

# Quality Endeavors

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## Innovation and Improvement at Penn State:

### USING TECHNOLOGY IN THE FACULTY SENATE OFFICE AND THE PENNSYLVANIA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

**W**e are continually asked to provide increasing levels of service using only our current resources. Technology provides one way to address this challenge. Two units at Penn State have been focusing on using technology to more effectively serve their clients and more efficiently use their resources.

The Faculty Senate Office is using the Web to better distribute information and receive inputs, both within Penn State and outside the University community. The Pennsylvania Transportation Institute is using technology to better communicate to their clients and staff about the services they provide.

## The University Faculty Senate Office

### Development of a Database

The Senate Office, led by **Susan Youtz**, Executive Secretary, has been working over the past eighteen months to incorporate technology into their processes. The initiative started with the development of a database, the first in the Senate Office, to replace several labor-intensive manual processes previously used for tracking senators by location/address, college, term, committee, appointment type, and leadership position.

The database was designed and implemented by **Matt Smeltz**, senior-level student intern from the School of Information Sciences and Technology. Once in use, the database continues to be updated to expand its capacity,

producing new efficiencies and increased effectiveness in the Senate Office.

### Web-Based Improvements

The Senate Office has also been making use of several Web-based applications to improve services, reduce costs, and use resources more efficiently.

➤ During 2002-2003, ANGEL (A New Global Environment for Learning, Penn State's on-line course management system) was used with five Senate committees to pilot on-line agenda distribution, posting of minutes, and use of chat rooms for discussions. Use of ANGEL has been

expanded to now include General Education certification/recertification course proposals, streamlining the course approval process.

- A database of undergraduate and graduate programs and courses, the Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programs Bulletins can be viewed world-wide, is updated as changes occur, and continues to be enhanced, providing more complete information and greater efficiency in disseminating information.
- The first-ever Web-based Senate election replaced a 25-page paper ballot, and resulted in a close to 70% response rate, up from a previous response rate of 58-62%.

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- An on-line committee preference selection system has replaced a paper-based system, with an increase in the response rate from 60% to 80%.
- In January 2003, the Senate Agenda shifted from paper to on-line distribution for more than 500 recipients, following the Board of Trustees model of distributing printed copies only to Senators.
- The Senate Newsletter is now distributed on-line.

Current projects include the development of an electronic search and index function for the Senate Agenda and Senate Record.

### Projected Savings

These uses of technology are expected to reduce postage, mailing, printing, and copying expenses by 50% in the next two years, *resulting in a projected savings of \$30,000.*

That does not begin to measure the savings in time and improvements in service resulting from the access to documents and procedures on-line. To see some of these enhancements, visit the Senate website at: <http://www.psu.edu/ufs>.

Senate Office staff involved in these initiatives include **Anna Butler, Kadi Corter, Janie Jones, Diane Mills, Patty Poorman, and Sherry Walk**. For more information, contact **Susan Youtz** at [scy1@psu.edu](mailto:scy1@psu.edu).

## The Pennsylvania Transportation Institute

### Supporting Research Activity

At the Pennsylvania Transportation Institute (PTI), the team was charged to “improve the quality and efficiency of the research administration process . . . and ensure that PTI remains a good place to work.”

PTI is an interdisciplinary research unit that conducts research related to transportation needs, promotes continuing education for transportation professionals, and provides transportation-related expertise to local communities, the Commonwealth, and the nation. Staff at PTI provide support to faculty throughout these processes.

As a result of PTI researchers’ successful efforts to secure projects, the annual research budget has been steadily increasing. The budget that supports the research administration staff, however, has not kept pace with the increase in the research budget. PTI’s director, **Bohdan Kulakowski**, appointed the team to identify ways to maintain or improve the services with the current resources to meet the needs created by the additional research activity.

### Mapping the Processes

The team began by identifying and mapping the processes in the six major areas of administrative support: pre-proposal, proposal, pre-contract, project/contract, final report, and closeout. This revealed that, in some cases, different people would accomplish the same services in different ways, or several people might be involved in just one process step. The team also developed a project-tracking database to verify the process maps, and collect performance data on the processes.

### Satisfaction Surveys

To gather more detailed information, the team surveyed their internal staff and their clients on satisfaction with the processes. Survey data made it possible to identify specific steps and services within the processes where clients were less satisfied. Some immediate actions were initiated to address those issues.

### A Quality Operations Manual

Survey data and focus groups also indicated that there was a need for an organizational reference for use

by both clients and staff to clarify who provided what services, and how they were provided. Based on this finding, the team focused their efforts on developing the PTI Manual for Quality Operations. To make the manual more accessible and maintainable, the team decided to make it an on-line document.

The purpose of the manual is to identify “where and how research teams and staff . . . interface as they secure, conduct, and manage projects.” The manual includes sections on contractual issues, general services, information technology services, library services, personnel issues, publishing services, purchasing, and travel policies.

### An Office Professional’s Project

While the team members were the content experts on these sections, they needed a means to move their work to the Web. As a result, **Pam Houck**, a participant in the Office Professional certificate program, translated the content into Web pages and posted the pages to the on-line manual for her Office Professional project.

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To enhance communication, the manual was expanded to include several chat areas to enable discussion and collaboration among faculty considering future research projects, and for users of the reference to provide feedback or ask questions.

The manual is now in its first year of use. There are still a few sections that need to be completed. PTI is planning to do quarterly updates and a complete annual review of the document each summer.

### **Plans for the Future**

Once the manual has been in use for a while, there are plans to measure how the availability of the manual has improved services and efficiency.

PTI also plans to revise the project-tracking database to make it easier to use, and extend it to use as a planning tool. A new team, the Marketing Innovation Group, has been formed to examine how PTI is perceived and improve marketing strategies.

Original team members included **Chris Christian, Deb Clemmer, Greg Dauber, Lily Elefteriadou, Kevin Mahoney, Lisa O'Hara, Paul Tikalsky, and Zoltan Rado.**

**Barbara Sherlock** was the team facilitator. **Evelyn Thomchick** and **Dan Linzell** have joined the Marketing Innovation Group. For more information, contact Team Leader **Robin Tallon** at [tallon@psu.edu](mailto:tallon@psu.edu).

### **Up-Coming Planning, Improvement, and Assessment Events**

Friday, January 16, 2004, 8:30–10:00

#### **Quality Advocates' Network: Using Self-Study to Drive Improvement.**

For more information, visit [http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/networks/advocates/january\\_2004.htm](http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/networks/advocates/january_2004.htm).

February 4, 20, and 27, 2004

#### **Facilitator Training (CQI 068)**

For more information visit [http://www.ohr.psu.edu/hrdc/catalog/HRDC\\_Catalog.cfm](http://www.ohr.psu.edu/hrdc/catalog/HRDC_Catalog.cfm).

Also consider visiting the on-line course, “**An Introduction to Continuous Quality Improvement: A Web-Based Learning Opportunity**,” at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/overview/>