

The Scoop

Office of the Chancellor ITS Department News

October 2008

Countdown to the Conversion

The RDB-Oracle Conversion project is on track to reach the goal of consolidating the databases and converting the ISRS application from RDB to a pure Oracle environment.

This is a huge but very important effort. We are leaving behind a system built with tools that are no longer vendor-supported.

The groundwork has been laid for a successful implementa-

tion as several tasks in this massive project have already been completed. The team has slowly been migrating from one environment to another to lessen the impact and risk of converting everything at once.

The new Uniface 8, the client/server application used by our back office campus users to enter and maintain ISRS data, has been fully tested via the RDB environment and is

100% in production.

The parts of the web applications and ISRS application that only "read" data are already working in the Oracle environment.

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**Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES**

Little Chuckle

Why was there a bug in the computer?

It was looking for a byte to eat. :o)

Ready...Set...Back to School!

September brought cooler weather and students back to campuses across Minnesota.

A cross-functional ITS project team was assembled in June to assess, plan, and prepare for Fall campus start-up.

With the added variables of a common start date and the Republican National Convention in town, the team was convened to ensure that the MnSCU infrastructure, network, and application systems were ready and available for the heavy load as well as any unforeseen incidents.

Throughout its lifecycle the team met weekly, as did its communications sub committee. During the weeks surrounding start up, conference calls were conducted each morning to address and resolve any incidents.

In addition to systems readiness efforts, the team deployed a freeze on certain activity to ensure maximum performance, established a call tree and elevation process, and placed Support Analysts on campuses before

and during the first week of school.

The Results:

Servers were not stressed, D2L operated well even with a higher peak load, and more than adequate capacity was available for students, faculty, and staff using ISRS.

Some issues that did come up included an internet attack on one of our colleges which resulted in an outage for Metro area schools at one point, and we also experienced issues the week before school started due to a power problem at the U of M, where our servers are located.

The team has formalized and documented the entire process for future semester start up planning.

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Tuition Waiver

By the end of the year, MnSCU employees will be able to apply for their Spring semester tuition waiver benefit from any computer with a web browser. Paper forms, mailing, and faxing will no longer be needed.

This project is the result of a two-part web application that allows employees to request and track status of tuition waivers and, allows one or more designated HR users on each campus the ability to review these requests in order to approve/deny them. Details of approved requests will be reported to institution business offices and financial aid offices for application to the student bill and accurate awarding of financial aid.

A tuition waiver is a benefit (negotiated and agreed upon in bargaining unit contracts/

plans) that is granted to certain MnSCU employees allowing a portion of tuition and class fees not to require payment. The student using the waiver may be the employee, their spouse or dependent child.

The new system will:

- Establish and enforce a tuition waiver application processing workflow (regardless of the diverse ways this is currently handled).
- Provide the HR user with a preliminary assessment of the employee & student eligibility along with a waiver approval/denial recommendation.
- Provide a more consistent interpretation and application of waiver benefits

for all MnSCU institutions.

- The data captured by this system will be available for use by other MnSCU processes including Accounts Receivable, Registration drop for non-payment, Financial Aid, and System-wide reporting.

A pilot is currently underway. Pending a successful pilot, the system will roll-out to all campuses in November/ December.

According to Business Analyst Debbie Schadewald, the feedback received from pilot participants has been very positive and we are looking forward to a successful deployment to a larger base in the coming months.

Seamless Core Update

According to Business Analyst Michelle Pichaske, the Seamless Core Data project is right on schedule.

This project involves identifying people who have records at more than one institution and merging the data we have about them at those different institutions into one common set of data for each person. Once this merge has been done, a student will be able to change his name or address at one school

The Seamless Core Data project is on schedule to have merged core data system-wide when the migration from the RDB database to the Oracle database is complete.

and have that change reflected at all schools where he has a relationship.

This will set the stage for a better, more "seamless", student experience for MnSCU students who attend more than one college or university throughout their higher ed career.

In preparation for the merging of core data,

old inactive prospective student records have been archived to remove them from the pool of records that will need to be merged. The prospect records that are included in the archive are those that are 5 years old or older who have never applied, been admitted, registered, or had accounting or financial aid data attached to them.

This process has been built so that it can be run automatically once per year from this point on.

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Reporting Enhancements Project

The Reporting User Group, chaired by Iris Gill (Minnesota State University Moorhead), was formed in 2006 to provide a mechanism for campuses and OOC reporting personnel to present their data and reporting needs to MnSCU ITS. The group generated an initial list of 133 data and reporting projects that need substantial ITS time and resources.

An ITS project team met with the Reporting User Group last December. At that time the entire group worked together to define the requirements and order of importance. The group decided that a new and improved data dictionary and improved ISRS report docu-

mentation and training was needed.

In March a survey was sent to every MnSCU employee with ISRS security to help identify the data elements and ISRS reports that were used most often and of most importance to campus users.

Since then, ITS has been working on a new data dictionary template and a new report template. This fall, the Reporting User Group will meet to review the new templates and ensure that they meet the users needs.

Once the templates are in place, work will begin on a dynamic, up-to-date Applicant/

Admissions data dictionary and Financial Aid ISRS report documentation — these were top needs as identified by the survey. As these are completed, work will begin on other high priority data dictionaries and report modules. Training will be initiated once the documentation has been updated.

For more information on this project please see the [ITS website](#).

For more information on the Reporting User Group see the [Reporting User Group website](#).

Spotlight on... Dan Robb

Dan says "getting back to the woods" is the reason he volunteered to be the first ITS staff member to make the move up to the new Eveleth office.

He is a Lead Technical Analyst and is currently working on the Student eServices Portal and Web Registration applications. He was also involved with the initial development of the eTranscript project.

Dan has been with MnSCU since May of 2007 and says that most days are a combination of production support, research, project work, and mentoring.

Enjoying the beauty of Northern Minnesota with Dan are his "lovely" wife Tonya, their four children (Christian 14, Nadia

10, Ivy 8, and Lily 7), and their dog, who "swears he's human," Skippy Joe.

Dan brings a diverse background of experience to MnSCU. He spent five years in the military as a Navy Seabee (Steelworker), has been a general laborer, and a project manager. He has also worked Tier 1 and Tier 2

Dan says: "I once spent 3 hours on the phone trying to talk an end user through a somewhat lengthy process that involved ejecting a 3.5 inch disk from their computer. Every time I said, "Ok, now push the disk eject button... not the power button on the CPU", I received, "Oooooohhhhhh SHOOT!" as the response. I suppose it's a testament to my dedication, but apparently not my instructional aptitude. (In my defense, I even had the person put a Post It Note over the power button so as not to push it. Didn't help.)"

helpdesk, operational support, computer support, and networking, before moving over to software development full time.



He has worked in software development almost exclusively since 2000, having started on web front ends and working his way back to the database.

Dan is a huge football fan and loves cheering on the Steelers. He also likes spending his free time remodeling and renovating houses. Although, he says spending time with his family is his favorite extracurricular activity.

He says his future plans involve visiting Scotland ("the Motherland") at some point and "doing something about the crop circles that have started mysteriously appearing on the top of my head."

eTranscript—Going Green!

Soon all MnSCU institutions will be able to send and receive transcripts electronically between and among all other MnSCU institutions—saving hundreds of thousands of pieces of paper, and dollars, each year.

During October, one two year college and two state universities will pilot the new features, which will give them the ability to view/print undergraduate transcripts and view/print Minnesota transfer curriculum audit reports. After the conversion to Oracle is complete, they will be also be able to view/print graduate transcripts, automatically load transfer information and automatically move data to DARS for articulation.

Full MnSCU-wide deployment is scheduled for the late fall.

eTranscript will provide many benefits including:

- Time savings in getting information from the sender to the receiver—transcripts will be available in real-time as needed.
- Increased accuracy of data to ensure compliance with board and school admissions policies and to help prevent financial aid fraud.
- Improved privacy of confidential data.
- Cost savings as manual systems are replaced by electronic ones, most importantly the very labor intensive data entry of transfer course detail into DARS. (Phase 2—scheduled to start later this fall)
- Electronic files allow for immediate tracking of sent/received transcripts and immediate access to retrieved transcripts resulting in quicker admissions decisions.
- Technology used to produce fraudulent academic documents is outpacing paper credentials.

Minimum MnSCU-wide direct savings of \$137,000— a savings of over \$13,000 in postage alone!
-AACRAO SPEEDE Committee

Training for the MnSCU wide deployment is being scheduled to take place in November.

For more information on this project please see your Director of Admissions or Registrar.

We would love to hear from you! Please send your ideas for future editions to: Valerie.Schmidt@csu.mnscu.edu

Movin' on Out...

...to Minneapolis that is.

On September 22nd many members of the OOC ITS Division left St. Paul and moved to new office space on the MCTC campus. We are sharing space in the newly remodeled (former Billy Graham) building with Metropolitan State University.

Included in this move were the Development teams, the Business Analysts, the ISRS Helpdesk, the Customer Relations

team, and the Project Management Office.

There was no downtime associated with this move. However, ITS staff phone numbers have changed. Updated phone numbers are posted in the [Directory](#) on the MnSCU ITS Division website.

This new space has several well-equipped conference rooms and is a great meeting place.



Multi-use space in Minneapolis

Oracle Conversion cont.

We have also beefed up the infrastructure for web technologies with more servers and load balancers to improve performance.

Finally, we are increasing our testing of the application in the new environment with more rigorous testing by developers, business analysts, support analysts, and QA staff.

What's left? Since early October, and until the final cut-over occurs, the "read

only" screens are being incrementally pointed directly to the Oracle database to increase the load on the production servers. Monitoring tools are being used to closely monitor performance and load on the Oracle servers. Additional functions, in a controlled manner, will be migrated to use only Oracle during this rollout phase.

The final step of the conversion process will be to point the remaining "read and write" processes to Oracle. This final

step will be undetected by ISRS users. Users will not know they are now looking to Oracle to read and write data, and no longer using RDB.

As you can see, we have been working in Oracle for over a year now and slowing migrating off RDB and significantly increasing overall processing power.

We expect little to no impact to ISRS users as we complete the final steps.

Seamless Core Update cont.

The core data merge will actually take place prior to the migration to Oracle. The program will merge the core data of those people identified as the same person at more than one institution and store that core data in a holding receptacle until the Oracle database is available. After the pre-emptive merging, any changes to a person's core data before we have migrated to Oracle will be done in your own school's database.

These changes will be tracked by the system so that the people who have changed can be run through the merge program again when the migration to Oracle is performed.

Once the data is fully merged and the ISRS application is both reading from and writing to the Oracle database, core data inserted, updated or deleted for a person who is attending more than one

state college or university will be reflected at all the schools he is attending.

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Check us out!

www.its.mnscu.edu