FINAL REPORT

of the

AD HOC COMMITTEE
ON THE STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM
(ACSIS)

Presented at the
655th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
September 21, 2006

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Nikki Stoia
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Charge: Established by the Faculty Senate, Sen. Doc. No. 05-066 to explore the success of alternative SIS systems implemented at sister institutions, in order to provide a comparative basis for evaluating UMA's current PeopleSoft SIS module.

The Committee met 13 times over two years. We framed our charge by developing four lines of inquiry into the problem: (1) What are the features and scope of the current SIS system and its implementation? (2) What are the problems with the current system? (3) What are the comparable systems and what do we need to know about them? and (4) What are the comparable institutions and what do we need to know about them? Subcommittees were formed to address each of these questions.

Each of the subcommittees met during fall 2005 and delivered their final reports to the larger committee during spring 2005. A report detailing the structure of the existing system was delivered first and used to contrast the problems we were experiencing with other comparable SIS systems and approaches. The principal conclusions were that (1) there are no viable open-source SIS systems that could meet the needs of the Amherst campus and (2) that there are no other commercial SIS systems that could have been adopted at the time the choice was made (or that could be adopted now) that would have offered a substantially lower risk of the kinds of problems we have experienced and continue to experience.

The report of the subcommittee charged with identifying problems was used to craft a joint special resolution in 2005 that charged the administration to improve the reporting capabilities of the SIS system, which was adopted by the faculty senate.

The subcommittee charged with identifying peer institutions for the purposes of comparing the experience at UMass with experiences elsewhere proposed a list of institutions. A set of questions for the institutions' CIOs, faculty, advisors, and staff was developed by the committee during Spring and Fall 2005 with the goal of assessing the SIS experience at these schools.

During spring 2005, we carried out this survey, contacting 5 peer institutions: University of Arizona, Stanford, SUNY Stonybrook, University of Minnesota, and University of Washington. We received communication from two that indicated that either there was no SIS system or that there was no faculty oversight group that could respond to the questions. Of the other three, the results were mixed. Minnesota appeared to have had a marginally better experience than UMass and described the results of a successful PeopleSoft implementation: improved service, more transparency, and more data available to answer questions. They experienced similar challenges in terms of lack of flexibility and insufficient funding to support changes to the system to increase flexibility. Stonybrook appeared to have had an experience essentially consistent with UMass, describing a PeopleSoft implementation that met student and registrar needs, but which had shifted substantial additional work onto faculty and department staff and complaining of the poorly functioning interface and the large expenses incurred to even marginally improve it. The
experience of Arizona, however, appeared to have been substantially worse. They began with
the goal of replacing their legacy system with an ambitious SIS system, but found that substantial
components of the product they had purchased (NOT PeopleSoft) upon implementation were
inadequate to the task. They discontinued their implementation and are currently pursuing a
hybrid model: extending the life of their legacy SIS, adding third-party web-interfaces, and using
a few pieces of the new system that were successfully implemented.

The committee therefore finds that there are problems with the SIS system and implementation,
especially with respect to adequate reporting, stability, and end-to-end bug tracking, which have
created additional workload especially for advisors, faculty, and department staff; but that that
the UMass PeopleSoft implementation is relatively typical when contrasted with the experiences
at peer institutions.

However, there are some encouraging developments on our campus and recommendations to
report:

1) The SIS Advisory Committee (formerly the SIS Level I Liaison Group) has shown evidence
of taking hold with discussions of substantive issues having been started. This group will be a
major force in weathering the continued effects of periodic upgrading the SIS software.
Combined with its oversight by FSUC&ECC this working group needs to be sustained and
encouraged.

2) Additional reporting facilities should be pursued to help the various units that lost reporting
capabilities when we moved from the legacy system.

3) Given the major transfer of responsibilities to end users, primarily faculty, advisors and
academic staff, by this SIS, the ease of use and establishment of access permissions needs to be
streamlined.

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate receive the Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on
03-07 the Student Information System (ACSIS), as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 07-003,
and thank the Committee for its excellent work which is now complete.