Today’s Demands—Tomorrow’s Needs

As PESC prepares to release the XML Postsecondary Transcript, we are well aware of the situation created by the release of a new standard (in XML) while the existing standard for transcripts (in EDI) is still largely used throughout the higher education community. Organizations questioning whether to continue support and investment in EDI or begin investment in XML can only answer that question themselves.

Who you trade with and what they are able to support will heavily influence what you support and which direction you take. Service providers and vendors must analyze and understand what is best for their clients as factors vary depending on how, when, and with whom data is to be exchanged.

Three other important factors must be considered when determining how to proceed with EDI and XML:

- Right now, there are more than 600 schools at some stage of implementation of the EDI transcript. How willing or able each school is to migrating to XML will vary dramatically from school to school. The remaining schools in the country may be using proprietary interfaces.

- EDI is used more in a batch environment, while XML, which could also be batched, is really designed for real-time data exchanges. How quickly data is needed and when, will play a role in which standard is supported.

- XML is gaining wide adoption in both the standards community and the IT community.

There is no single answer that can apply to everyone here. In every development initiative, there exists the dilemma between building for the future and supporting what’s needed today. The communities and stakeholders involved can put voluntary rules of support into place. These rules usually involve or insinuate support for both the existing standard and the future.

See CHOICE, Page 8
The XML Forum continues to work on its main objectives and several important tasks are very near successful completion. The Core Components team has identified all outstanding items and will soon produce a finalized Core Components Data Dictionary that will serve as the basis for all future schemas developed and released by the XML Forum.

Those working on the XML Postsecondary Transcript have agreed to launch the first version as all-inclusive. This means that the transcript will be “fat” and include academic and non-academic information. Going forward, the single transcript will break out into two: One will morph into a true academic-only transcript; and one will morph into a transcript that contains all supplemental, non-academic information.

This compromised approach satisfies those that only exchange academic-only transcripts as they can block non-academic information and those that rely on supplemental information. The future approach, which is more compartmentalized, preserves the purity of the academic transcript while allowing those that need the supplemental information a way to facilitate its exchange.

Lastly, the Technology group is reviewing the XML Technical Specification for Higher Education Version 2.11 to determine what changes and updates need to be made. Expect updates and the potential release of all documentation within the near future or even in time for the February XML Forum meeting in San Francisco!

Happy Holidays from PESC’s Staff

(From left) Betsy Bainbridge, Ane Al-Sayyed and Michael Sessa wish all of PESC’s members and their families a joyful holiday season.

The PESC Board of Directors and staff wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday and new year. PESC offices will be closed Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2002 through Thursday, Dec. 26, 2002 and Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2003.
Dear Friends and Colleagues:

As most of you may know, Betsy Bainbridge, PESC's founding Executive Director, is relocating to Italy in January, and has therefore left PESC. It is with sadness, but deep appreciation, that the Board of Directors along with the membership bid farewell to Betsy, wishing her the best of luck for the future. Betsy served as the champion for standards, building a strong coalition of dedicated and committed stakeholders. This year PESC celebrated its fifth anniversary, and our success is due to Betsy's vision and leadership and the powerful voice that has evolved for standards within higher education.

PESC's mission, which has remained solid since its foundation, focuses on three main areas: controlling costs, improving service, and attaining interoperability. The board believes that all PESC activities be measured against these criteria to ensure a balanced approach to standards setting. In today's market with continuous advancements in technology, decision makers must ensure that what is being built is reusable and can be built upon. Many hyped up initiatives carry proprietary interfaces and may provide much needed short term benefit. In the long run however, proprietary initiatives and the tools required to support them, cannot evolve or be built upon, or cannot be cost-justified to do so. A short term benefit may also carry with it a short shelf life.

To maximize investment, this situation requires that decision-makers choose products, services, and interfaces strategically, choosing ones that make sense for today and for tomorrow. Using standards satisfies these conditions and meets these needs. Standards allow trading partners to be able to connect more efficiently and enable faster implementations and shorten the ramp-up time for new trading partner relationships. Over time, the cost savings can be tremendous.

For the higher education community to experience the long lasting benefits of industry standards, we must leverage the voice of the Standards Council in working together to ensure that the role of standards is understood and fully supported. Without such collaboration and without standards, trading partners, service providers, schools, and vendors will experience disjointed communications at a cost that is much higher than you would ever imagine. Betsy’s vision and PESC’s mission have held true for five years, and we believe they will hold true for the next five and beyond.

Sincerely,

Keith Riccitelli
Chair
PESC Board of Directors
Interview with...

Theresa Shaw
Chief Operating Officer
Office of Federal Student Aid

Theresa S. ("Terri") Shaw assumed the position of Chief Operating Officer in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) on Sept. 16, 2002.

Before entering federal service, Shaw served as executive vice president and chief operating officer of eNumerate Solutions, Inc., a start-up technology firm in McLean, Va., from 2000 to 2002. Prior to that, she worked for SLM Corporation (Sallie Mae) since 1988, advancing to the position of senior vice president and chief information officer in 1999.

Now that you have had a chance to get a feel for the post, what do you see as the challenges?

We run a very large operation and we have some “to dos” in terms of bringing our systems and the technology platforms that they sit on into a state of currency. The challenge is running our operation every day in a seamless, high-quality manner and while still working on bringing everything up to date. It is similar to driving a car and trying to change the tires at the same time while not causing a crash.

Will FSA continue to communicate its IT strategy through the Modernization Blueprint?

We will probably not communicate the IT strategy through the Modernization Blueprint as it currently exists. We will probably be re-formulating that a bit to take into account the planning process that we have just been through and how all that integration and technology platforming plays out with our planning process. We will be coming out with our plan for which systems we are going to tackle this year for integration and technology currency. It probably will not be in the exact format that has been put out in the past.

I assume it will still be distributed through the website and to other partners in the community?

I certainly will be communicating what we are doing. People want to know what we are doing—what actions, what projects, and what initiatives we are going to be undertaking that help them provide good customer service. We will be communicating and putting information forth.

Steve Hawald was recently elected to PESC’s XML Forum for Education Steering Committee. What other involvement does FSA have in the overall community’s development of standards?

The Common Record was a collaborative project from the beginning. Representatives from the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHELP) and PESC attended Common Origination and Disbursement development meetings during the design phase of the Common Record. During these meetings, the group was able to identify a basic structure that worked for all aid programs and organizations—the structure that is in use today.
In addition, the Common Record-COD schema was formally submitted to the PESC Technology Workgroup for review. This review was very helpful and several recommended changes were made before the final schema was released. FSA also has been working informally with the Electronic Standards Council (ESC) as they work to incorporate FFEL data into the PESC Core Components Dictionary and create the Common Record-FFEL and Alternative Loans schema.

FSA also has formal membership on several of the PESC workgroups (Core Components, Technology, and Technical Architecture) and shares with these groups what has worked well and lessons learned in the XML world. Today, FSA is a member at the PESC table as stakeholder standards groups (Admissions, Registrars, K-12, CommonLine, Meteor, and FSA) work together to create an XML standard for higher education.

What role do you see standards playing within FSA?

One of our key initiatives is to work with the community on XML standards. We, just as everybody else, are interested in standardization to drive away complex processes and to streamline work. Certainly the exchange of information electronically in a common format eases the burden everybody has for receiving and processing that information. I think we are all interested in that and we support commonality and standardization on those kinds of things.

When you can set a standard for two or more parties to communicate with each other, electronically or otherwise, it is certainly much easier to affect that communication and have a common understanding of the information that is being communicated. I see standards playing a very important role not only in FSA, but in how we are going to work with others in the community.

If everyone is trying to be the Baskin Robbins of communication and support all 31 flavors of everything it’s complex, it has a lot of overhead, it’s very expensive, and it has a lot of room for error. I think we are all interested in reducing all of the above.

What is your vision of the ongoing relationship between FSA and PESC and where do you see it in the future?

I think they are working pretty well together right now. I think we have a good relationship with PESC as evidenced by Steve’s recent election to the Steering Committee. I think we have a fine relationship and will keep working on developing that in the future.

FSA and PESC have worked very closely together on Common Record. Do you envision bringing similar efforts into collaboration on projects such as ISIR and NSLDS?

At the start of the project, Student Information System vendors, state agencies, and schools were asked "What do you want us to know/keep in mind as we develop the XML ISIR?" In addition, because the ISIR contains loan aggregate data, a Meteor representative has been invited to attend the XML ISIR meetings to ensure continued consistency. Finally, FSA is mindful that the basic business structure of the ISIR and CommonLine share some similarities. Where it is appropriate, we are working to create consistency.

NSLDS & NSLDS II efforts have included FSA Regional Office workshops for guarantee agencies and lenders, and we have provided workshops at each of the Electronic Access Conferences. NSLDS staff have presented project updates to NCHELP management, membership and Electronic Standards Committee, ELMNet membership, the National Student Clearinghouse Board, and the Consumer Bankers Association Board. A number of industry representatives from schools, lenders, and guarantee agencies have been contacted for information, insight, and advice regarding current operations and future direction.
CommonLine, Common Record convergence moves forward

Members of the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs’ Electronic Standards Committee (ESC) have reached another milestone in the development of a reengineered CommonLine process for convergence with the Department of Education’s (ED) Common Record. On Nov. 11, 2002 the team presented its reengineered process to a group of SIS vendors, schools, ED and members of the Electronic Standards Steering Committee.

The proposal was well received by the participants and the ESC is moving forward with the development of the new standard. Written comments on the proposal were submitted to the ESC and analyzed over the past several weeks. All of these items were brought to closure on a follow-up call with the schools and vendors on Dec. 9, 2002. The final step in the proposal is to receive written commitment from the vendors on their intent to support and implement the reengineered process.

The ESC will begin development of the technical documentation later this month. Completion of the first draft is expected in April of 2003 with final documentation ready for June 1, 2003. Members of the ESC, schools and systems vendors are in support of implementing the reengineered process for April 2004, in time for the 2004-2005 processing season.

The fundamental changes in the reengineering proposal are as follows:

• Streamlining the application and disbursement processes to allow for both batch and real time processing using the XML-based Common Record structure.

• Completely revising the change processing standards from a transaction based model where schools are required to stipulate the exact transactions they want their service providers to process, to a model where the school is only required to report the data elements that have changed on a student’s record. This process will greatly simplify processing for vendors and schools and hopefully will encourage more electronic processing.

A copy of the proposal and the written comments and their responses are available on the ESC’s page of the NCHelp website at www.nchelp.org/committees/e_standards/esc.asp.

“The nice thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from.”

Continuing in its leadership role as a hub for data exchange within higher education, Ted Pfeifer, Registrar of the University of Texas at Austin, issued the following statement to PESC regarding the University’s plans for continued support of EDI and expected XML data exchanges:

“The University of Texas at Austin is a member of and active participant in the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council and XML Forum. As with other operational and technical issues relating to the UT Austin Internet Server, it is our intention to keep current with electronic data exchange formats endorsed by PESC and approved by ANSI. Barring unforeseen circumstances, we will continue to offer the level of service currently provided while keeping pace with advancements in applicable technologies and delivery mechanisms.”

Thank you to Ted and the University of Texas at Austin for serving as a champion and proponent of standards in higher education! We appreciate all you do!
PESC is pleased to announce that its annual conference on eStandards in Higher Education for 2003 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. Conference and hotel registration information will be made available after the first of the year, so stay tuned. The conference will be preceded with meetings on Tuesday of PESC’s membership and the XML Forum.

A conference committee is being formed to help develop the agenda, program, and sessions for the conference. The first conference committee meeting will be held in January. PESC is also looking to see if members, affiliates, and other organizations are interested in sponsoring events and items for the conference (such as breakfasts and breaks). Individuals interested in either serving on the conference committee or in sponsoring the conference should contact Michael Sessa at Sessa@StandardsCouncil.org as soon as possible.

New for next year: PESC is partnering with the Education Finance Council (EFC) which will hold its Technology Conference at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town as well, immediately preceding PESC’s conference and meetings. EFC’s conference will start on Monday, May 5 at 8 AM and will conclude at 11 AM Tuesday, May 6. While two separate conferences, the opportunity to partner allows those interested to spend a few days focusing on technology issues important to various areas of higher education. Separate registrations as well as a joint registration will be made available.

PESC is pleased to announce that its first meeting of the XML Forum in 2003 will be held on the campus of the University of California at San Francisco starting from 9 am on Monday, February 10 and concluding at 5 pm on Tuesday, February 11. The campus site where we’ll be meeting is located in Laurel Heights, a historic part of San Francisco, and is within walking distance of many shops and restaurants that overlook the Bay. A hotel block has been secured at The Laurel Inn, located directly across the street from the campus. Registration forms and information are available on PESC’s website at www.StandardsCouncil.org.

Special thanks to USA Funds for sponsoring this meeting of the XML Forum, which allows fees for attending this meeting to be waived; and to Carrie Steere-Salazar, Director of Student Financial Services at UCSF, and her staff for supporting this meeting of the XML Forum. With the expected release of the XML Postsecondary Transcript, the completion of version 1.0 of Core Components, an updated XML Technical Specification, and an agreed upon plan for CommonLine and Common Record convergence, this meeting is one you won’t want to miss!

The first annual "AACRAO Technology Conference: Implementing Technology in Student Systems and Service," will be held Oct. 19-21, 2003 in Austin, Texas.

EDI and XML standards building and implementation will continue to be a strong presence in the AACRAO Technology Conference. However, new tracks are being added to identify and explore other technologies and initiatives. While the conference will certainly be "forward looking," much of the emphasis of the conference will be on implementation.

Dave Stones of Southwestern University (formerly of U. of Texas at Austin) has been asked to coordinate the AACRAO Technology Conference. Although Dave has formed a program advisory board and will soon issue a call for papers, he welcomes any suggestions or input you might have regarding the conference (stonesd@southwestern.edu). Please visit www.aacrao.org during the coming months for more information.
**Workgroup sets out to identify institutional codes**

PESC held its first full meeting of its Single Institutional Identifier workgroup on December 12, 2002.

Members participating on the workgroup include representatives from the U. S. Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid, the National Student Clearinghouse, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), the CollegeBoard, ACT, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHELP), Miami-Dade Community College, and Southwest Student Services.

At this meeting, the workgroup focused on identifying the various codes currently used, how and why they are used and discussed the need for standard international codes.

For those not familiar with the topic, various codes are used for different business purposes, leaving schools with numerous codes that identify them.

As charged by the PESC Board of Directors, this group is identifying these codes, analyzing the feasibility of moving to a single standard and recommending future actions PESC should take. It is important to note, however, that the group is not charged with developing a code set.

For more information on this work group, contact Michael Sessa at sessa@standardscouncil.org.

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**In Memoriam**

PESC sends its heart felt condolences to the family of Greg Woods. Woods, the first person to head the U.S. Department of Education’s modernization efforts, was appointed Chief Operating Officer for Federal Student Aid Oct. 1, 1998. During Woods’ tenure FSA began the retirement and replacement of several of its legacy systems, implemented a FAFSA and renewal FAFSA on the Web, launched a PIN-based e-signature process and laid the groundwork for interoperability and standards development throughout higher education’s student loan community. While Woods will be missed, his commitment to students and the technology that serves them will long be the driving force behind FSA’s accomplishments.

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standard.

For service providers and vendors launching new products and services, building two standards simultaneously may be a difficult or even impossible. In these instances, an organization’s product development and prioritization process must be clean and efficient and must take into account when the product is to be launched and who would be most likely to use it. In depth customer surveys on development and industry readiness will provide a good snapshot of target markets and depending on the results, may give you your answer. PESC is planning to develop profiles on vendors to help the community understand and know what is supported and by whom.

EDI may seem like the right answer and may just be. But with several organizations lining up to implement XML, industry proliferation of XML may occur sooner rather than later. Are you ready?
The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S. Department of State recently published final and interim final regulations, respectively, governing retention and reporting of information for F, J, and M Nonimmigrants in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Included in the rules is confirmation of an institutional compliance deadline of Jan. 30, 2003. The complete Final INS regulations for reporting of information for F, J, and M nonimmigrants in SEVIS can be viewed at: www.aacrao.org/forms/uploadFiles/3E1200000131.pdf. The complete interim final U.S. Department of State rule can be viewed at: www.aacrao.org/forms/uploadFiles/3E140000025D.pdf.

Despite a GAO report published earlier this year cautioning government entities about the use of XML, Robert Haycock, manager of the Office of Management and Budget's E-Gov Office, told attendants during his keynote speech at the XML 2002 Conference and Exposition earlier this month that the federal government is looking at XML and web services as key technologies for system integration and interoperability. Haycock called XML and web services the “keys to the palace.” Haycock explained that XML is the heart of the Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA), OMB developed business-based framework for government-wide improvement and interoperability between systems in various government agencies. The FEA's Business Reference Model is out now, the Performance Reference Model will soon be out, and the three other reference models—the Service Component Reference Model, the Technology Reference Model and the Data and Information Reference Model—will be released by spring, Haycock said.

The OASIS interoperability consortium recently announced that its members have approved the ebXML Collaboration Protocol Profile and Agreement (CPPA) v2.0 as an OASIS Open Standard. ebXML CPPA defines business partners' technical capabilities and documents agreements between partners, enabling organizations to securely engage in electronic business collaboration. OASIS Open Standard also facilitates the migration of both traditional EDI-based applications and other legacy applications to ebXML-based platforms,” said Dale Moberg, chair of the OASIS ebXML CPPA Technical Committee.

The W3C Voice Browser Working Group has released a Last Call Working Draft of the "Speech Synthesis Markup Language Version 1.0." The essential role of the SSML markup language is to provide authors of synthesizable content a standard way to control aspects of speech such as pronunciation, volume, pitch, rate, etc. across different synthesis-capable platforms. A related initiative to establish a standard system for marking up text input is SABLE. Comments can be sent to W3C until Jan. 15, 2003.

OASIS announced the creation of a new technical committee, the e-Gov Technical Committee, devoted to e-government XML standards Dec. 5. The recommendations that the committee develops will be submitted to the OASIS working groups developing the standards. OASIS formed the committee to help ensure that XML schemas and emerging technologies relying on XML, such as Web services, are not developed solely for private-sector needs, according to the organization. The chairman of the committee is John Borras of the United Kingdom's Office of e-Envoy, and includes representatives from the U.S. General Services Administration and the Navy; the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation; the government of Ontario, Canada; and the U.K. Ministry of Defense.