

The Mission of the Registrar – A Ten-Year Retrospective

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Introduction

It has been ten years since the article “The Mission of the Registrar Today” appeared in the AACRAO College and University Journal. The article was written in response to a concern that technology would make the registrar an invisible administrator. Registrars were apprehensive that as they developed self-service systems, that the standing and importance of the registrar would be diminished. This paper will take another look at the mission of the Registrar today.

Excerpts from the 1995 Article

“As a result of technology, the registration and records functions are becoming more automated and the registrar is becoming a data manager. Data management is a wonderful responsibility for the registrar to have in the Information Age. However, there is danger lurking in the lure of technology. Technology can turn the registrar into an invisible entity on campus. As faculty and students gain more direct access to data, there is less need to come see the registrar. Is the registrar a necessary position? Will the registrar disappear?”

“This also means that organizational charts will change. There will be more assistant registrars or other comparable management level positions supervising automated functions in addition to those managing the service providers.”

“Registrars should be positioning themselves as academic service leaders and student information system leaders. Registrars need to re-affirm the faculty and student services component as well as the records technology component. Registrars now provide a service as the regulatory agency of campus academic policy. Most enforcement will be done in the future through controlling the database. By controlling the information system, the registrar can monitor the creation of new courses and programs. They monitor grades and graduation. They protect the content and integrity of the academic transcript.”

“Because the registrar certifies the academic process, they need to stay close to the source of academic authority, the faculty and the chief academic officers of the campus. Many of the academic policies and decisions drive administrative functions. Administrative capability must also be factored into academic decisions.”

The article suggested three important functions for the Registrar:

“First, the registrar can be a leader in the development of campus systems that tie the academic and administrative functions together. The registrar is in the best position to understand how information must pass through the initial entry points and be distributed to others. The basic student record maintained by the registrar has been the hub through which information has flowed to those that need it.”

“The second function of the registrar is to validate the data that is flowing into and out of the system. Consistency in the coding of information becomes even more difficult and more critical as data comes into the system from more diverse sources. The old systems permitted only experienced clerks and processors to enter and access the data. Future systems will have information coming in from numerous sources like data services,

students, faculty, and other administrators. The data flowing out of the system will be accessed by people not as familiar with the coding structure of the data elements. Inconsistency in the way the data is allowed to be stored will cause confusion for people trying to understand the information. The registrar enforces academic policy and data integrity through the maintenance of system controls.”

“The third function is to be a resource to all the system users of student information. Someone must help the users use the system. The registrar can provide the coordination of services to assist students and faculty members in understanding how to enter information, obtain information from the system, or deal with problems with the system. By working with the system users, the registrar can determine how well the system is functioning and recommend changes to continually upgrade the system to meet the demand of the system users. The integrity and accuracy of the information contained in the system will be determined by the training and preparation of the users of the system.”

How is the Registrar Doing?

In a meeting of the AAU Registrars in February 2004, there was discussion of the changing role of the Registrar. The comments indicate that the position and future of the Registrar is very secure. The responsibilities of the Registrar are increasing as real-time processing has dramatically changed the way campuses deliver their academic services to students. The campus relies on technology to conduct more of its business and this has created a greater need for coordination of functions. As predicted, the position of the Registrar plays a central role in coordinating these real-time operations.

Below is a summary of the comments and observations from that meeting. A list of the meeting attendees is provided at the end of this article.

The Registrar is a leader in systems and technology.

- Greater responsibility, sought out for expertise in technology and policy
- In position to provide standard definitions of student, of data
- Viewed as key managers of change
- Experiencing title changes as roles change, adding titles to positions
- More multiple roles, partly because of economy, budget and efficiency
- Awareness of scaling up of staff skills for more complex and technical tasks

The Registrar is more involved in policy.

- Greater role in policy development – more involved at the table
- Used more as sounding board – influencing policy
- Greater role in recognizing patterns and possible policy changes
- Prompts change in procedures and policy through outreach to campus
- More involved in planning facilities and function in classrooms – more committees
- Greater responsibility to evaluate policy as good or bad
- Academic integrity – academic conscience – detection of inconsistency, unfairness in policies

The Registrar is a choreographer of campus work.

- Data air traffic controller
- More responsibility vetting requests for data
- Umpire of the game – good referees do not interfere, but aid the flow of the game
- We impact how people work – working at a higher level, not old task level
- Process oriented and not task oriented

- Collaborative role, we bring groups together and they come to us for help
- Busier with more committees – need to spread that around among staff
- Recognition of centralized position of registrar – systems, budget, priorities, more visibility
- Training the service providers on campus a larger role.
- Help other offices to get new programs up and running
- Characteristic of longevity in operation of the university, institutional history
- Role of communications chief, offer one-on-one consulting

The Registrar has greater concern for records protection.

- Technology raises risk and more concern with identity theft
- Auditor findings – FERPA – who has responsibility
- Grade change procedures – protecting security of entry of grades
- More visible because of concerns with litigation, wide knowledge of university business
- Greater responsibility for records integrity, FERPA, protection of records because of technology
- Data use – data security – greater conscientiousness of privacy of data, of access to data
- Concern about data moved to desktop – how is the data being used

The Real-Time Enterprise

In their book, The Real-Time Enterprise, authors Peter Fingar and Joseph Bellini discuss the impact of technology and real-time services on business. The Internet has changed the architecture of business through its ability to provide customers and suppliers real-time access to information. In the book they state,

“Today, work management is about coordination, collaboration, negotiation, and commitment. Business is constantly changing, messy, unordered, and chaotic, and both manual and automated work activities have to progress in parallel. Work is conducted, and coordinated, at all levels, through choreography and orchestration.” (Fingar, page 73)

The business of the campus is also constantly changing, messy, unordered, and chaotic. Academic and administrative departments on college campuses operate somewhat like interrelated businesses working in parallel and requiring coordination. Creative faculties on college campuses push the boundaries on the methods for delivery of instruction and on traditional calendar models. The registrar works in a challenging environment where interdisciplinary cooperation is of utmost importance, while departments are determined to be more entrepreneurial, follow non-standard calendars, and use non-traditional teaching methods.

What is real-time? The authors suggest that “real-time” should be thought of as meaning delivering information “in-time” or “on-time”. The importance and value of a real-time system is to deliver actionable information in time for people to make decisions. (Fingar, page 78) The authors give the example of Amazon.com as a company that set the standard in delivering information to its customers. The company customizes its delivery of information for each customer. The customer is presented information on products based on their own preferences, making the identification and selection of their next purchase easier.

The Student Information System as a Business Process Management System

The authors discuss the concept of the Business Process Management System. The purpose of the Business Process Management System is to store, process and manage business processes. Business processes are all those manual and automated activities that produce the company product. (Fingar, page 70) The BPMS provides the controls and coordination for all those business processes. This is very similar to the purpose of the Database Management System, which is to store, process, and manage data. The DBMS holds the valuable archive of company information. The Business Process Management System provides the automated and manual processes to collect and distribute the information contained in the Database Management System in a real-time environment.

How does the Business Process Management System relate to the Registrar's profession? Student information systems are not solely for records storage and retrieval. Student systems are a collection of interconnected applications (academic business processes) for educational institutions. The student information system pulls together all the resources to make the delivery of instruction happen -- instructors, courses, rooms, recruitment of students, financing of customers, billing and collection, assessment of progress toward degree, and certification of completion of work. These systems embody all the automated and manual business procedures, and contain the controls for enforcing the business rules and academic policies for the academic enterprise.

Admissions and Student Aid offices are experiencing a similar evolution in their business processes, and are serving their students with more on-line systems and self-service applications. The admissions and student aid directors are becoming sophisticated systems users, not just to collect applications, but to analyze their student populations and make market decisions. Admissions offices review prospect data and develop marketing strategies based on profiles of students. Student Aid offices analyze financial data and package their aid to take best advantage of grants, scholarships, and loans.

The Registrar manages the self-service applications and processes for students, instructors, and other administrative staff external to the Registrar's office. This is a different role from the Admissions or Student Aid Directors who manage systems primarily for use by their own staff. These applications move information into and out of the database management system. The Registrar must consider how applications will provide the on-time and in-time information, customized for students, faculty, and administrators to make decisions and take action in this self-service environment.

The Registrar now spends more time managing systems and less time managing records. Most of the academic records are no longer held in the Registrar's office. Records are stored in the campus database. The campus IT manager, not the Registrar, has the responsibility for the physical storage and protection of records in the database management system. This relationship of business process management and database management has created an extremely important and close working partnership between the Registrar and the campus IT manager.

For example, registration is more than processing course transactions. Registration is a series of carefully timed staff activities and coordinated computer applications. The Registrar sets up system controls defining student access to the registration process and those controls determine priority for courses. The Registrar defines system checks for academic and financial eligibility to see if the students are eligible to register. Has the student been properly admitted? Are there financial holds? Are there academic holds?

The Registrar provides self-service applications to deliver information about course availability, course descriptions, course restrictions, and other information to aid students in making their course selection. The Registrar provides applications to control waitlists and class rolls to provide immediate information to instructors on section enrollment. The rolls provide instructors with email addresses and photos to help them communicate with students. System applications feed electronic grade books that in turn feed grades back to the student system. Well-integrated systems can suggest courses to students based on their academic program and personal interests. Systems can forecast course demand to assist departments in planning their course offerings to meet the unmet requirements of their majors.

Staffing for Business Process Management

Skilled people are needed to manage these processes. How does the Registrar anticipate and organize office staff for this environment?

Here are some assumptions to help planning for the future.

- The Registrar will continue to manage the registration process and maintain academic records.
- The Registrar will continue to certify the authenticity and content of academic records.
- There will be new duties not thought of today.
- The rate of change in technology will continue to accelerate.
- New technology will change the way that registration, records maintenance, and records certification are performed.

To meet the demands of constantly changing technology, a variety of skills will be necessary. Here are three areas of expertise that will be needed.

(1) Technically knowledgeable professional business process administrators

These administrators manage the processes and applications that make up the business process management system. These professional administrators supervise the staff responsible for delivering services to our customers. They are the public face for the office. They facilitate the essential collaboration and coordination with the other parts of the campus. They understand the mission of the campus and the role of technology, and translate campus policies and procedures into workable system solutions. They work with IT staff and functional analysts to define and implement these systems. They assist students, faculty, and alumni with questions about using the student system. They plan the schedules and timetables that control when the system is performing specific functions. They set up and maintain the system control tables and the

system parameters and any other user controls that make the systems operate according to campus policies and standards.

(2) Information Technology Staff

These positions have traditionally been found in a central IT office. However, IT specialists are becoming a part of the Registrar staff as the constantly changing technology and greater dependence on computer systems requires more immediate and full time assistance. These internal IT staff complement and work with the central IT staff to support office and campus applications. These are the system and software specialists who maintain the office network systems, performing tasks such as server administration, web administration, application programming, data reporting, and desktop equipment support. They support web functions and other special applications that help provide information to other users. They support the imaging software and hardware, the scanning software and hardware, and printing software and hardware. They provide report data, data files, and other statistical services for campus users.

Twenty-two AAU schools responded to a survey that asked the question, “Are you experiencing a need for more technical staff in your office?” A list of the respondents is attached. Here is a summary of some of the remarks from the survey:

- Yes, and its happening fast.
- We are now 90% technically oriented and 10% administrative.
- IT provides the basic infrastructure and we provide staff to work with IT – functional analysts (funky techs, Emory University)
- We are always in the middle of a development project.
- Need staff for writing specifications for system implementation.
- Need people for Banner implementation
- Need people for Peoplesoft implementation
- Need Web developers for web services support.
- Need Data warehouse Data Base Administrators.
- Need desktop support.
- Self service has changed the nature of our operations and changed the tasks of clerical and receptionist positions.
- New functions plus constant implementation means a cadre of highly competent functional staff needs to be created.
- Created a position to work on managing our imaging system.
- Folks that work with DARS must have more technical support skills.

(3) Functional analysts

Full time positions are now needed to manage the constant and rapidly changing technology. These functional analysts (funky techs) are intimately aware of the business needs and business rules for the office and may be imbedded within office sections or be under a technical supervisor. These people assist the Associate and Assistant Registrars in managing their applications and system processes. They work as system liaisons with central campus IT people, with the internal IT people, and the IT people in other departments to design and implement new

applications and computer systems. Their purpose is to identify systems needs and evaluate service solutions in emerging technology. They develop and write specifications and serve as project team leaders with the campus IT or internal IT people. They test prototypes, certify readiness for implementation, write the documentation, train internal staff, faculty, advisers, and other administrators in other departments. These are tasks that have been assigned to assistant registrars or other regular staff.

Smaller offices will have these same staff functions, but positions may contain combinations of these functions. For example, the Registrar themselves will be instrumental in managing the business systems. Desktop support may come from the central IT staff, but one of the Registrar's staff will be knowledgeable enough to help with routine office computer issues. Someone on the Registrar's staff, maybe the Registrar themselves, will routinely write and run report programs to produce counts and summaries of student data.

Summary

The major functions outlined in the 1995 article are still valid today. The Registrar must continue to be a leader in the development of campus systems. The Registrar must validate the data as records are created or revised as information is pulled in from numerous sources. Academic policy is enforced and data integrity is maintained through the system controls. The Registrar is in a pivotal position to assist campus users in understanding and using the information that is available.

The responsibilities of the Office of the University Registrar have grown far beyond the traditional role of custodian of records and managing records. The Registrar is the choreographer of a dance of students, instructors, and administrators interacting with multiple systems and complex applications. This has become a very complex dance because departments want to work outside of the traditional calendar and schedule.

The Registrar must be a good referee, controlling the game but not interfering with the process. The Registrar coordinates a collection of automated business processes as well as manual ones that pull together campus resources to meet the educational mission of the institution. The Student Information System is a business process management system that links together these business applications. Students, faculty, and staff have access to and conduct their daily academic business transactions through self-service applications.

The Registrar delivers the resources and information to the right people at the right time to make the business of education happen. At the same time, it is the Registrar's responsibility to make sure this information is collected and distributed without violating the security, integrity, and confidentiality of the records.

The Registrar assures program quality and is the gatekeeper for the University through the management of the business processes. The Registrar assures that courses and programs have been through the proper approval process, that students follow official enrollment procedures, and that grades are authenticated before being recognized in the official records of the

University. The Registrar certifies the authenticity and content of academic records because of the role in managing these processes.

Highly trained, knowledgeable people with a variety of skills are required to administer, maintain, and improve these systems. People with more technical skills are being added to the Registrar's office to help manage these business process systems. The Registrar works in partnership with all technical resources available (departmental, campus, vendors) to provide seamless service to our constituents.

Technology will continue to drive the mission of the Registrar. Technology provides the tools that the Registrar needs to manage the real-time services for the campus. The goal is for the technology to become ubiquitous and invisible. The Registrar's goal remains a very visible one, communicating, collaborating, and coordinating with people. The mission of the Registrar is to apply all their knowledge of the academic process and technology to create an environment where faculty, administrators, and students can work together. The ultimate mission for the Registrar is to make it work and make it happen.

References

Lanier, David C. 1995. "The Mission of the Registrar Today". AACRAO College and University Journal. Spring 1995.

Fingar, Peter and Bellini, Joseph. 2004. The Real-Time Enterprise: Competing on Time Using the Revolutionary Business SEx Machine. Tampa, Florida. Meghan-Kiffer Press.

Attendees at the 2004 AAU Registrars Conference

Name	AAU Institution
Pesta, Michael J.	Brown University
Papinchak, John	Carnegie-Mellon University
Hammett, Amy S.	Case Western Reserve University
Lenzi, John	Columbia University
Cunningham, Bruce W.	Duke University
Nicolaysen, C.R.	Emory University
Kane, Barry	Harvard University
Coté, Roland A.	Indiana University-Bloomington
Jones, Kathleen	Iowa State University
Schaedel, Hedy A.	Johns Hopkins University
Franke, Sylvia	McGill University
Stanford, Linda O.	Michigan State University
Wager, J. James	Penn State University
Greenberg, Joseph L.	Princeton University
Breed, Maureen	Syracuse University
Carter, Donald D	Texas A&M University
Myers, Brad	The Ohio State University-Columbus
Castillo-Robson, Susanna	University of California-Berkeley
Bradley, Charlene	University of California-Irvine
Lewis, Beverly Q.	University of California-Santa Barbara
Black, Thomas C.	University of Chicago
Todd, Barbara	University of Colorado at Boulder
Pritz, Steve	University of Florida
Poehls, Alice	University of Illinois
Lockwood, Lawrence J.	University of Iowa
Derritt, Cindy	University of Kansas
Robb, David	University of Maryland
Robinson, Paul	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
Van Voorhis, Sue	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Selman, Brenda V.S.	University of Missouri-Columbia
Hawkey, Earl	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lanier, David C.	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chereck, Herbert R.	University of Oregon
Sanders, Ronald V.	University of Pennsylvania
Conte, Samuel D.	University of Pittsburgh
Servis, Kenneth L.	University of Southern California
Pfeifer, Theodore	University of Texas-Austin
Stanley, Carol	University of Virginia
Johnson, Van E.	University of Washington
Berg, Joanne	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Gibson, R. Gary	Vanderbilt University
Hosack, Sue	Washington University
Carlton, Jill	Yale University

Respondents to the survey question:

”I would like to know if I am unique in this area, or if you see this happening in your offices. Are you experiencing a similar need to have more technical positions as part of your staff?”

UNIVERSITY
Columbia University
Cornell University
Emory University
Iowa State University
McGill University
Michigan State University
Northwestern University
Pennsylvania State University
Princeton University
Rutgers University
University of Arizona
University of California-Berkeley
University of Colorado-Boulder
University of Iowa
University of Kansas
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh
University of Texas-Austin
University of Virginia
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin-Madison