



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY

## **NEW FISCAL OFFICERS ORIENTATION AND MENTORING PROGRAM**

**Primary Author:** Linda Teater, Director, Business Affairs, School of Pharmacy  
**Team Leader:** David Babcock, Manager, Cashiering  
**Team Members:** Bonita Baxter, Manager, Fiscal Operations, VC Student Affairs  
Pam Becker, Manager, Fiscal Operations, VC Academic Affairs  
Janet Carnett, Administrative Manager, Information Services  
Cyndi Cusick, Administrative Manager, School of Nursing  
Stephanie Griffin, Manager, Fiscal Operations, School of Computing & Engineering  
Mary Morgan, Manager, Fiscal Operations, School of Business & Public Administration  
Jackie Walter, Manager, Fiscal Operations, School of Education

University of Missouri-Kansas City

**Abstract:**

As the result of a grass-roots effort by department and division level business officials at the University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC), and in direct response to a demonstrated need for training and support systems for new fiscal officers, UMKC has instituted a New Fiscal Officer Orientation and Mentoring Program.

Prior to the hire of a new fiscal officer at UMKC, the mentoring group meets and assigns a primary and secondary mentor for the new hire. The designated mentor also meets with the outgoing individual to learn as much as possible about the position, potentially joins the selection committee for the new hire, and serves in the capacity of mentor for the individual when hired.

Support systems that were established as this mentoring initiative was being designed include a centralized repository for fiscal operations information and an individualized training program. The Fiscal Officers web site provides information and links that every fiscal officer on campus (and their respective staffs) can utilize in the daily operations of their offices. The individualized training program takes advantage of a newly formed training initiative on campus that can be tailored to the most urgent needs of the new hire, as identified by the mentor and is based on the time of year of the hire and the individual functions the new individual will perform in their position.

**Introduction of the Organization:** The University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC) is the second largest campus in the University of Missouri system which also includes the University of Missouri – Columbia, the University of Missouri – St. Louis, and the University of Missouri – Rolla. An urban campus, UMKC is located in the heart of Kansas City, Missouri enrolling approximately 14,500 students in eleven academic divisions, including four professional schools. UMKC’s mission is to lead in the life and health sciences, to deepen and expand strength in the visual and performing arts, to collaborate in urban issues and education and to create a vibrant learning and campus life experience.

**Statement of the Problem/Initiative:** The eleven academic units on UMKC’s campus as well as eleven service units employ a chief fiscal officer. Prior to this initiative, formal training on university policies and procedures and support systems for these positions was inadequate to aid in the success of a new employee hired into the university to fill this role. The goal of the initiative was to formalize training for these positions in all aspects of their responsibility, formalize a mentoring program, and build other support systems to ensure success for these new employees.

**Design:** The Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration became aware of the concerns of these chief fiscal officers during customer service focus groups and convened a project team comprised of volunteers from the twenty-two filled positions in addition to representatives from Human Resources, Finance, Procurement, and Research Services. The project team researched best practices of other universities to provide guidance and brainstormed to explore concepts for the project. The design of the initiative formed around three major components: a centralized repository for information relative to the workload of a fiscal officer, formal training in

university policies and procedures relative to operations, and a formal mentoring support program for new chief fiscal officers when hired.

The centralized repository of information took the form of a Fiscal Officers Web Site. The major hurdles for this step were to determine who would physically create the web site, who would “own” the website and be responsible for content relevancy and maintenance, and where the web site would reside within the university’s domain. Utilizing the help of several work study students from the computer science department, the web site was created and populated with relevant information discussed and approved by the project team. The web site resides on the home page of the Division of Finance and Administration and is physically maintained by the office of Financial Services. The format of the website includes many links to other sites, so updating information occurs as those sites update information. Additions to the overall content of the site are reviewed and approved by the chief fiscal officers. The web address for this new web site is: <http://www.umkc.edu/adminfinance/finance/fiscalofficer.asp>.

With the assistance of the manager for training in Human Resources, the team compiled a list of necessary training topics for fiscal operations. It was recognized that due to the cyclical nature of the workloads for these positions, the most relevant training would be dependent on the time of the year a new employee joined the university, so a form was created to be utilized in developing a specialized training program for each new employee. It was further recognized that the training needed to be provided by the appropriate personnel within the university, not by the fiscal officers themselves. This project team was therefore the catalyst for the new training program offered by the Division of Finance and Administration, whose program can be located

at <http://www.umkc.edu/adminfinance/finance/budget/fmcourselist.ASP>. This training program is designed to be utilized by all university employees, but can be personally requested for a new employee based on the specialized training program determined at hire. Additionally, this project team was also the catalyst for documentation of the university's policies and procedures currently being developed by the Division of Finance and Administration.

The final aspect to the project is a new fiscal officer mentoring program. Volunteers were again solicited from the twenty-two primary fiscal officers to serve in the capacity of mentors for new hires. The project team developed a list of positions that would be eligible for the new mentoring program. When one of these positions becomes vacant, human resources notifies the fiscal officer in the provost's office of the vacancy. This contact individual calls a meeting of the volunteer mentors to discuss the position being vacated and the group chooses the best primary mentor and a secondary mentor based on availability and related workload. (For example, some departments have higher levels of grant related research than others and would need a mentor with significant grant experience.) The mentor meets with the outgoing individual to learn as much as possible about the functioning of the office and any unique responsibilities involved. Concurrently, the primary mentor works through human resources to offer their services to the unit in identifying specific skills and attributes required for the position, potentially sits on the selection committee (if desired by the unit), and finally helps the new hire and the unit determine and prioritize the individualized training plan. The mentor works with the new hire for in a safe, non-reporting relationship to provide guidance, information and expertise for six months to a year while the new individual gains confidence in his/her new role.

**Implementation:** The initial meeting of the project team was October 7, 2005, with an original projected completion date of January 2006. Team members met twice a month, working committee assignments into their regular workload. The creation of the web site and the development of the specialized training tool were selected as prioritized assignments worked concurrently while researching successful mentoring programs. The web site was rolled out to the campus in March 2006 and the training tool was completed in April 2006.

The mentoring aspect of the project was delayed until January 2007 due to a variety of reasons. Fiscal year end closing, which affects all fiscal officers, took time away from the project during the months of May through September 2006. Additionally, the liaison from the office of human resources left the university, and was not replaced on the team until December 2006 due to reorganizations in human resources. The project team purposefully took a break from the project during this time to reenergize and recommit to the project, acknowledging that the support of human resources would be crucial to the success of this final aspect. In January 2007, the project team piloted the mentoring program with a volunteer fiscal officer who had been in her position for only a short time.

**Benefits:**

The benefits of the initiative include direct impacts on campus training, professional development, and job efficiencies. As noted above, operational training scarcely provided in the past is now being scheduled and offered to fiscal personnel as a direct result of this initiative. Preparing individuals to serve in the role of a mentor has offered professional development to these individuals. Job efficiencies have been realized both through the centralized location of

information on the web site and as the project team discussed current operational procedures and found best practices among the team members. An indirect benefit of the initiative has been the improved communication between the twenty-two identified positions eligible for mentoring. A retreat among these individuals recently afforded the opportunity for brainstorming approaches to solving some shared problems, and the hope is that campus-wide best practices of common operational processes can be developed as the mentoring program gains momentum.

### **Retrospect:**

In retrospect, there are four items that would have improved the process:

- The team leader should have been appointed from within the affected individuals (the chief fiscal officers)
- Goals should have been clearly stated and referred to often
- Early buy-in from all stakeholders in a formalized process would have expedited the implementation of the program
- Dedicated resources would have helped speed up the process

In this initiative, the team leader was assigned to the group from the office of Finance and Administration, not chosen from the twenty-two available chief fiscal officers. This affected the project in that the team set its timeframe and marked achievements based on this individual's goals, not on what made sense within the boundaries of the fiscal officers' operational timeframe. This also added another dimension of time delays based on his job related responsibilities not associated with the project, if he couldn't attend a meeting due to another commitment, the team didn't meet. Finally, the passion for the project was not the same as it would have been from one of the twenty-two, since the final product is not highly correlated to the team leader's daily responsibilities. Sadly, toward the end of the project, the team had to rededicate themselves to completing the project with or without the team leader.

As with any new project dealing with conceptualizations, it is wise to clearly state the goals and refer to these goals often. The team rehashed certain items in multiple meetings because of the lack of clear focus. The most common occurrence of this, for example, was in determining which positions would be eligible for the mentoring program. The positions were not clearly defined until almost the end of the project when “project scope creep” had the team discussing potentially providing the mentoring program for over 100 positions having any type of fiscal responsibility. Although the team had previously discussed the concept of providing mentors for only the chief fiscal officers, the positions had not been clearly defined early to maintain the original project scope.

The delay caused by the loss of the human resources liaison provided the lesson to the team that buy-in from the stakeholders needs to occur early and be somewhat formalized. While the individual liaison was clearly committed to the initiative, the human resources director was unaware of the project and commitments the individual made on behalf of the office until after the liaison left UMKC. Because of this lack of formalization, effort was duplicated (causing time delays) in explaining the initiative and obtaining support needed in implementing the mentoring aspect of the initiative.

Finally, as has been experienced in many large projects, if dedicated staff resources can be allotted to the completion of an initiative, the timeframe for completion can be greatly reduced. Since both the leadership and the team member’s time were volunteered above and beyond daily responsibilities, this project incurred a delay anytime a higher priority presented itself.



This is a great achievement for UMKC; one that has made a huge impact on the success for fiscal officers across the campus, and one that will make a huge impact on the success of the future chief fiscal officers hired through the utilization of the mentoring program.