

User-Friendly Changes Ahead for Student Information

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“Change” has become quite a national buzzword, and it's coming to Tulane as well. Big changes are on the way for the university's online student information system that students and parents will be glad to embrace. An update will roll out later this year to make that system more user-friendly, simplifying online access to financial aid, course registration and grades.



Working on the student information system project are, from left, Charlie McMahon, Paul Barron, Frank Resignola, Lourdes Mega, Tess Passey, Mary Walsh, Mike Pilman and Laurene Lagonegro. McMahon is the new vice president for information technology and chief technology officer, a job previously held by Barron, also a law professor. (By Paula Burch-Celentano)

From the time students apply to Tulane until they graduate, the university gathers a massive amount of information from each student. Accessing that information will get easier with the updated system now in the planning by a team of administrators

from across the university.

When the phased-in changes are complete, students, parents and other system users will be able to take advantage of round-the-clock accessibility, real-time updates, streamlined log-in and many other new features.

Students currently access information from financial aid, the registrar, accounts receivable and admission through separate portals. The new system will allow students to access all this information with one sign-on, using their Tulane user ID and password.

This switch from a Social Security number and PIN log-in will help with identity and security issues, as well as provide a more streamlined access with other university web services.

Mary Walsh, director of software and application services, says the new system will provide better functionality and more self-service for students, parents and staff. Instead of faculty members having to paper-grade rosters, they will be able to post grades automatically to students' records. These changes will be immediately and automatically updated in the system, allowing students to see these changes as they happen.

For online registration, the system will automatically check that a student meets any prerequisites for a particular course and will stop students who don't meet these requirements from enrolling in that class. Departments would also have the ability to reserve a percentage of a course section for students who major in that subject.

New features for financial aid will give students more online capabilities including receiving and accepting awards, choosing lenders and checking additional requirements and current status.

The new system, Banner 8.1 by SunGard Higher Education, integrates the company's Luminis portal software, which can be easily adapted and updated with future technologies, Walsh explains.

Keeping up with future changes is a strength of the updated system, adds Frank Resignola, assistant vice president of enrollment management and a member of the team overseeing the Banner project. "This update will place the university on a maintenance path, where future releases will be able to keep up with the software

and take advantage of new technologies as they come along.”

Changes to the system will roll out in phases, with admission going live this summer. Student records and accounts receivable will follow in October so students will be able to use the new system to register for Spring 2010 classes. Financial aid will go online at the end of the year to accommodate the incoming class of 2010.

The project began when Paul Barron was serving as vice president for information technology. The system update will continue under the administration of new chief technology officer Charlie McMahon, who began work at Tulane on Feb. 1. Barron is returning to his faculty position as a law school professor.

In addition to Walsh and Resignola, the team that is spearheading the Banner effort includes Lourdes Mega, registrar/student records; Laurene Lagonegro, undergraduate admission; Tess Passey, financial aid; Michael Pilman, accounts receivable; and a team of Technology Services programmers.