# CAMPUSWIDE FINANCIAL REPORTING MADE EASY

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# ABSTRACT

How to provide accurate, timely reporting to an entire university is a problem that most organizations go through as they develop and evolve. The state of North Dakota which includes eleven colleges and universities of which North Dakota State University (NDSU) is a part had to deal with this issue on a much grander scale with the implementation of PeopleSoft as the Enterprise Resource Platform (ERP) system in 2005. As a result of the system conversion, all previous reports went away and each campus had to develop new reports to provide to both internal and external customers.

Because of the magnitude of the implementation, developing reports was put at a low priority and, instead, time and resources were spent on accuracy of the data, work processes, and employees relearning their jobs in the new system. Because NDSU works within a university system, customization of the system was not possible, and reporting of financial information was left up to the campuses.

NDSU is North Dakota's land grant institution with over 13,000 students and over 5,000 employees. Therefore, there are many reporting needs and various levels of computer knowledge throughout the organization. NDSU had to address reporting concerns that have existed since the inception of PeopleSoft in 2005.

In 2007, Karla Mongeon-Stewart, Budget Director began working on a Microsoft Access-based reporting solution where tables were downloaded from PeopleSoft, data verified centrally, and financial reports produced at the fund, department, college, division and campus level. Though this database solution met the reporting needs of the campus, distribution of this information once generated became problematic.

In 2008, Karla worked with NDSU's Information Technology Services to provide a web-based solution for the distribution of the financial reports to the campus in a secure environment.

The web-based reporting delivery has been available to all divisions and departments at NDSU for about six months, and NDSU is now in the process of sharing this technology with the ten other colleges and universities within the North Dakota University System.

By utilizing technology and economies of scale, NDSU has been able to reduce staff hours related to reporting by hundreds of hours per month, and the current reporting system generates nearly 800 reports a month for administrative and departmental use.

## NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY (NDSU)

NDSU is North Dakota's land grant institution with over 13,000 students and over 5,000 employees. NDSU has eight divisions with nine different colleges and offers degrees in 272 disciplines. Because of the scope of reporting requirements for this number of employees and programs, it is critical that NDSU have a reporting solution that is timely, easy to access, and meets the needs of each department to the best of its ability.

## THE PROBLEM

In 2005, the state of North Dakota implemented PeopleSoft as its primary Enterprise Resource Platform (ERP) system for all state agencies including all eleven colleges and universities that make up the university system. Prior to 2005, the university system operated on an internally developed ERP system with centralized data processing and programmed reporting. As a result of the PeopleSoft implementation, all prior reporting capability for the university changed and in some cases disappeared completely.

Prior to 2007, departments at NDSU were responsible for their own monthly reporting, and only had access to the generic PeopleSoft delivered reports in the system. As a result, most departments developed "shadow systems" or implemented some type of small business accounting software, in which they would reenter data from PeopleSoft and generate reports. This process required a

significant time commitment to rekey data and allowed for inaccuracy because of the human element related to rekeying.  In addition, because PeopleSoft is a robust accounting database, it is very complicated and if users aren't acutely aware of the specific setup and how data is stored, information generated from the system can be inaccurate because the user can enter faulty criteria for the reports to run.

It was clear that a reporting solution was needed for PeopleSoft users across campus to meeting their monthly reporting needs and to create a system where uniform reporting existed in a setting that was easily utilized by the everyday user.

## DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Initially, the solution was designed in a Microsoft Access database where tables were downloaded on a monthly basis from PeopleSoft, and reports were generated using the Access reporting capabilities.  Because of the various division and college roll-ups that were needed and because this definition is not stored anywhere in PeopleSoft, using Access allowed tables to be built to tie departments to the appropriate college/division.  In addition, due to field length limitations, some of the college names, etc. are not stored in full in PeopleSoft.  By using Access, tables were built to use whole names and abbreviations were eliminated for reporting purposes.

Another shortcoming of the PeopleSoft system is that once a budget is setup for a particular department, transactions can still post to a department/fund combination that is no longer valid, even if the budget is reduced to zero.  By using Access, a "Master Table" stores the correct department/fund combinations, thereby reporting

all transactions correctly in the monthly reports, even if transactions are posted incorrectly in PeopleSoft.

The Access database solved the problem of reporting functionality for the university, but because there are hundreds of staff and faculty that need to access this information on a regular basis, distribution of the reports became problematic.

In 2008, Karla Mongeon-Stewart, Budget Director, worked with Britt McAlister, NDSU Application Development Manager, to develop a web-based solution for report distribution. Code was written into the Access database, whereby PDF reports are created for every report that can be generated in the Access database. These reports are stored in a folder on the network and are uploaded monthly to a server where they can be accessed through a secure web page.

There is an application process for users to request access to the reporting web page, which is approved by the Department Head, the appropriate Vice President and the Budget Office. Once appropriate authorization has been received, the user is granted access to the reporting web-page. The login and password information to the page is tied to the users' University electronic ID, which is also utilized for various other applications on campus. There are currently over 100 users of the reporting web page and usage continues to increase.

This project was unique in that it did not require any additional personnel, equipment, or software implementation. The only resource needed for the project was the time allowed for staff to develop and test the tools. NDSU estimates that this project took about 700 hours of staff time for development, which included time to develop the reporting tool (Budget Director), the reports package and tool

for migration to the web (Applications Manager), and the web-based program (Application Development Specialist).

## BENEFITS

This reporting tool has been well received by the university as a whole. It saves the university hundreds of hours monthly at the department level because users no longer need to develop their own reports or to rekey data into a shadow system. In addition, there is now uniformity in reporting and the data has been verified at the campus level, so internal and external customers are receiving the same accurate information. In addition, users who are not as familiar with or don't use PeopleSoft on a regular basis now have access to the web-based reporting tool, and can access monthly reports without ever having to login to PeopleSoft.

In addition to all of the benefits that NDSU is recognizing, the benefits will also affect many more people and many more campuses. NDSU has shared the Access reporting tool with four of the other colleges in the North Dakota University System. They load their own campus data into the database and use the reports for their own purposes on a monthly basis. Beginning in February, 2009, NDSU will be offering to host the web-based services for any interested North Dakota University System campus. Campuses will maintain their respective databases and will verify the accuracy of their own campus information, but NDSU will host the website that stores their reports. The benefits and cost savings at this level will be exponential and immeasurable at this time, but will make reporting for the colleges and universities in North Dakota much more uniform and easy to access.

# RETROSPECT

Looking back at the project, it is amazing how successful and relatively flawless the entire process went.  All of the parties involved agreed that the success of this project can be attributed to a clear vision for what the project was going to accomplish and to the dedication of the leadership and the staff involved in moving the project forward and making it successful.  This project is an example of how effective an initiative can be if it is well planned, is supported by leadership, and has staff dedicated to its success.