officially goes live.

For more information on FAMIS at Oberlin, visit the FAMIS Web page at <http://www.famis.oberlin.edu/famis>.

The Score

The Score is published monthly by the Irvin E. Houck Computing Center and the Oberlin Project for Unified Systems.

Editor: Ami Berger

Questions and comments should be directed to:

The Score
Houck Computing Center
Oberlin College
Oberlin, OH 44074
216-775-6643
OPUS @oberlin.edu

OPUS is wired!

Visit OPUS on the World Wide Web at www.oberlin.edu/~acs/opushome.htm