PESC, CBA, EFC & NCHelp Announce Joint Conference

The Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC), in partnership with the Consumer Bankers Association (CBA), the Education Finance Council (EFC) and the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHelp), is pleased to announce the first Annual Conference on Technology and Standards in Higher Education to be held May 3 to 5, 2004 in the Washington DC metro area.

This new partnership signifies an effort by CBA, EFC, NCHelp, and PESC to focus on technological issues important to their respective memberships under one efficient venue.

This conference will also include the support and participation of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the US Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA).

In partnering together, CBA, EFC, NCHelp, and PESC are jointly planning and developing this conference, and PESC will serve as overall administrator. Membership organizations from any of the four associations are eligible for the discounted registration rate of $450. The non-Membership rate is $600. Beginning Monday, December 15, 2003, conference registration will be available online at www.StandardsCouncil.org.

Hotel reservations can currently be made by contacting the Marriott Crystal City directly at 800-228-9290. The Marriott is located at 1999 Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington VA. A conference rate of $179 has been reserved for single/double rooms and the group name is “PESC.” The cut-off date to receive this discounted rate is April 12, 2004.

In the next few weeks, a joint conference committee will be formed so that by the end of the year, an agenda along with session topics and speakers will be available. Note that PESC will be holding its 6th Annual Meeting at the same time.

Questions or concerns about the conference and 6th Annual Meeting can be directed to Michael Sessa, PESC Executive Director, at 202-293-7383 or via email, Sessa@StandardsCouncil.org.
PESC Reaches a Milestone

As with all organizations looking to function as non-profit (501c3), the IRS requires that an application be completed and submitted. Once processed and approved, the IRS then assigns a temporary non-profit status (what they call an advance ruling) which lasts for five (5) years.

After five years, the organization must then request permanent non-profit status. To reach this status, the IRS requires that a series of financial reports and information be submitted to prove that the organization has historically and consistently served a community-based function and has been supported by a broad-based group, not just a few interested parties.

PESC is pleased to announce that it has completed all necessary steps and has been notified by the IRS that it is permanently classified as a public non-profit entity.

Our founders came together in 1997 with a common vision for organizing our data needs and founded PESC. This step is yet another in meeting those needs and delivering on the vision.

Thank you to our founders, our members and affiliates, our Board of Directors, and all those that continue to support PESC and its mission!

PESC Schedule for the Holidays

Note that the Standard will not be published in December 2003 but will resume in January 2004. PESC offices will be closed Wednesday December 24, 2003 through Friday December 26, 2003 and Thursday January 1, 2004 through Friday January 2, 2004. A happy and safe holiday season to all!

PESC On The Road and In The News

Leaders and representatives of PESC have been getting the word out. Here’s just a few of the meetings, conferences, and organizations that PESC has been active and reached out to this fall:

- US Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) Software Developers Conference
- American Council on Education (ACE) ARTS/SMARTS Committee Meeting
- American National Standards Institute (ANSI) X12 Committee Meeting
- New York Student Financial Aid Administrators (NYSFAA) 35th Annual Conference
- AACRAO’s Technology Conference
- Center for the Advancement of Standards (CAS)
- US Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) Electronic Access Conference (EAC)
- Educause Annual Conference
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)

Also, the latest edition of the Greentree Gazette included a two-page story on PESC and its Executive Director, Michael Sessa. That story from the Greentree Gazette is attached at the back of this edition of The Standard.
Vision for

How the Standards Forum Operates

Last month, we discussed what PESC’s refined mission is and what it means from a global, strategic perspective. The Board of Directors also understands that a day-to-day tactical vision must be provided so that we all understand how tactics and strategy relate.

At its last board meeting held October 21, 2003 at PESC’s Technology Summit, the Board discussed and developed a process for how the Forum operates. As organizations can collaborate together to jointly develop proposed standards, PESC anticipates that the majority of standards will originate in this manner. In cases where PESC needs to develop a standard, an open workgroup will be formed.

In either case, once a proposed standard is developed, it must be submitted to the Standards Forum for Education as a standards candidate and this request will be analyzed under the following guidelines:

- The Standards Forum, under the direction of the Steering Committee, will conduct a technical review of the request, which will include a validation against the data dictionary, technical specification, and collaboration principles. If needed, clarification will be requested. The tentative timeframe for a review is 30 calendar days.

- Once the technical review is completed, the Steering Committee will notify the Board of Directors of its intention to issue the request for public comment. The public comment period will be 30 calendar days.

- The Standards Forum, under the direction of the Steering Committee and through a process open to the PESC membership, will address and consider all public comments and make any necessary revisions.

- Adoption of the request as a standard will occur if 2/3 of votes cast are to accept the request.

- Once accepted, the PESC Board will ratify the vote, and PESC staff will publish/post all necessary documents and communications, and lock down and versionize all supporting documents.

A variety of policies and procedures need to be developed in order for the Standard Forum to support this process. PESC staff are working with the Forum leadership and Steering Committee to ensure that all topics are addressed and documented (in the form of a manual) including: organizational hierarchy and infrastructure; submission criteria; collaboration principles; review criteria; public comment, voting and appeal procedures; repository needs; and maintenance, version control, and issue submission processes. Consultants will be brought on board to help expedite the creation of a manual and more information will be provided as progress is reached.
Accepting Submissions

Best Practices Competition

It’s that time of year when PESC looks to highlight Best Practices being used in the community. Now entering its fifth year, the Best Practices competition is held to promote innovation and ingenuity in the application of standards for business needs.

First instituted in 1999, the competition is open to associations, organizations, institutions and individuals that have made a concerted effort to design and implement an electronic standardization initiative via a published article or other medium.

Examples include:

- Standardization of data definitions

- Standardization of data formats or transmission protocols

- Articles on benefits of standardization

- Demonstrations or pilot programs utilizing data standards

- Initiatives moving from a paper process to electronic delivery using an electronic standard

Past winners of PESC’s Best Practices Competition include:

- 1999 Ontario Universities’ Application Centre - “A Model of an Electronic Standardization Initiative”

- 2000 University of Northern Iowa - “EDI Bridge”

- 2001 NCHELP Electronic Standards Committee (ESC) - “Common Account Maintenance”

- 2002 ELM Resources - “ELMNet” and NCHELP Meteor Advisory Team - “Meteor”


Documents detailing the scope of a project, participants, type of standards employed, relevant dates of project milestones, copies of articles (if an article submission), outline of mission/objectives and any related statistics (number of transactions transmitted, estimated cost savings, etc.) should be included in the submission.

All entries should be submitted by January 30, 2004, to:

Michael Sessa
Executive Director
Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council
One Dupont Circle NW Suite 520
Washington, DC 20036-1135

or emailed to Sessa@StandardsCouncil.org.

All entries will be judged by the PESC Board of Directors. First place and those receiving special recognition will be notified by April 2, 2004 while an official public announcement and award will be made during the opening general session of the First Annual Conference on Technology and Standards.
In the September 2003 edition of the Standard, PESC reported on minimum PC requirements for schools in order to effectively communicate with FSA and keep pace with emerging technologies. As those requirements have yet to be released from FSA in the form of official regulations, schools should interpret those requirements as draft. FSA plans on issuing those minimum requirements and has ensured that schools will have sufficient time to prepare for any changes that will need to be made. Stay tuned!

According to a recent survey, conducted by CIO, of 118 IT executives the practices that were most effective in reducing costs (negotiating lower fees and consolidating vendors) were less effective in adding business value. The most common strategy for negotiating with IT vendors was in the negotiation of lower initial fees. The most effective way of reducing per user cost was negotiating lower ongoing fees, according to the survey. Consolidating vendors was cited as the most effective for adding business value. To see the full results of the survey, go to: http://www2.cio.com/research/surveyreport.cfm?id=65

UT Austin Internet Server ‘SPEEDEs’ Along

October 2003 volume included:
- 38,122 TS130 transcripts
- 25,571 TS131 acknowledgements
- 6,580 TS997 Functional acknowledgements
- 30,206 TS189 Admission Applications
- 20,591 TS138 test score reports
- 132,236 total transactions

November 2003 volume included:
- 31,420 TS130 transcripts
- 21,253 TS131 acknowledgements
- 6,303 TS997 Functional acknowledgements
- 36,133 TS189 Admission Applications
- 17,349 TS138 test score reports
- 122,902 total transactions
While XML is increasingly used in unexpected places and now involves a constantly increasing number of people, the early XML technology pioneers may be asking whether or not all of these new people understand what XML is all about, according to an XML Journal article. The article explores a number of areas that XML can be found and warns against combining all XML-based projects into one corporate initiative. The article may be accessed at http://www.sys-con.com/xml/article.cfm?id=739.

As controversy continues to fuel the political fires surrounding the Patriot Act, some CIOs indicate that it has “created a climate for business in which protecting the privacy of customers who are not terrorist suspects is threatened,” according to a CIO.com article. Additional information about the Washington debate and its effects on corporate security and privacy practices can be accessed at www.cio.com/archive/111503/tl_washington.html.

According to a Department of Education Dear Partner letter, issued November 24, a defect in the Common Origination and Disbursement website software “allowed internet browsers to store (or cache) on personal computer hard drives, data protected by the Federal Privacy Act, such as students names, SSN's, and home addresses.” The defect was fixed in the COD application on Tuesday, November 18. However, institutions had to take immediate action to delete information covered by the Federal Privacy Act that were cached prior to the fix. Additional information, including how to delete the stored information can be accessed at www.ifap.ed.gov/dlbulletins/DLB0344.html.

The Department recently released the updated draft of the ISIR XML schema, a sample ISIR in XML format, and an accompanying ISIR record layout/data description, based on the 2004-2005 cycle. A sample XML ISIR is provided in both XML format and in Adobe PDF format. The ISIR record layout/data dictionary lists all the XML tags available for the ISIR record, provides a brief description of the field, and lists valid field content for each tag. For more information visit http://www.ifap.ed.gov/announcements/1126XMLISIR.html.

The Department of Education begins its newest electronic initiative, Common Services for Borrowers, with a contract to ACS Education Solutions. CSB will consolidate the Department's direct loan servicing functions, loan consolidation processes and collection activities.
The Postsecondary Education Standards Council (PESC) began in 1997 with a critical mission: to figure out ways to control costs, improve service and maintain systems interoperability in higher education.

The volunteer IT researchers, school administrators and vendors involved in PESC want to find ways to get business done, by developing technical standards for leading-edge technologies like XML communications. But PESC operated more like a think tank than a standards body at the outset, and standards development was stalled. Then, something happened.

“We figured out a couple years ago that we should change our perspective from ‘why’ to ‘how’—from thinking through the issues to actually doing something about them,” remarks Michael Sessa, PESC’s executive director since October 2002. “We realized that we should add tactical goals to our strategic planning.” The first tactical decision produced an enterprise-wide XML data dictionary and technical specifications for higher education institutions.

“Everyone could focus on those deliverables,” Sessa says, and they were actually delivered in May 2003 at PESC’s annual meeting. That success had a lot to do with the unusual set of skills that Sessa brings to the job. He emphasizes that he is not a tekkie, but an artist “by training and by lifestyle.” Sessa notes that his passion for standards, and his ability to identify and draw out that passion in others, tipped the scales in the board’s decision to hire him.

His artistic temperament was honed at Dartmouth. His artwork, including paintings like “Cusp” (see opposing page), took long hours and significant technical skill to produce an enterprise-wide XML data dictionary and technical specifications for higher education institutions.

Why is SIIA looking to expand its higher education membership?

It’s a growth marketplace. Our education division is largely focused on K-12. We need to include more companies with higher education and lifelong learning customers, who will benefit from our anti-piracy and copyright efforts, as well as our lobbying, industry promotion, market reports, studies and surveys.

Who are the members of SIIA?
The SIIA represents more than 450 digital code and content providers, with 100 of them in education. Code and content providers include software companies, the digital divisions of textbook publishers, internet content providers and the like. Some names include Atex Learning, Apple Learning, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Thomson and others. Our membership dues are based on a company’s overall annual revenues.

Are your members broadening their commerce within education?
Many K-12 members are moving into higher education, and vice versa. Blackboard, which focused exclusively on higher education, recently moved into K-12. Kaplan K-12 has just joined SIIA. ProQuest sells its Xanadu course packs in higher education, but now with the purchase of Big Chalk, its focus is K-20. PLATO Learning, already in K-12, community college and adult education, is acquiring Light Span, which owns Academic Systems’ math and algebra first-year college courses. And watch for moves by MathSoft Engineering & Education and Red Hat.

Please compare SIIA and other education technology organizations.
EDUCAUSE and the League for Innovation serve people within educational institutions. The Association of American Publishers has a partial focus on education technology. The total focus of the SIIA, however, is to serve education technology providers.

What issues and activities are important to your members?
HEA reauthorization is a shared concern, particularly its affect on distance learning. Copyright and digital rights management; open sourcing; the TEACH Act; and faculty/professional development are a few others. A major development/implementation issue is the integration, interoperability and transferability of one software program with another. SIIA can bring players together from all markets and industries. We cooperate closely with standards organizations like MERLOT, SCORM and SIF.
produce. He also possesses an engaging and outgoing personality, plus more than a modicum of business savvy to go along with his creative bent.

“It’s a relationship business,” says Sessa of running an association. “A lot of people underestimate the human side of business, but that’s where I start. I talk to everybody and listen.” His business career includes three years at a savings bank, managing retail compliance and consumer loans. He also spent most of the last decade with American Student Assistance in a variety of positions.

“Just about anyone can run a workgroup, call a meeting or put on a conference,” Sessa says. “But the determining factor for this position was passion, and the ability to follow through.” The difficulty has been sustaining the awareness that the immediate goal is to build value through reliable and consistent performance. He likes to use the automated teller machine as an example of value-building through standards.

“ATM access is a commodity today,” he observes. It was originally considered a proprietary technology by banks who thought ATM’s would lock-in customers. “Instead ATMs turned out to be a way to make money through fee-based services,” Sessa points out. And standardization made that possible.

“It’s the same with XML standards,” Sessa continues. “You might lock students in for a year or two with a proprietary XML campus standard. But they will want to talk to others elsewhere. Making that happen is very costly without national standards. If students can’t interoperate, you wind up losing them—maybe for life.”

Working with other associations also has been both satisfying and frustrating. The good part has been working with members of AACRAO’s SPEEDE committee and NCHELP’s Electronic Standards Committee, whose members have brought a lot to the table. Frustrations have come with working with other standards organizations.

“We’re a member of ANSI. ANSI speaks on data issues to the larger user community outside of higher education,” says Sessa. “But it only recently developed design rules (X12) for XML. That puts ANSI not behind the curve, but behind the eight-ball,” he adds, noting that PESC and other XML developmental groups are way ahead.

“We could pull out of ANSI and simply be the voice on XML standards for the higher education industry, something we’re considering even as we continue to try and work with ANSI,” Sessa says. But the decision to do so is yet unmade. Regarding other standards-setting activities in which PESC may become involved, Sessa speaks with caution.

“We should not latch onto a specific technology,” he believes. “We should first find out what we need to get done in higher education, choose the technology that will get it done, and then define the standard.” He also frets about falling back into bureaucratic ways.

“Let’s face it, standards development is boring for anyone not involved in it, and even for some who are,” he concludes. “The process of getting a standard approved is hierarchical, bureaucratic and inefficient. It’s the application of the standard that’s exciting.”

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**POP QUIZ**

How would capital expenditures planning, especially for new construction, be affected by tuition price controls at public universities?

The primary impact of tuition price controls at state institutions would be felt in institutions’ operating budgets. Capital expenditures and new construction, almost always funded separately via long-term bonds, would not be directly or immediately affected. However, institutions using tuition to fund debt service may be forced to limit new construction. Longer term, capital spending on construction will be affected if states divert dollars from bond payoffs into operating budgets. Institutions will also continue to be confronted by competition for expenditure dollars between programs and maintenance/repairs. The likely result will be increases in already burgeoning deferred maintenance backlogs.

**Jolene Knapp**
Executive director
Society for College & University Planning (SCUP)

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*Cusp, by Michael Sessa*