CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

FACTS Supports Student Services

CNS Document ID: u001105a
Last Updated: 11/01/2000

UF Information Technology

UFIT

2046 NE Waldo Rd, Suite 2100
Gainesville Florida  32609-8942
(352) 392.2061
<editor@cns.ufl.edu>
Table of Contents

FACTS Supports Student Services .................................................................3
FACTS Supports Student Services

NERDC provides computer muscle for a statewide system which helps college students and potential students explore higher education in Florida: FACTS. FACTS, Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students, acts as a Web-based glue that holds together Florida institutions and allows students easy access to traditional student services such as financial aid, career advising, registration, etc. It also helps current students access services without setting foot on campus.

FACTS is a single doorway to student services at 34 schools across the state. The schools keep their individual approaches to representing data.

From the FACTS Web site (http://www.facts.org), students and potential students can degree-shop, check their grades, apply for financial aid, and more, at state and some private institutions in Florida, including the community colleges, universities in the State University System, and others.

The impact that FACTS has on students is still being determined, but the benefits of not having to deal with parking and standing in line are already apparent.

"Now, students from all sizes of institutions will have the same benefits that UF's students have with ISIS, with a common interface," said Barb Sedesse, coordinator of computer systems

Barb Sedesse helps coordinate FACTS efforts at NERDC.
Marsha Stickel of FCAAS, the Florida Center for Academic Advising and Support in Tampa, agrees. FCAAS is responsible for project management and implementation of FACTS.

"A primary advantage of FACTS to incoming students and distance learners is convenience. Students can view virtually everything they would want to know about Florida public schools from one entry point, facts.org. The process of transferring from institution to institution is becoming easier with the required information being readily available," said Stickel.

Advantages for the participating institutions translate into savings, Stickel added. "Institutions can share data that was previously unavailable. Some institutions are realizing cost-savings due to not mailing grades and reduced traffic in offices. Institutions have a greater exposure to potential students-both in and out of state."

For the system to work, cooperation is vital. Cooperation takes place between the schools, FCAAS, the Northeast Regional Data Center (NERDC), and other participating institutions. NERDC provides space for the servers, and all the central processing for the statewide system takes place on our NERMVS (OS/390) computer. NERSP, the data center's other large-scale computer, serves up the FACTS Web page.

The FACTS system is partially powered by EAGLE (Enhanced Application Generating Language for the Enterprise), which was developed by programmers at UF's Office of the University Registrar. EAGLE builds CICS-generated Web pages and powers both ISIS at UF and the statewide system.

"FACTS is not intended to replace ISIS or any other systems that institutions have in place. ISIS is strictly a UF application. FACTS takes ISIS a step further by sharing data among the universities and community colleges. A community college student can degree-shop at a university and all his/her transcript information will be available," said Sedesse.

According to Stickel, NERDC has been vital to making this massive undertaking possible. "NERDC houses the central site processing of FACTS. FCAAS personnel work closely with staff members at NERDC through our primary contact, Barb Sedesse," Stickel said.

Sedesse explained how NERDC makes this possible. "The central site, which consists of several components, runs at NERDC. Central functioning includes CICS applications using EAGLE and Web-serving functions using the NERSP. We also house several other large servers, one of which acts as a central-site server and two that are gateways to the UF and UNF host applications. Because a large piece of this system is using NERDC services, we have provided, and will continue to provide, assistance to the FCAAS staff," Sedesse said.

As the FACTS system sees its first birthday, administrators are learning how to deal with the new demands on content delivery, Stickel said.

"Although FACTS has become the exclusive vehicle for viewing grades and degree-program requirements at some schools, the impact of FACTS is yet to be determined. Administrators are challenged with reviewing their old business processes and changing their batch schedules in order to allow students access to their data at the student's convenience," Stickel said.

In the past year, FACTS has expanded from its testing phase to a real-time interactive system. FCAAS has assisted 34 institutions with hooking up their current Web sites to FACTS. Institutions which were not previously online were able to use FACTS for delivery of Spring
semester's grades.

"What is available on the Web site now is the 'Advising' piece. That includes transcripts, degree audits, and degree shopping at your institution and at remote institutions. Currently, they are working on Admissions, where you will be able to apply online to all the institutions. There are also a lot of static links on the site to each institution's home sites if they have them, for the various applications; for example, career resources," said Sedesse.

The next year should bring new features to FACTS.

"Within the coming year, FACTS will be adding the ability to apply for admission online to Florida's schools. Students will be able to enter and save their data, eliminating unnecessary, repetitive keying, and apply to any school within the system. FCAAS plans to produce a newsletter soon to keep administrators, technical representatives, and general users abreast of what is happening with FACTS," said Stickel.

Your Comments are Welcome

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this and all UFIT documentation. Please send your comments to:

UF Information Technology

UFIT

2046 NE Waldo Rd, Suite 2100
Gainesville Florida 32609-8942
(352) 392.2061
<editor@cns.ufl.edu>