



FSA *Now*

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Single Sign-On Makes Customers' Lives Easier

Imagine if you had to remember 26 usernames and 29 passwords to access 39 online systems just to do your job. This is a challenge faced by FSA staff and customers every day. But there is a solution in the making. Scheduled to go live in December of this year, FSA staff and the Modernization Partner are working on a new service called Single Sign-on. The Single Sign-on service will work with Web portals to provide students, schools, financial aid partners, staff and contractors with a single logon ID and password.

"Single Sign-on is great because it addresses our customer's pain, the pain of having to sign-on

multiple times and remember multiple passwords in order to do business with federal systems," said Neil Sattler, project director of Innovations and the project lead for Single Sign-on.

Single Sign-on will work with existing FSA portals in its implementation. The schools, students, financial partners and other portals will house the Single Sign-on dialog box that will allow a user to access all the sites he or she needs. The project is now in its second of four phases. The goal for this phase is to create a design plan for Single Sign-on. Phase 3 will begin testing Single Sign-on for selected FSA online systems.

FSA Makes Progress Toward Clean Audit

FSA is making headway in its goal toward getting a clean audit. "A clean audit is a seal of approval that our financial data is accurate, and this is the ideal for any organization," said Ron Ackerman, accounting procedures and treatment manager for CFO.

CFO has taken significant steps toward this ideal by improving its financial reporting process and financial management activities during fiscal year 2001. CFO has drastically reduced the number of material weaknesses in FSA's audit. A material weakness is a reportable condition significant enough to raise substantial questions about the integrity of the financial information being reported. In fiscal year 2000 FSA had 3 ma-

terial weaknesses and in fiscal year 2001 it was reduced to just 1 material weakness.

The hard work of the CFO team has led to this auditing improvement. They participated in the Management Improvement Team formed by Secretary Paige and worked with the Department on a monthly basis to reconcile discrepancies in the general ledger and prepare financial statements. They also performed detailed analysis of certain general ledger account balances to correct any unresolved differences. "The hard work of the CFO team has paid off by bringing FSA two steps closer to its goal of a clean audit," said Steve Arisumi, director of the FSA Financial Reports Division.

Ombudsman Office Connects with Kids

Joanne Gallasch's second grade class now calls some FSA staff their new friends. The class of 21 children located in Tacoma, Washington, received Valentine's Day cards from the Ombudsman staff as well as Jim Lynch, Jennifer Douglas and Sybil Phillips to kick off a new pen pal program. "It's an opportunity to connect with kids and expand the horizons of the students and our staff," said Connie Jesse, an ombudsman specialist.

The students in the pen pal program are from culturally diverse families. Almost all

of them know English as a second language. Their families speak Cambodian, Samoan, Vietnamese and Russian.

According to their teacher, "The culture these children bring with them is wonderful. I am learning way more than they are."

The letters the children send and receive will help them with their English skills while being a fun and exciting way to get to know people in an area of the country most of them have never seen. Some of the children's letters ask about the President or September 11,

while others students write about their family and the sports and games they like to play. Each student has received two responses to their letter and will soon be getting a letter and a picture from Secretary Paige. The students and staff will continue writing back and forth through the rest of the school year. "The program is a great way for FSA staff to help students while connecting with them on a personal level," said ombudsman Debra Wiley.

Schools Partnership Council a Success

The Schools Partnership Council is another tool FSA is using to help our customers. The Schools Partnership Council has been around since 2000 and demonstrates how FSA can improve customer satisfaction. The council works in partnership with schools to address their needs, by listening to what our customers want.

Karen Chauvin of Case Management and Oversight said that the council acts as a sort of field test to improve customer service. "When we are gathering information to create a document or procedure, we run it by the schools to see if it makes sense. And we get

suggestions from each other."

"The primary purpose of the Schools Partnership Council is to facilitate the collaboration between [FSA] and the schools to improve delivery of financial aid to the ultimate customer, the student," said council member Charles Johnson, Jr., the Dallas Area director for FSA programs.

Everything the council does comes back to learning from each other and believing that working in direct partnership with the schools is critical to improving customer service.

The success of the council can be attributed

to Victoria Edwards, acting Case Management director, who created the council in response to FSA's Customer Service Task Force. The Task Force, one of the PBO's first major initiatives, conducted over 200 face-to-face listening sessions with customers and partners.

Victoria said, "The value of this initiative is to learn from our customer so that we can better understand their needs and provide them with quality service."



Did You Know?

Denmark implemented a new financing system for higher education in 1994. In this new system, institutions are awarded a lump sum grant and are free to decide how to distribute the funds. As a result, if you get into a university in Denmark, you owe no tuition fees. Admission to a Danish university is split up into two different requirements. To meet the first type, the applicant must obtain a certain score on a Danish qualifying examination. The spots open in the second type are for other applicants who either meet the admission requirements or are found able to complete their chosen course of study based on other qualifications like grades, special circumstances or lower admissions requirements for non-academic programs.

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Department Teams Creating Human Capital Plan

The workforce takes front and center stage in the Department's new strategic plan (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/stratplan2002-07/stratplan2002-07.doc>). To help make the Department citizen-centric and results-oriented, FSA has joined several agency-wide teams: human capital, strategic sourcing and restructuring. Together, these teams will create a five-year plan to implement those three initiatives from the President's Management Agenda (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2002/mgmt.pdf>) in the Department.

The human capital team is exploring how to improve the skills of the staff; how performance management systems can maximize staff performance; how to recruit, hire, develop and retain high-performing employees; and how to create a culture of performance.

"The Department is working with the Private Sector Council and the National Association of Public Administrators to bring in best-in-business organizations in the area of human capital management for us to talk to," said Sarah Babson, one of the FSA representatives on the human capital team. "I've relished the opportunity to really pick the brains of people who are tops in their field. I've also been able to share a lot with my fellow team members about what we've been doing in FSA. Those are the moments when you realize just how much we have done and how proud you are of your organization."

The strategic sourcing team is examining the Department's work to organize it for maximum efficiency and productivity. Denise Leifeste, the FSA staffer on the team, said, "We're looking at the functions that we perform in the agency at a very high level to create a five-year plan for what the Department should look like."

The restructuring team is aligning the organization's structure with our strategic goals. "We'll make recommendations for how the Department should be organized to improve efficiency," said John Mondragon, the FSA representative for the team.

"The teams are just beginning to look at these issues and how to improve performance across the Department," said Calvin Thomas, director of human resources and FSA lead for the human capital project. "As we go forward, pieces of the plan will begin to develop more concretely. We'll keep you informed every step of the way."

A History Lesson

In 1965, Congress took a tremendous step toward providing everyone in America with an equal opportunity to earn a college education. **The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA)** aims to strengthen the nation's colleges and universities by providing funds to create new programs. It also provides students with the means to go to college, most notably in Title IV, which mandates federal student aid programs. Recent additions to the HEA have gone even further by adding new programs like distance learning for disabled students and by building upon existing programs, like adding Direct Loans to Title IV.

A reauthorization of The Higher Education Act in 1998 broke FSA out of the Office of Postsecondary Education and **made FSA the first performance-based organization**. FSA now administers Title IV of the HEA. Our role is directly related to the original intention of the Higher Education Act of 1965 – to help students meet the costs of pursuing a postsecondary education.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

The Students Portal, a one-stop Web site for students interested in education beyond high school, is scheduled to debut at the end of April. The URL will be www.studentaid.ed.gov.

Steve Hawald was honored as one of the Top 100 Federal Executives for 2002. The *Federal Computer Week* award is based on outstanding contributions to federal information technology during 2001. On March 11, Steve received the award for his leadership in planning and implementing a modernization program that is benefiting colleges, universities and financial partners participating in Title IV student aid programs.

FSA CIO is sponsoring a one-day "open source" technology conference in partnership with the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council. Chief information officers from colleges and universities, as well as technology executives from the higher education community, will attend the conference in Arlington, Va., on May 8.

We asked FSA staffers . . .

What do you think is the coolest job in FSA?

My FSA



I believe my job is the coolest in FSA. I visit schools to determine if they are in compliance with Title IV regulations. It sounds dull, but all too often I find dishonest school owners who are stealing education from students and money from taxpayers — that's us! One of the few ways to identify that false documents are indeed false is to interview students. Working with our AAAD adjunct and OGC

I often drive over mountainous terrain and into barrios and projects looking for students. I have met some of the most delightful and interesting people and have also heard some of the saddest stories and seen poverty we think only happens in Third World countries. So often these students have told me they knew something was wrong but didn't know who to call and didn't think anyone would listen anyway. They are so grateful that someone is looking out for their interests. This type of review often results in an Administrative hearing. One of our greatest rewards came last summer, during a case against a particularly unscrupulous school owner. He coerced students into signing false documents countering our allegations and bribed others not to cooperate with us. Four students, despite threats from the school owner, flew to Washington to testify for us and against the school. Some had never been on a plane or even out of their small town. Those students were such heroes it made me feel really good about the work I do. Oh yes, and we won the case!

— *Patricia Edelson, New York Case Management*



I want to have Mary K Muncie's job because Mary K puts the rock in the Student's Channel.

— *David Rippon, Washington, DC, Director of Student Affairs*

Thinking over your question of what the coolest job in FSA is and why, for several reasons I can't come up with one specific area in FSA and say that is the coolest job. I think working for the Department of Education is the coolest mission in the federal government and that's one of the reasons I haven't looked elsewhere for work. In FSA there are many employees who come to work day in and day out who have worked for FSA for over 15, 20, 25 years. These are the people who don't carry the really cool titles: director, manager or chief. These are the ones who've topped off at the GS-12 and without complaint continue volunteering to share their ideas for improving FSA. These are the *subtle* employees who inconspicuously reach out to schools and students on a daily basis patiently answering regulatory, policy, technical and process driven questions. I can tell you who the coolest employees are in FSA, and although they are in the least visible positions, they are the ones who make FSA shine.

— *Lori Rehfeldt, Washington, DC, Title IV Delivery/Call Center*

I don't think any one particular job in FSA is the "coolest." We all work together to achieve the "coolest" result — helping someone achieve his or her educational dream. We all have to communicate and work together to make this happen. With that in mind I think that one of the more important roles in FSA is the voluntary role of the Internal Communicator. Communication has a direct impact on performance and end results.

— *Kerry O'Brien, Denver Case Management Team*

Working in FSA HR [in DC]. With their window view of the lobby and courtyard, they see everyone when they come in and when they leave.

— *Kristin Rainey and Ryan Raffaelli, Washington, DC, Mod Partners*

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Get all the latest on FSANet.



<http://fsanet.ed.gov>

Coming Next Month...

Part 2 of the History Lesson on the Higher Education Act

&

FSA's Latest Online Innovations