

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 7 – CENTRALIZATION: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (THESIS)

## First Report

June 2005

*Strategic Direction 7 - Centralize the System's business/administrative functions, where appropriate, in order to leverage resources and increase effectiveness of service throughout the System.*

### I. Overview

The THESIS (Transforming Higher Education Student Integrated Services) project was launched in January. Much has been accomplished through the work of an eleven-member Core Team, which has been assisted by Thundercloud Consultants, and a fourteen-member Executive Advisory Committee. Three members of the Chancellor's senior staff, the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Chief of Staff, have functioned as Executive Sponsors, regularly consulting with Core Team and Executive Advisory Committee leadership.

The THESIS groups produced an Interim Report that was endorsed by the seven university presidents and shared with the Board of Trustees on April 15, 2005. This report included an analysis of business processes in the following areas: Advising; Registration and Student Records; Financial Aid; Bursar, Loan Processing and Receivables Management. In each instance, process maps identified areas of work that could be centralized across the System and areas that needed to remain on the campuses. The report also included a vision for the transformation of student services and a set of underlying, guiding assumptions.

Since then, the THESIS groups have produced a second Interim Report, which was shared with the seven university presidents and the UMS senior staff on May 23, 2005. This report included information about best practices nationally, organizational design options, preliminary data to build a business case, and recommendations for the organization of remaining work.

### II. Preliminary Recommendations

The Presidents endorsed the following recommendations from the THESIS Executive Advisory Committee:

- 1) Immediate attention needs to be given to the design and implementation of common policies and procedures (to permit the Enterprise project to move forward AND to allow Peoplesoft to support THESIS). A list of current "sticking

points” needs to be developed; the Presidents, CAO’s, and CFO’s need to communicate a commitment to resolving these, and in some cases may need to take action themselves. (Editorial Note: care will need to be exercised with differences closely related to mission and with matters potentially impinging on faculty governance)

- 2) We need to commit to the design principles contained in THESIS Interim Report I—i.e., “above-the-line” processes that need to remain on the campuses and “below-the-line,” back-office processes that can reasonably be centralized. This needs to be a firm commitment, i.e., a destination that the UMS resolves to reach. However, the implementation of central services will evolve gradually, as will the design of central services.
- 3) We need to proceed as quickly as possible to:
  - a. The development of campus one-stops (“Student desks” that link front-office service in financial aid, bursar, and registrar’s operations);
  - b. The enhancement of web-based, self-service options;
  - c. The development of a Center (a single location to be determined) that will assume responsibility for “low hanging fruit” items from the “below-the-line” processes—e.g., perhaps loan collection and receivable management, certain data entry and paper handling, student billing. (Note: as centralized services gradually become more robust, form will follow function—i.e., there will be opportunities to consider what needs to move to a central location, what can be done in a more distributed or virtual manner, etc.)
- 4) In order to accomplish the items listed in #3, we must:
  - a. Link the development of new student service delivery operations to the Peoplesoft implementation calendar;
  - b. Be clear that one of our goals is cost removal (the other is the improvement of student services);
  - c. Revalidate the “speeds and feeds” data in order to have an accurate understanding of our starting point (FTE positions currently required to deliver student services).
  - d. Commit to making rapid progress with the purchase, installation, and training on a document management system that provides us with imaging, indexing, and workflow capabilities.
- 5) A Time-Line Taskforce needs to be convened to discuss recommendations for organizing the work required to begin THESIS implementation. This taskforce will be chaired the chairs of the Core Team and Executive Advisory Committee, with membership from both groups.

- 6) The Executive Advisory Committee and Core Team will need to reconvene some time over the summer of 2005 to consider recommendations from the Taskforce and to begin to develop implementation plans.

### **III. Areas of Overlap**

The main areas of overlap include:

Strategic Direction #1: Co-location of university and community college resources; development and improvement of academic support services.

Strategic Direction #3: On-line and Center support for distance-learning students.

Other portions of Strategic Direction #7: Enterprise Resource Planning; Human resources management.

Strategic Direction #6: Goals and objectives for financial management; facilities planning for campus one-stop student service centers.

Strategic Direction #8: Development of UMPI, UMFK, UMM consortium; possible development of UMA, USM merger; future plans for University College Centers.

### **IV. Goals for Next Steps**

The next steps involve follow-through on the recommendations listed in Section II. This work has already begun.

In addition, THESIS planners will need to work closely with the UMS Human Resources Office to continue to develop appropriate workforce management plans. The Interim Report II included various analyses of potential or theoretical savings from the efficiencies to be gained through centralization and campus one-stop student service centers. These analyses, though preliminary, were sufficient to demonstrate the potential of savings, but substantial design work remains to be done. It is clear that any reductions in force and impacts on current personnel will be gradual, with opportunities to handle these primarily through attrition management and secondarily through other workforce management approaches.

The University of Maine System currently has a grant proposal pending with the Davis Educational Foundation. This proposal, if funded, will provide support for the first stages of THESIS implementation. We expect a response from Davis by mid-June.