

Decentralization Tendencies by Deans (Related Software Overview)

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Abstract

A survey was conducted with business, education, and engineering deans across the country which revealed a surprising prevalence in decentralized approaches to development, new-student recruitment, career services support, and even record-keeping for enrolled student. A specific comprehensive software package for academic deans and department chairs is outlined which allows academic administrators to track students, alumni, faculty, staff, advisory boards, outreach schools, student recruits, experiential education employers, and school co-op and internship placements.

Introduction

Deans and department chairs are movers and shakers who frequently spur and oversee a wide range of peripheral or support responsibilities for their given programs, including outreach for new students, development of funds and resources, maintenance of current student and alumni records, and even running small-scale career centers and human resources offices. Universities tend to frown on decentralized practices and record-keeping systems in these areas, especially when they are in addition to centralized systems. Such decentralization is viewed as a duplication of efforts which tends to lack the same quality control. In spite of these policies and opinions, deans and chairs often reportedly pursue such practices as much as possible.

The University of the Pacific (Pacific) is a small university with about 6,000 students. The campus has centralized admissions, registration, human resources, career services, and development offices. The university supports decentralized experiential education offices in several academic units including our School of Engineering and Computer Science (SOECS). In spite of all the centralized operations, we (i.e., the SOECS) perform extensive data tracking which seeks to complement these primary centralized campus offices. To support this activity, we migrated to an extensive, comprehensive database system to support and tie all of these functions together.

This paper will first reveal the results of a survey sent to business, education, and engineering deans across the country for the purpose of ascertaining a more empirically based grasp of the extent these academic administrators actually engage themselves and their staffs in these support functions. The balance of this paper will describe the above

software system used at Pacific along with its various benefits, thus assisting the reader in either gleaning relevant ideas, or possibly migrating to this particular system. The name of the software program is *AIM*.

Survey Introduction

Deans know anecdotally that they all rise to assume much direct responsibility for their entire programs, including the recruitment of new students, tracking of current students, various career placement activities, and development. The purpose of this survey was to determine the extent of this involvement by deans and their staffs. We sent an email survey to 200 engineering deans in the U.S. There were 269 of them in our database. We asked the questions listed in Table 3.0. We also asked them whether they considered their engineering schools to be small, medium, or large. We received responses from 48 deans.

We then decided to send the same survey out to education and business deans across the country to see how they might differ from engineering deans. We also added the following questions to the survey:

1. How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help raise funds for your school?
2. How much work do you or your staff do to help with co-op, internship, and career placements?"

We sent the survey to a random sample of 200 deans for each field. Twenty-seven Business deans responded. Fifty-three Education deans responded.

1.0 - Survey Results of Business Deans in the U.S.

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help recruit new students to the university?				
None	1	1		2
Some	8	6	4	18
A lot	4	2	1	7
Are your Development functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	11	4	2	17
Decentralized	2	5	3	10
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help raise funds for your school?				
None	3		1	4
Some	6	7	3	16
A lot	4	2	1	7
Do you maintain your own database of alumni?				
Yes	3	4	4	11
No	10	5	1	16
Do you maintain your own database of your enrolled students?				
Yes	5	1	3	9
No	8	7	2	17
Are your career services functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	11	5	3	19
Decentralized	2	4	3	9
How much work do you/or your staff do to help with co-op, internship, and career placements?				
None	2		1	3
Some	8	3	2	13
A lot	3	5	2	10

2.0 - Survey Results of Education Deans in the U.S.

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help recruit new students to the university?				
None		1		1
Some	10	11	6	27
A lot	9	10	6	25
Are your Development functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	17	12	6	35
Decentralized	3	10	6	19
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help raise funds for your school?				
None	6	2	1	9
Some	12	12	6	30
A lot	1	8	5	14
Do you maintain your own database of alumni?				
Yes	11	12	5	28
No	9	12	6	27
Do you maintain your own database of your enrolled students?				
Yes	16	16	10	42
No	4	7	2	13
Are your career services functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	18	16	8	42
Decentralized	3	8	3	14
How much work do you/or your staff do to help with co-op, internship, and career placements?				
None	2		3	5
Some	7	8	3	18
A lot	8	12	6	26

Table 3.0 - Survey Results of Engineering Deans in the U.S.

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help recruit new students to the university?				
None			1	1
Some	10	12	4	26
A lot	8	7	5	20
Are your Development functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	13	14	3	30
Decentralized	4	6	6	16
Do you maintain your own database of alumni?				
Yes	7	8	4	19
No	11	12	6	29
Do you maintain your own database of your enrolled students?				
Yes	9	7	3	19
No	8	13	8	29
Are your career services functions more centralized or decentralized?				
Centralized	14	18	6	38
Decentralized	3	2	3	8

Table 4.0 - Combined Results of Dean Responses

		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help recruit new students to the university?	None	1	2%	2	4%	1	4%	4	3%
	Some	28	56%	29	58%	14	52%	71	56%
	A lot	21	42%	19	38%	12	44%	52	41%
Are your Development functions more centralized or decentralized?									
	Centralized	40	82%	30	59%	11	42%	81	64%
	Decentralized	9	18%	21	41%	15	58%	45	36%
How much work do you and your own faculty and staff do to help raise funds for your school?									
	None	9	28%	2	6%	2	12%	13	16%
	Some	18	56%	19	61%	9	53%	46	58%
	A lot	5	16%	10	32%	6	35%	21	26%
Do you maintain your own database of alumni?									
	Yes	21	41%	24	45%	13	50%	58	45%
	No	30	59%	29	55%	13	50%	72	55%
Do you maintain your own database of your enrolled students?									
	Yes	30	60%	24	47%	16	57%	70	54%
	No	20	40%	27	53%	12	43%	59	46%
Are your career services functions more centralized or decentralized?									
	Centralized	43	84%	39	74%	17	65%	99	76%
	Decentralized	8	16%	14	26%	9	35%	31	24%
How much work do you/or your staff do to help with co-op, internship, and career placements?									
	None	4	13%	0	0%	4	24%	8	11%
	Some	15	50%	11	39%	5	29%	31	41%
	A lot	11	37%	17	61%	8	47%	36	48%

Results

Tables 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 show the results of the surveys.

Many responders indicated that they had some aspects of outreach and/or development that were decentralized. As one dean wrote:

Your survey does not provide for our type of operation very well. It isn't a simple centralized/decentralized problem. The way we do it is a hybrid where some functions and support are centralized but others are decentralized for all of these areas in your survey. I'd say we are more of a cooperative or hybrid model in which central administration does what they do best (working with recruiters who want a wide variety of students from across the university--especially at the undergraduate level) and letting our college (the School of Management) do what we do best--working with very focused recruiters who want MBA's, for example.

In fund raising, as another example, the university has an annual fund campaign that is coordinated all across campus. But in the School of Management we write our own letter to our own alumni and solicit from our own database. However, strong coordination is needed to avoid people being hit up by several colleges at the same time. Large gifts are solicited by me and my development staff in the School of Management, but we must clear our donors with central administration to avoid conflicts with other colleges in the university.

In the cases where deans implied “both” in any way, I entered, “decentralized,” since the purpose of this paper is to assess how many academic units are engaged in any decentralized practices. The reader could thus think of the survey question as instead reading, “Do you have any components of outreach/development/career placement that are decentralized?” Had the survey actually been written that way, the numbers favoring “decentralization” would presumably have been even stronger.

Recruitment: Virtually 100% of the schools reported that they have joined the recruitment game themselves. About half of the engineering and education schools reported that they spend “a lot” of time doing recruitment. About ¼ of the business schools reported “a lot.” This did not vary significantly by size.

Development: Most small schools reported “Centralized” development offices on their campus. We might have expected this considering absent “economies of scale.” Medium and larger schools were about even, with the exception of engineering whose medium schools still favored centralization, and whose larger schools actually had more decentralized programs. Somewhat incongruously, the great majority of deans reported “some” or “a lot” of involvement with fund-raising, and even more conflicting, many of the schools reported that they maintain their own alumni databases (presumably, and often reportedly, on top of the university’s centralized alumni database). About 2/5 of engineering and business schools, and about 1/2 of education schools track their alumni

independently from their central records office. (Note that more education schools do so for teacher credentialing purposes.) Medium and larger business schools appeared more likely to track their own alumni than the smaller ones (although our sample numbers were small).

Enrollments: A surprising number of schools reported maintaining their own independent databases of their enrolled students, again, presumably on top of the university's centralized registrar. The smaller engineering schools are much more likely to maintain their own database (which is opposite the alumni tendency). The great majority of education schools track their own students, again allegedly for credentialing purposes.

Career Services: A much smaller percentage of schools rely on their own career placement service, about 1/3 overall. The larger the school, the more likely this function is decentralized. Overall, these are surprisingly high numbers. Further, nearly all schools reported providing at least "some" support to this activity, with about half reporting "a lot."

Overall Differences

Table 4.0 reports the combined totals of the responses, along with the percentages for each response. These collective data accentuate the dean tendencies:

1. Virtually all deans and their faculty now engage in new student recruitment.
2. The larger the school, the much more likely they are to have decentralized development offices, with "Large" schools being more the rule than the exception.
3. Deans and their faculty are heavily engaged in development, but not to the same extent as they are in new-student recruitment.
4. Essentially half of all schools maintain their own decentralized alumni databases and their own decentralized student databases.
5. About one fourth of all schools have a decentralized career services office of some type.

Unsolicited "Comments"

Many of the responders offered personal comments along with their replies. (Note that all comments were unsolicited.) Virtually every response indicated that deans would like to have increased independence and "decentralization." This issue is clearly a "hot button." Some of the comments follow:

Regarding "New-student recruitment" centralization

1. "More centralized, unfortunately."

Regarding "Development" centralization

2. (We are centralized) "but we do a lot."

3. (We have some things centralized, and others decentralized) “but the most effective work is decentralized.”

Regarding maintaining their own alumni/student databases

4. Many said that they “try” to keep their own student and/or alumni databases, intimating much frustration with accomplishing the task in a satisfactory fashion.
5. (No) “But we wish we did.”
6. “We are discouraged from doing so.”
7. Many indicated they were “starting” to do this.
8. “Primarily to keep track of advising.”

Regarding “Decentralized career services” functions

9. “But the students use me a lot b/c they know I have a lot of connections.”
10. “Best contacts are usually the ones made at the college level rather than the overall university level. One obvious reason is that the focus is on companies that recruit our students at the college career fair, so the students prefer that atmosphere.”
11. (We are centralized) “although many long-time employers maintain close relations with departments.”
12. (We are centralized but) “we work with them a lot.”

Discussion

These results were considerably more extreme than I would have predicted.

- I would not have guessed that nearly 100% of all schools are significantly engaged in new-student recruitment, with nearly half describing themselves as heavily involved. This is presumably a relatively new phenomenon, but a practice that nonetheless people seem to think is only going to increase.
- I would never have guessed that half of all programs maintain their own decentralized alumni databases! This represents a tremendous amount of work. I presume this practice is always in some defiance of “Central Records” types of administrators on their campuses. This practice is ostensibly easily challenged given the “duplication of efforts” appearance of two people entering the same data repeatedly, and the vagaries and pitfalls of each relying on the other to share their respective updates.
- Nor would I have guessed so many schools would maintain separate databases of their enrolled students, for the same reasons as the above bullet. This is a huge job, an immense amount of work.
- Finally, I was surprised by the number of unsolicited comments of time spent supporting career service functions, presumably including Co-ops and internships as well as entry-level placements.

So why are so many schools willing to undergo all of this “duplication of effort” and additional data entry? They clearly find the benefits worth the cost. “Central Records” people make arguments that the decentralized and duplicative efforts lack efficiency and

perhaps the same level of quality control, given the “economies of scale” differential. They point out that deans can normally get these same reports, and enjoy such capabilities as email blasts to students or alumni with a simple request to them. But when it comes down to it, the ease and empowerment of deans having that information literally at their fingertips is compelling. Further, the freedom to explore additional query options and related capabilities makes the draw even stronger. Finally, again, deans may have additional related fields and reports they need added to the system.

APPENDIX

The final section of this paper will elaborate on many of the above specific benefits and capabilities of *AIM*. It will also outline approaches to improving deans' and chairs' software support for these activities.

AIM Program Description

“*AIM*” stands for “**Academic Information Manager.**” *AIM* was beta-tested at the University of the Pacific for the functions of new-student recruitment, enrollment services, career services, alumni, and human resources. The primary record systems are:

The screenshot shows a web-based interface for a student record. The window title is "Student". At the top, there is a search bar with "Walker, Keith M." entered. Below this, the student's details are displayed: First Name: Keith, Mr./Ms.: Mr., Status: Enrolled, Last Name: Walker, Middle Initial: M., Student ID: 988416727. There is a "Profile Report" button. Below the details, there are tabs for "Contact Info", "Permanent/Work", "Personal", "College", "Other Education", "Placements", "Schedule", and "Contact Log". The "Contact Info" tab is active, showing fields for E-mail Address (k_walker@pacific.edu), Cell Phone # (209-518-6154), Current Phone (932-4145), and Region (Local). A "Current Address" section includes fields for address (3601 Pacific Ave., Jessie B. #305), City (Stockton), State (CA), Zip (95211), and Country. There is a "Map it" button. A photo of Keith M. Walker is displayed, along with a "Résumé:" section. At the bottom, there is an "InfoRelease" dropdown, an "Inactive" checkbox, and a "Reason" field. The "Revision Date" is 5/20/2004. The footer shows "Record: 3008 of 3204".

- **Students** - The Student records can be used for prospective students, enrolled students, and alumni, including all possible contact information, advisor, course schedule, and extensive academic information including their high school, community college, bachelor's degree, and graduate schools.
- **Staff** - The Staff records are for the school's faculty and staff, including faculty research interests, courses they are qualified to teach, and committee assignments.
- **Employers** - The Employer records are for use with entry-level, Co-op and internship employers as well as company development activities and where alumni work.
- **Schools** - The School records are used for outreach and tracking feeder schools. It also allows you to track where graduates go.
- **Placements** - The Placement records serve any kind of experiential education placements. They include a link with a Student record and an Employer record.

(See “Summary List of Primary Applications and Types of Records in AIM” insert below.)

Since all of these functions tend to overlap with each other in numerous ways, multiple opportunities exist for common links. This fact brings tremendous efficiency value to having a single system that supports all of these ancillary functions. Consider the following overlapping links:

- Once faculty members are entered in the Staff records, those people can be linked to the student records as the students’ faculty advisors. They can also be linked to a student co-op or internship record as the students’ coordinator. They can also be linked to an employer as the school coordinator or liaison with that employer.
- Once a school is created in the Schools records, that school can also be linked as a student’s former high school or community college, or as the university that the student plans on attending after graduation from your school.
- Once an employer is created, it can be linked to an enrolled student for their Co-op or internship employer. It can also be linked to an alumnus as their permanent employer.

These are just a few examples that illustrate how once a single piece of data is entered or updated, it can be utilized in multiple ways, and carries over automatically into other areas.

Summary List of Primary Applications and Types of Records in AIM

Students

Prospective Student

Enrolled Students

Alumni

Staff

Faculty

Staff

Advisory Boards

Volunteers

Emeriti faculty

Courses faculty are able to teach

Faculty Committee Assignments

Employers

Co-op and internship employers

Entry-level employers

Alumni employers

Placements

Co-ops and internships

Job listings/openings/announcements

Schools

Outreach schools

Graduate schools

Digression on Co-op and Internship Databases: Since the arrival of electronic database technology, experiential education programs across the globe have struggled to find better ways to harness this new resource. Numerous commercial programs have come out, ranging in price from \$3,500 to as high as \$80,000 per year. All strive for the “one-size-fits-all” attribute. But just as no two families could ever agree to the perfect house floor plan, schools would be hard-pressed to agree to a common database design. As their programs vary in nature, so do their demands for specific fields, forms, reports, search and sort features, data-entry

and import methods, security systems, etc., etc. etc. Virtually every program administrator has at least one function that is very important to them which is lacking in all the programs on the market. Since *AIM* is actually written in MS Access ©, it is literally 100% customizable.

Basic Features

AIM takes literally a few minutes to teach to administrative staff. With basic Access© features, it is obvious how to find records, enter and change information, and run reports. Dozens of reports come with the program, allowing the user to select from numerous relevant search criteria. You can additionally type a report heading that reflects the chosen search criteria. Extra-useful report capabilities include:

- Emails – You can enter criteria for students or staff, for example, and generate a list of email addresses that can be effortlessly copied and pasted into your email program. The whole exercise can be done in seconds.
- Letter-merging is nearly as easy, providing every possible address type and sort preference.
- Statistics reports are “smart,” allowing the user to see extensive descriptive profile information such as the number of students, grouped by gender, ethnicity, etc.

Student records can initially be imported from a spreadsheet, such as from the school registrar’s office. They can also be imported and updated individually from a brilliant text file system whereby students copy given text into an email addressed to you. (See a portion of this text file below.) Before sending, they type in their respective information after each relevant label. (See sample bold-faced text below.) Students can complete this exercise in a few minutes. Once your office receives the email, you can import that given information in literally a few keystrokes.

Sample Import Text File

---Student Information-----

Last name: **Doe**
First name: **John**
Middle initial: **M.**
Mr./Ms.: **Mr.**
Student identification #: **123-45-6789**
Gender (M/F):
Email address:
Cell Phone #:
Current residence phone #:
Current street address line 1:
Current street address line 2:
Current city:
Current state:
Current zip:

Current country:
Permanent residence phone #:
Permanent street address line 1:
Permanent street address line 2:
Permanent city:
Permanent state:
Permanent zip:
Permanent country:
Employer:
Work phone #:
Work title:
Work address line 1:
Work address line 2:
Work city:
Work state:

Work zip:	Ethnicity:
Work country:	Maiden name:
Home Page (URL):	Spouse first name:
Current college gpa:	The names of your children:
College units completed:	Emergency contact:
Year you plan to graduate:	Emergency contact phone #:
Month you plan to graduate (e.g.6):	Name of your first class (1):
High school class standing:	Which days does it meet (e.g. MWF)
Year you graduated from high school:	(1):
High school gpa:	What time does it meet (1):
Math SAT score:	Professor's name (1):
Verbal SAT score:	Location of the class (1):
ACT score:	Units for the class (1):
Birthdate:	Name of your second class (2):

The feature that may win the most comments of appreciation for this software is the ability to paste pictures of the students, alumni, and faculty into their respective records. Faculty and administrators frequently confess the need to be given a face for a student or alumnus name.

“Customization” Redefined

Making “customizability” even easier and pervasive in the program, all of the record forms (i.e., the “Students,” the “Employers,” the experiential “Placements,” the “Staff,” and the “Schools”) have four user-definable flags on them. So, if there is something you want to keep track of among all of your employers, for example, such as whether they are one of your target companies for fundraising, you can easily change the label on that form to read something like, “Gift Proposal.” With this single entry, that label will be transformed on everything, including the form, the search window, and the related reports.

To Write Your Own, or Not?

Whenever schools talk about their experiences of writing their own databases from scratch, they invariably report the following:

It sounds easy and inexpensive when first discussing and analyzing. It ends up *consuming* you, and depleting department funds on the order of many thousands of dollars.

The University of Regina in Canada reported orally at the 2004 Cooperative Education & Internship Association Conference that they spent approximately \$500,000 by the time they completed such a system. Endless additional examples exist across the country.

One hundred percent of those who have done this will report that they either spent countless hours and excessive funding on the project, and/or they had to stop and settle for an incomplete and unsatisfactory system. (Anecdotal) Either is most frustrating, to say the least.

The advantages appear overwhelming to migrate to *AIM*. The cost of *AIM* ranges from \$3,500 - \$20,000 per year, varying with the size and capabilities required by the institution. This cost includes most training and implementation costs. After you have transitioned to *AIM*, you can then build upon the system to cover unique needs of your given program. (See “Customization” section above.) If you think that you are “nearly completely satisfied” with your system, again, any number of testimonies will support that your distance to closing that gap is probably much greater than you would ever guess.

Closing Comments

Decentralization exists to some extent at all business, education, and engineering schools across the country. Regardless of the extent of “centralization” at a given university, all academic unit heads require information at their fingertips to at least some extent. The duplication in efforts of dual data entry (i.e., by both the central records as well as the unit records) appears to be worthwhile for the increased access and reporting capabilities. Administrators have high expectations placed upon them. Immediate data access empowers them. To bring up a particular employer screen and immediately see a list of all alumni who work there, along with all the current students currently employed there in Co-op or internship types of capacities immediately provides you with powerful knowledge of how to approach whom for what at that company. To be able to generate faculty email lists by department, or student mailing labels by the year they will graduate suddenly equips the administrator with great new capabilities. To go to a student, staff, employer, or school record, and press a single button that prints out a comprehensive report on everything in the computer regarding that particular record, your homework is done in an instant.

Academic department heads can increase their productivity by developing software that links all of these functions together. (For more information on *AIM*, go to: <http://www.placementsoft.com>.)