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Information Systems Uses NERDC to Help Automate UF Administration

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UF Information Technology

UFIT

2046 NE Waldo Rd, Suite 2100
Gainesville Florida  32609-8942
(352) 392.2061
<editor@cns.ufl.edu>
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Information Systems Uses NERDC to Help Automate UF Administration

It's shortly after 8:00 a.m. on a typical UF workday. An administrative assistant in Turlington Hall is entering employee leave information. Across campus in the Health Center, a business manager is reviewing employee applications for a vacant position in her department. Meanwhile, a senior secretary at one of the IFAS research centers in South Florida is tracking a purchasing requisition he posted a few days ago. And it's also the day payroll is authorized, so department chairs all over campus are signing on to make sure their employees are paid on time.

What do all these people have in common? They're all using administrative computer applications developed and maintained by UF Information Systems (IS), one of 13 departments within the Office of Administrative Affairs. The IS department is the primary technology provider of administrative applications here at UF. These applications support the business functions performed by Finance & Accounting, Physical Plant, and University Personnel Services, to name a few.

Because IS applications are delivered either through CICS or the Web, NERDC also plays a critical role in helping fulfill the IS mission. "If NERDC is down, we're down," said Tom Cassarly, who manages the IS Production Support Services group.

The CICS regions used by IS applications run on NERDC's OS/390 system. And the campus Intranet that connects users to IS applications is managed and maintained by NERDC Network Services. "The NERDC staff is very helpful and cooperative, especially in an emergency"
situation," said Jane Thomas, coordinator of computer applications. For these and many other reasons, IS and NERDC staff are in constant communication with each other.

Information Systems also acts as the security administrator for all NERDC userids used by Administrative Affairs, adding and revoking userids for new and terminated employees, respectively, and, of course, resetting passwords when they are expired or forgotten.

Located in Tigert Hall, IS has been serving UF by building automated systems for more than 45 years. Of course, back then it was with punch cards and model 407 Electronic Accounting Machines (EAM)! In those days, data from the Finance & Accounting department was entered on punch cards and fed into these desk-sized machines.

"Operators had to pull a piece of paper off the unit after every basket of cards was read to verify that the amount calculated by the EAM matched the numbers from an adding machine tape in the basket," according to Bill Holmes, now computer operations manager at IS who helped run the machines. "The machines were very noisy," said Dottie Holmes, senior computer programmer/analyst, "and you actually had to remove a large, pre-wired circuit board when you wanted to change from one program to another" (the circuit board was about the size of a small whiteboard). To process one month of accounting data, the EAMs had to read 23 baskets of cards, with each basket holding about 2,000 cards!

Of course, things are much different now. In conjunction with NERDC and other units, most of the applications developed by IS are delivered through CICS or on the World Wide Web. In fact, several of the budget-management tools produced by IS were among the first transactional Web applications on campus. Some of these Web applications run from the NERSP and use commercial "screen-scraping” software to connect the Web interface with CICS applications. These provide the users with an application that combines the speed and reliability of the mainframe through an easier-to-use Web-browser interface.

Another IS-developed application, in conjunction with Finance & Accounting, the Travel Request and Reimbursement Information System (TRRIPS), recently won a management-processing award from the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), a national organization made up of colleges and universities from all over the country. Numerous other systems developed by IS over the years also have received the prestigious Davis Productivity Award.

Of course, IS works very closely with the application "owners" who are usually one of the other administrative departments in Administrative Affairs. "None of our applications are developed in a vacuum," said Tom Thomas, director of IS. "We depend on each other. Our sister departments know their business policies and procedures and we have the technical expertise to automate a given practice in order to make them more efficient." The IS department also works very closely with its Vice President's office which sets the department's priorities.

Although it's an administrative unit, Information Systems also plays a role in UF's teaching mission. For the past five years, students from the Decision and Information Sciences (DIS) Department in the College of Business have served internships at IS. The students get academic credit and valuable work experience and the department benefits from the projects they complete during the semester.

Students also benefit from many applications developed by IS. For example, the folks at University Financial Services (UFS) asked IS what could be done to reduce the long lines at Criser Hall when it was time to distribute financial aid disbursements. Working closely
together, UFS and IS came up with an application that allows students to have their financial aid deposited through a clearing house directly into their bank accounts. Another time-saving, and NACUBO-award-winning, application allows students to complete their financial aid exit interviews over the web.

Information Systems is also responsible for the UF kiosks located around campus and developed the applications that enable people to use their debit and credit cards to pay for tuition, fees, and other UF debt, including at the kiosks. Other versions of this software allow debt payments over the Internet or through TeleGator.

So whether it's processing payroll, hiring an employee, transferring money from one account to another, or many of the hundreds of other day-to-day administrative tasks performed at UF, the folks at Information Systems provide you with the tools necessary to complete the task.

NERDC is pleased to be able to play a supporting role in the many services IS provides to UF, through our CICS systems, and by providing and maintaining network connectivity across campus, and to the world-wide Internet.

Your Comments are Welcome

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

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