

State Fair Community College Enhancing Quality of its Services Through Improved Technology

For nearly 40 years, State Fair Community College has been helping meet the needs of students living in the 14 counties of west central Missouri served by the two-year institution. As the needs of the largely agricultural area change, however, and as demands placed on the college by governmental and accrediting agencies increase, SFCC has turned to technology to help meet those challenges.

“When I arrived here in 2003, in terms of information technology, I found there was a great opportunity to provide additional support and resources, both to our administrative systems and our academic programs,” said SFCC President Marsha Drennon. “The first thing we did, with the help of SunGard Higher Education, was to consolidate all of our technology services into a single unit. Then we began to look at technologies more comprehensively across the campus. That was not something the college had been able to accomplish prior to our partnership with SunGard Higher Education.”

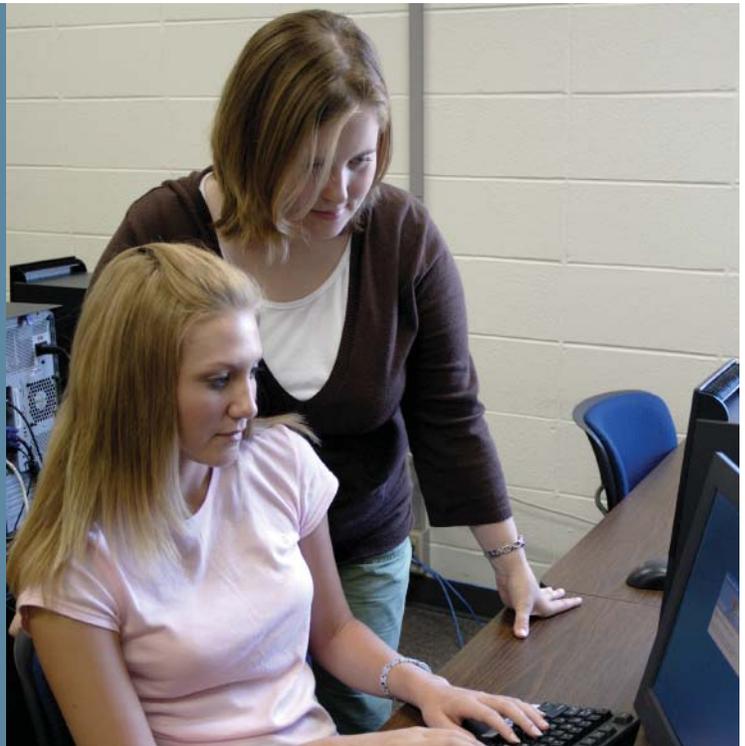
Michael Ash, who also came to the college in 2003 as vice president for student services, said he was surprised to find the institution was still using an AS/400 as its administrative system.

State Fair Community College
Sedalia, Missouri
Enrollment: 3,306



Results with SunGard Higher Education:

- Consolidated all technology-related services into a new department of Educational Technology Services, thereby improving efficiency and providing an integrated state-of-the-art IT environment.
- Implemented the Banner administrative system and Luminis portal platform resulting in increased employee productivity and expanded services.
- In excess of \$1 million saved in the first year of the partnership through improved processes and a reduction in negotiated fees for software equipment and services.





“Because the system was so old, getting data out for reports and extracts was a laborious task,” said Ash. “There were some people in departments who had the ability to run already established reports, but for most reports, the demand usually fell on the shoulders of one or two technical people.”

Through its partnership with SunGard Higher Education, the college established a technology governance structure to enhance planning and also created a strategic plan to ensure IT was properly aligned with the college’s overall objectives. A centralized 24/7 user services help desk was provided to better support students, faculty, and staff. And a new college Web site was designed and deployed to better showcase the institution to potential students and others.

“What has surprised me most about SunGard Higher Education is the level of support and interest beyond campus technology that has been truly helpful. Their comprehensive knowledge of how educational organizations work and their expertise that pulls some of those best practices into what we should be doing has been invaluable to me. They are a tremendous resource for a president.”

— Marsha Drennon, President, State Fair Community College

During the first year of the partnership, the college saved in excess of \$1 million, nearly half of which was attributed to a reduction in fees for software and services. And satisfaction among the campus community greatly improved, with the majority indicating they were “greatly satisfied” with the level of IT support they were receiving.



“The faculty has been very positive,” said Drennon. “During the past four years, we have seen significant growth in terms of faculty interest in the use of classroom technology. They are now seeing it as a real support system as opposed to something that they have to do or as a challenge to their teaching preferences.”

One of the key decisions SFCC needed to make early on was the selection of a new administrative system. The college conducted 37 business process analyses of its finance and student services, resulting in 82 pages of hindrances and recommendations. In the end, it chose to implement SunGard Higher Education’s Banner system as

well as the company’s Luminis portal platform. To personalize it, the college has renamed the system STAR (Serving Together Achieving Results).



"As we went through the implementation, I was concerned it would be a tremendous burden on our staff to do this," said Ash. "We did a little backfill here and there, but for the most part, our troops took the ball and ran with it." Another concern of Ash's was the need for staff to re-design how they conducted many of the college's processes. Before Banner, for example, the college did not have an HR department and all employees were categorized as either classified or professional. The newly created HR department is now re-classifying employees per IRS guidelines and providing a variety of services online. The college also made changes to its payroll system."

"We would not have been nearly as successful with this implementation on our own," said Drennon. "I talk with people all over the country and when I tell them we're 99 percent done in under two years, and learn that they've been in their implementation for seven years and have started over again, I feel really grateful."

"myStar (Luminis) has been a very positive and powerful tool," added Ash. Employees continue to adjust to it as a communication resource. It's easy for them to say they didn't get a message, but if it's posted on myStar, there are no excuses."

Ash said now that the college's administrative system and portal platform are up and running, the next step is to implement the Banner ODS/EDW data warehousing application and COGNOS report writing tool. Being able to rapidly and accurately report statistics, he said, will help the college keep up with the numerous requests for reports.

"We were just looking the other day at a list of federal reports we have to complete," added Patricia Gillman, director of the college's institutional planning and continuous quality improvement. "We used to be able to turn in duplicated headcounts on some things. Now, everything requested is in unduplicated headcount. Technology really assists with that, which is not to say that we haven't always had technology. It's just that we're just so much more dependent on it today than ever before."

Having readily available and accurate information will help the college participate in the National Community College Benchmarking Project (NCCBP) that will allow SFCC to compare its data sets to those of peer institutions. SFCC also is in the third year of becoming an AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program) institution. In so doing, Drennon said there are eight key performance indicators, such as graduation/completion rates, retention rates, and academic success that the executive team monitors to ensure improvement.





“Because our budget is so small for spending for things needed on the campus, making the decision to purchase the data warehousing system was huge for us,” said Drennon. “But as an AQIP institution, we have been working on making data-driven decisions. It became really apparent to me that while I was asking faculty and staff to do those kinds of things, they didn’t have access to the data they needed in a timely way. Our next challenge, of course, is for all of us to learn how to use and analyze the data.”

Since the area served by SFCC remains largely rural, there is limited opportunity for local enrollment growth. SunGard Higher Education is helping the college by conducting a comprehensive marketing survey to determine potential new markets. There are eight state universities in Missouri, as well as 19 other community colleges across the state. One opportunity for significant growth, said Drennon, is around the Lake of the Ozarks, which is expected to be the third-largest metropolitan area in Missouri by 2015.

One way of reaching the new students will be continuing to move many of the college’s programs online. Gillman, who also is an adjunct instructor, said that when she began teaching online, perhaps one in 20 students indicated it was the only way in which they could matriculate. “I’m getting to the point where 75 to 80 percent of my students say it’s the only way they could work it in. Either the courses are not offered in their area at night, or they are stay-at-home moms trying to get some of their pre-requisites out of the way.”

As the objectives and expectations for SFCC have increased, Drennon has been challenged to make campus technology at the college a priority. “We have gone from 4.5 percent of our budget focused on IT to probably close to 7 percent. I’ve come to grips with the fact that technology is not a core competency for most colleges and universities. It would take an astronomical amount of time, energy and money to find the people to keep up with the turnover. Having formerly served at San Juan College, another SunGard Higher Education partner, and now at SFCC, I’ve had the opportunity to see the value and the difference a partnership with them can make.”