I am pleased to report that through the cooperative efforts of many organizations (lenders, schools, guarantors, servicers and SIS vendors) participating on the Electronic Standards Committee, we expect to have draft documentation of the Common Record for FFELP and alternative loan transactions for review at the ESC meeting April 14-16.

Many individuals have risen to the challenge and are devoting much of their personal time and energy to ensuring we meet our goal to distribute final documentation by July 1, 2003. This time frame should allow organizations ample time to develop and deploy the XML schemas for 2004-05.

Several organizations are actively participating in the development of the technical documentation for the Common Record – FFELP and Alternative Loans. (Listing of organizations, Page 7)

As you may be aware, we are continuing to work with the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) and the Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Assistance (FSA) to solidify standards for schema development.

It has been our mission to provide schools and their SIS vendors with a process which mirrors, as closely as possible, FSA’s Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) process. Since all schools are required to use the Common Record for COD in 2004-05, it is our goal to make available the Common Record for FFELP and Alternative Loans at the same time.
More than 50 attendees met over the course of two days, February 10-11, in San Francisco. Sponsored by USA Funds and the University of California at San Francisco, this meeting was the most widely attended XML Forum meeting to date.

On the first day, attendees heard timely updates from Ed Hauser of SCT on Steering Committees activities; Tim Cameron of NCHELP on Common Record - CommonLine convergence; Bruce Marton of the University of Texas at Austin on the XML Postsecondary Transcript and status of all schema development; from Holly Hyland of the US Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) on the current XML Forum project plan and status of core components; Steve Margenau of Great Lakes Educational Loan Services on the XML Technical Specification; and Mark Boembach of SCT on Quality Control review procedures. A lunchtime presentation was made by Jim Farmer of im+m and Tish McNamara of the California Community College (CCC) system on the status of CCC’s efforts to migrate admissions and record keeping processes to electronic. The remainder of the day was spent reviewing and bringing to closure all issues related to core components.

On day two, Bob King of Citibank and Chair of PESC’s Web Services workgroup provided an update on the status of that workgroup. Mike Rawlins, consultant to PESC, provided an overview of the process and procedures for moving the XML Postsecondary Transcript through the ANSI ASC X12 approval process. Michael Sessa of PESC presented the first draft of website enhancements and received excellent feedback from attendees.

The rest of the day, the group split into two: one group, lead by Holly Hyland, focused on working through the project plan, resolving of all core components issues, and schema development; while Bruce Marton (working double time in both groups) lead the other group comprised mostly of newer attendees through a high level overview of the entire XML Forum, its methodologies, and the relationships between all its activities.

Thank you to all that attended this meeting. Plans for the next meeting of the XML Forum are currently being made and announcements will be made when available…stay tuned.
Dear Friends and Colleagues:

With the various standards efforts going on today, how do you know which efforts are worthy of your time? And with ever tightening budgets, what is the appropriate resource expenditure to make on standards efforts? I can’t tell you what’s right for your organization, but I’d like to share with you some thoughts on how you can make the best decision.

The first consideration should be whether the standards organization is tackling standards efforts that are important to your organization. You don’t necessarily need to be interested in all of a standards organization’s work products. However, if you’re investing money or resources in an organization that isn’t advancing, or planning to advance efforts that benefit your organization, you should be reevaluating your commitments.

Once you’ve determined which organizations are undertaking standards setting efforts that fall in line with your needs, it’s good to take a critical look at the organization itself. Does the organization truly exist to benefit the needs of a few or the needs of many? Why was the organization formed? Was it created to advance the needs of an industry or the needs of a few commercial organizations? While you’re evaluating the organization, take a look at the membership structure. Is the membership open to any interested party and is the existing membership representative of the industry? In order to establish industry standards, a group must represent all aspects of the industry it serves, with members from each sector having an equal vote.

The only reason to join a standards organization is to advance their work products, and the only way to advance the work is to participate and contribute. To make an impact, organizations should be prepared to allow their staff to spend 5% - 20% of their time on their assigned workgroup(s). Since this is not an insignificant amount of time, participation points should be selected judiciously.

Standards are continuing to evolve in higher education. Organizations that don’t actively participate will eventually have their future dictated to them. I encourage you to select the standards efforts that are of greatest interest to your organization and get involved.

Sincerely,

Keith Riccitelli
Chair
PESC Board of Directors
You've been in collegiate systems for more than 30 years. What is the most dramatic impact technology has had on college campuses during your tenure? What are the biggest challenges at this point?

First of all, I am not a technology geek but rather someone who closely tracks technology and who is interested in the way in which technological advances can be applied to solve existing business problems.

Microcomputers and the internet/web are obvious answers to questions of significant technologies over the past 30 years. However, we are in the midst of an exciting period where the integration and interoperability of distributed systems and processes is presenting a huge challenge but even a greater opportunity. Emerging integration technologies, such as web services, are going to be the enablers that will allow colleges and universities, as well as other industries, to dramatically transform business and learning processes.

Up until now we have been, for the most part, treating new technologies as add-on productivity and communication tools. Email and the web have assimilated into our daily routine and office software, such as MS Office, as standard desktop capabilities. However, current computing and communications environments are still built around the same model – i.e., separate credentials (username and passwords) at every website, batch data interchanges in proprietary formats, file downloads, customized application programming interfaces, etc. These inefficient, untimely, and costly procedures are no longer going to be tolerated. For example, in the past year we have witnessed the requirement for SEVIS and how traditional data management, communications, and reporting models have failed.

The architecture model is emerging; it is just going to take a while (in the next year or so) for the standards to get ratified and for most of the middleware components to fall into place. I like to refer to this model as the Transitive Trust Model – campus authentication with LDAP, SSL/TSL, CAS and Shibboleth, XML standard schemas, SOAP/XML messaging over HTTP, WS-Security, common SAML assertions, and XML encryption of message headers and bodies. A constituent (student, faculty, staff, alumnus, parent, etc.) would authenticate through the campus directory service using a single set of credentials and would have secure access to all appropriate resources on campus and with external data providers in a standards-based manner.

Security and privacy are on everyone’s mind, but the issues are all solvable and standards groups, such as Liberty Alliance, OASIS and W3C, and Higher Education special interest groups, such as Internet2, JA-SIG, and the XML Forum, are making significant progress. Effecting changes in business and learning processes is going to be significantly harder than the development of the technology, but the functional changes cannot occur without availability of the technology framework.
The admissions process is the "web service" that most, if not all, of today's college students will encounter. However, to fulfill an admissions packet they often must rely on several services outside the institution they are applying (i.e., Transcripts, standardized test scores, etc.). Often times the technological requirements for use of these services are different than that of the original institution. How can this be addressed at the institution level, as well as by the community as a whole?

Web services address exactly the problem that you have cited. web services support the real-time exchange and integration of critical business data between diverse and incompatible application systems in a standards-based manner.

System designers need to grasp the vision and to begin to design the application framework that will be receptive to web services when they become available. Web services also require willing partners—data providers. You mentioned Admissions. At some point ETS will make SAT scores available as a web service—on campus admissions system will access the ETS system within an application to retrieve the applicant’s scores—eliminating all of the batch file transfers and local formatting and updating programs. It will happen (when I don’t know?) because it will be very cost-effective, timely, and efficient. The integration of likely incompatible systems (campus admissions system and ETS) will occur at the transport level with data in a standard XML format and schema, and the transmission and security supported by the transitive trust architecture.

The emergence of the technology model and standards and the participation of willing web services partners are two issues. The bigger challenge may occur in changing the business and learning processes on campus. Campuses don’t respond well to radical change; everything is incremental. This is particularly true because most campus executives cannot be expected to grasp the vision, or will find it politically incorrect to push for broad functional changes.

Institution awareness will occur through real demonstrations of web services – “show and tell” is what works best. The other selling point will be an immediate return on investment – lower cost of doing business immediately, not a year or two down the road. Because web services are standards-based and will work with all software systems and all institutional environments, it is appropriate for the higher education community to develop working examples. If every institution, small and large, can feel the beneficiary impact, then broad understanding and acceptance will follow.

Recently, institutions have started pushing students toward applying electronically through reduced admission costs and other means, yet many are not yet capable of receiving all the information in electronic form. They may be able to accept the application itself but not the personal essay, for example. Is this type of inconsistency a common problem? Should institutions consider "staying paper" as opposed to providing partial services if they are not ready? Will there ever be a paperless postsecondary experience, from admissions through graduation?

Earlier I mentioned the need to grasp the vision and to begin building a framework, and I also recognized the practical reality of incremental change. Colleges and businesses have set the objective of becoming “paperless” but it has been elusive because if you are not going to be totally paperless than the process may turn out to be more expensive and inefficient. For example, if the admissions office has to key a folder with some documents, other documents are imaged and some data is stored in the system, the management of the files becomes a nightmare.

At Boston College we have the same objective as everyone else, but we made the commitment to be totally paperless. In the financial aid office all paper-based documents are scanned and imaged and a virtual file is created that is integrated with the financial aid system. The process is all managed by a workflow engine and business rules for
presentation of files to counselors for evaluation. The documents in a file are stored as images or as XML data and transformed to documents with XSLT.

The financial aid document management system is designed to be incremental and to conform to the transitive trust model. Financial aid officers, and soon students, access all of relevant financial aid information in a common Web interface and with a single set of credentials. All interaction between component systems is using SOAP-like messaging services and XML data formats. Boston College is a little ahead of the game, but the transitive trust architectural model is correct. It will also be easy to adapt, once defined web services and security standards are available.

It should also be noted that the financial aid document management system is being hosted externally as an ASP service and that all the document handling and scanning is being conducted as an outsourced service. Boston College has already achieved its return on investment and has partnered with Folderwave to make the service available to other institutions. Boston College is about to put admission document management into the same system. The virtual integration provides a powerful demonstration of web services and the vision of distributed application design.

**What standards need to be set for all postsecondary’s entities to work seamlessly from any given portal in the process? Are their fundamental changes in the procedure that need to be addressed before standards can even be considered?**

I would like to emphasize the need for cooperation across all entities. I have been very encouraged by the work at the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Campus registrars have embraced the service of outsourcing enrollment and degree verifications. In turn, NSC is working on creating web services so that a software application could invoke a web service inside the application and use HR-XML to validate enrollment or degree information immediately. The California State System is piloting web service access to transcripts – i.e., counselor at one institution can access the transcript that is resident at another institution and have the document displayed as a transcript within the counselor’s portal. The creation of more examples within higher education is dependent on the adoption of vertical XML standards.

**How do you propose that the thousands of postsecondary institutions and the tens of thousands of K-12 institutions work with all the other entities to ensure that student’s needs are met through web services? Is there any incentive for them to do so? Do you foresee web services at school A ever looking and feeling the same as web services at schools B-Z?**

I don’t think that the initiative is going to start with the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) vendors, who are interested less in integration and interoperability than they are in being the single focus for the information system requirements of an institution. The beauty of web services is that applications can be designed as a series of components or component applications. I expect that ERP vendors will certainly adopt modern technology architecture but will want to sell and manage web service capabilities in the context of their comprehensive system package. I guess this is my way of saying that the momentum is going to come from higher education collaborative groups, such as JA-SIG, who are providing a forum for lots of schools and providing an organized voice.

With respect to K-12 it is my understanding that they are far ahead of Higher Education in the definition of XML standards – I could be wrong! I also don’t have any knowledge of the state of secondary school systems, in particular the ability to present a transcript as XML. ■
Unlike the development of prior versions of CommonLine, we are now working with emerging technology, reliant on PESC for setting the XML standards, and some of the deliverables we anticipated have slipped.

However, in the most recent update from the ESC/PESC workgroups, it appears we’re back on track with a Core Components Data Dictionary, a Sector Library for financial aid and a draft schema all scheduled for completion by April 1, 2003. After the full ESC reviews the documents and makes comments, the revised document will further be made available to industry participants for review and comment.

This has been no small effort and there is still much to be done. It is nearly impossible to adequately convey my sincere appreciation to those individuals who have given more time and energy than I would have thought possible.

Upon completion of the documentation, the ESC plans to host a series of conference calls targeted at schools to assist in the education and transition process. The ESC will also develop a regional technical training session on the Common Record - FFELP and Alternative Loans beginning in the fall of 2003.

If you are interested in more information on this initiative, please feel free to contact any member of the ESC.

At its first meeting of 2003, the Steering Committee of the XML Forum for Education elected Ed Hauser, SCT, as its chair. Ed, along with Jason Elwood of Miami University, Paul Hill of ED FSA, Bob King of Citibank, and Paul Ness of Sallie Mae are working on prioritizing all requests for review and/or development of XML schemas made by PESC's membership.

The Steering Committee's overall goal is to ensure that the XML Forum has what it needs to run smoothly and efficiently. All of the Steering Committee looks forward to a successful (and busy) year!

Participating Organizations

- ACS
- AES
- American Student Assistance
- Baker College
- Brazos
- Chapman University
- Citibank
- College Scholarship Service
- Colorado Student Loan Program
- Datatel
- ECMC
- EdFund
- Educaid
- ELM Resources
- FES
- Great Lakes
- Iowa Student Loan Liquidity Corp.
- Nelnet
- New Jersey HESAA
- Northeastern University
- NSLP
- Sallie Mae
- SCT
- Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corp.
- USA Funds
- US Bank
- UW Stout
- VSAC
Conference registration announced

On Thursday February 27, 2003, registration information for PESC's 5th Annual Conference will be posted on PESC's website. The conference will be held at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town starting at 8:30 AM on Wednesday, May 7 and concluding at noon on Thursday, May 8. The Hilton, located at 1767 King Street, is conveniently located within minutes from the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), directly across the street from the King Street Metro Stop (Blue, Yellow, and Amtrak), and many shops, stores, restaurants, and cafes are within walking distance. The conference will be preceded by a membership meeting, and an open reception, both to be held on Tuesday May 6, 2003. Hotel reservations can be made now by calling 1-800-Hiltons. To ensure you receive the conference rate of $150, be sure to use the group name of "Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council" and make reservations by Saturday April 5, 2003.

Several sponsorship opportunities are still available. For more information regarding sponsorship, please contact Michael Sessa at Sessa@StandardsCouncil.org.

XML Postsecondary Transcript Submitted to X12

At the February 2003 American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Accredited Standards Committee (ASC) X12 meeting, representatives of PESC, the XML Forum for Education, and the higher education community submitted the XML Postsecondary Transcript for review and approval.

This means that once reviewed and approved, a process which normally takes several months, the XML Postsecondary Transcript will become an X12 standard.

The XML Postsecondary Transcript is the result of collaborative efforts between PESC's XML Forum and AACRAO's SPEEDE Committee, the original pioneers in higher education standardization.

Work to get the XML Transcript accepted and approved will take several months and updates will be provided as necessary.

Website redesign

During the coming months, visitors to www.StandardsCouncil.org will notice new and exciting features on PESC's website. To meet the growing needs of PESC and its membership, the website will receive a new look and feel.

The transition may be handled in several phases depending on complexity. Major enhancements include: a Membership Only area where members and affiliates only can access working documents and information; a web repository which will serve as the centralized location for all official PESC and XML Forum documentation; and PESC-sponsored listserves.

We look forward to providing value-added features to our website and welcome any feedback you may have. Communications will be made out of PESC's offices with each release of the new website.
While the Department of Education is generally considered to be making progress, its electronic-based operations are still causing concern, according to two recent General Accounting Office reports. Earlier this month, the GAO again listed the Office of Federal Student Aid on its "high risk" list. Central to the GAO's concerns is the state of system integration at the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA). According to the report, "Neither (FSA's) performance plan nor its subsequent annual reports readily provide information about its progress in integrating systems." In addition, in "Federal Student Aid: Timely Performance Plans and Reports Would Help Guide and Assess Achievement of Default Management Goals" the GAO listed preparing an analysis in FY 2002 to identify improvements that could be made to the National Student Loan Data System as one of the three out of 39 goals that FSA did not adequately address.

When students returned to the University of Colorado at Boulder campus for the Spring semester, some faced inoperable e-mail software due to a major change in the university's e-mail systems to tighten security, according to a Chronicle of Higher Education report. The university now requires encrypted communications for transmitting messages between campus e-mail servers and client software used by individuals. All users were required to reconfigure their e-mail programs so that they used encrypted links when communicating with the servers.

On February 17, OASIS announced the formation of an Education XML Technical Committee to support eLearning standards for the international PK12 community. "The primary deliverables of the Education XML TC are the documentation of a coordinated set of PK12 requirements, which will enable the development of XML vocabularies, schema, and web services interfaces for implementation of eLearning infrastructure. These implementations will enable the PK12 community to: (1) deliver eLearning applications and content to end users through a diversity of deployment channels; directly to a browser or mobile or handheld device, indirectly through a portal, or by embedding into web applications and devices; (2) create eLearning applications that can be easily modified, adapted, aggregated, integrated, coordinated, or synchronized by simple means to leverage worldwide eLearning application components." Additional information about the formation and goals may be accessed at http://xml.coverpages.org/EducationXMLTC-CFP.html#proposal

The North Dakota legislature is considering a bill that would punish anyone trying to use a degree from a diploma mill as a legitimate credential, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education. The bill (HB 1068) would impose a Class A misdemeanor charge on anyone using a fake degree for employment or other personal gain. The bill defines a diploma mill as any institution not accredited by an agency recognized by the US Department of Education, or by a foreign equivalent.

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**Technology Tidbits and Standard Snippets**

- **UT Austin Internet Server ‘speeds’ through December**
  - 31,134 TS130 transcripts
  - 2,761 TS146 requests
  - 7,061 TS997 functional acknowledgments
  - 21,311 TS189 admission applications
  - 24,480 TS138 test score reports
  - 139,031 total transactions

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