In the new integrated SIS (iSIS) almost all student data will originate from admissions. For many Tufts schools today, this delivery happens electronically and is practically invisible. Moving to PeopleSoft opens up possibilities for schools that aren’t currently taking advantage of electronic delivery.

The Role of Admissions

During the admissions process, all prospective students provide Tufts with information about who they are: their name, address, letters of recommendation, transcripts, and more. At a point in the admissions process, student information migrates to SIS and establishes each student’s official record at Tufts.

This fall, the SIS Project will complete development of a data connection between each of Tufts’ admissions systems and PeopleSoft. The new process will roll out just in time to capture information about the students entering Tufts in 2013-14 academic year.

The admissions-to-PeopleSoft interfaces will be transparent to admissions staff, and invisible to the general Tufts population. Select admissions staff will have access to iSIS, the new integrated SIS, in order to review and reconcile any anomalies with the data. They will also receive a daily, system-generated report that will tell them whether information is flowing properly from admissions to iSIS.

Building upon a Foundation

Matthew Hast, director of admissions at the Friedman School, believes that today’s work builds upon a foundation that was established in 2004. At that time, several graduate programs manually entered applicant information into SIS, and schools which had established a model for electronic delivery to SIS had individually negotiated software and support agreements. In 2004, admissions offices at seven Tufts schools decided to use a common admissions application, negotiated a contract that covered multiple schools, and leveraged the support of the School of Arts, Sciences and Engineering’s technical team.

Today, because these programs already deliver applicant information to SIS via an electronic feed, the new interface between Tufts’ admissions systems and iSIS will not dramatically change how these admissions teams operate. “It’s still going to be tricky to manage the transition and be sure the data moves correctly and smoothly, but for the seven Tufts schools that currently use an electronic feed, I don’t think this migration to PeopleSoft will be as difficult as the work in 2003-04, when we were getting rid of the paper application,” says Matthew.

New Opportunities to Support our Schools

Today, some admissions programs manually enter information into SIS. The dental school uses three different systems to manage its admissions process. According to Gillian Anzivino, an admissions officer at the dental school, “we spend a lot of time going through students’ applications and manually translating all of that information into SIS language and codes.” When the SIS Project releases its admissions-to-iSIS connection this fall, the dental school’s admissions systems will link with PeopleSoft and export data directly into iSIS. Admissions staff at the dental school will no longer manually enter student information in iSIS. “We’ll be able to move through that initial acceptance phase faster so that we can take more time with students to follow up with them individually,” says Gillian.

SIS Project’s First Major Rollout

This summer, a small group of people from all admissions offices will participate in a preliminary round of testing to examine the new connection between admissions systems and PeopleSoft. In September, the SIS Project will begin to train all admissions officers who will have access to iSIS, in time for go live dates scheduled in September and October 2012.
The Critical Step of Conversion

For the new integrated SIS (iSIS) to functional properly, a significant amount of student-related data that exists in the old SIS will need to live in iSIS. This data will be converted to iSIS over a year long period, beginning in August 2012 and ending in August 2013.

To convert student related information from the old SIS to iSIS, the SIS Project team must review, map and transform twenty-five years of data, policies, management, and technology. This process is a critical step in the implementation of iSIS. Accurate and complete data must exist in iSIS so that faculty and staff can continue serving students and preserve historical academic and biographical records for previous students.

SIS contains hundreds of thousands of data elements that make up the biographical, academic and financial profiles of all students, past and present. To convert and migrate data from our legacy system to iSIS, the SIS Project team must examine the data in detail, seek patterns in the information, distinguish good data from bad data, identify the processes and policies that changed our use of the system, and standardize how we will input and manage data. If this sounds complicated, that’s because it is.

A name is a name isn’t a name

SIS contains “twenty-five years of data that have been built by various people at various points in time,” says Linda Snell, associate director of student and alumni services in UIT and integration manager for the SIS Project.

“Email addresses didn’t exist in 1989 when we built the system,” recounts Linda. “When it was time to store an email address, we didn’t have a field for that in the system, so we co-opted a regular address field, made it a type “A” for mail, and stuck an email in there.” There are many examples of data changing over time, from how students are graded to how each school is represented. The data reflect “all points in time based on the evolution of process or policy,” Linda adds, “and now we’re trying to flatten that out, choosing and designing scripts that will bring the information from the past 25 years to the new system in a way that translates policy and academic changes.”

Revisiting history, however, is not the only complicating factor when converting data. The SIS Project team needs to convert student biographical information and then course information, scheduling information, student financial balances, enrollment information, and more, while other parts of the new SIS are being developed.

Linda shares a well-known analogy among those who work in higher education information technology: The process of conversion is like changing the tire on a racecar while it’s going 200 miles per hour. “There’s never a point when we can say we need a little more time. The business of the university does not stop,” adds Linda.

Standardizing a community

When the new system rolls out, everyone will be affected by the conversion work happening today. Biographical information about students will live in a PeopleSoft component named “Campus Community,” which facilitates the use of student biographical data across the system. If a student changes his or her address, the new address will be recorded in Campus Community and made available to administrators who have a need to see it. “Just as it is with legacy SIS today,” adds Linda, “we are stewards of student information who carefully guard student data. If we have to store information about students, we will only make the information available to people who have a need for it. We take student privacy seriously.”

SIS BY THE NUMBERS:
Data Conversion

| Total Student Records to Be Converted | 364,194 |
| Complete Student Records to Be Converted | 105,666 |

ABOUT

SIS Project update

Members of the Tufts Community can learn about iSIS and its importance to the University. To receive the update via email, subscribe at go.tufts.edu/sis.

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