FSA Now

The Monthly Newsletter for FSA Staff & Operating Partners

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FSA Unveils New Portals

New Portal Brings Financial Aid Information to Students

On April 30 the Students Channel launched the first release of the Students Portal—an online clearinghouse of financial aid and higher education information. The portal serves as a one-stop-shop on just about everything a student needs to know for education beyond high school.

Through the portal, students are able to find information on issues like standardized tests, schools that participate in Title IV, careers, applying for college, employment during school, and state and federal financial aid. The portal was conceived, designed, developed and tested with students in mind—and students have been involved in the entire process.

"Students and parents can easily access FSA through one online entry point and get the information they need, when they need it," said Jacqueline Dufort, an operating partner and content manager for the site.

As part of FSA's modernization efforts, the portal is designed to complement other education sites and FSA products. While students.gov gives college students a gateway to the federal government, the Students Portal focuses on FSA and higher education resources. The portal also supports the Consistent Answers project by giving the public one source of consistent, accurate information.

"Our customers have told us that they want information streamlined," said Adam Essex, the acting system security officer. "And we're listening to them!"

To learn more, visit the Students Portal at http://www.studentaid.ed.gov.

Financial Partners Portal Opens Door to Information

The Financial Partners portal just went live on April 30, but it has already received lots of positive feedback. The portal was created to bring all of the necessary financial partners data into one area for use by both external customers and FSA staff. "The main objective was to create a simple, easy-to-navigate, lending community gateway," said Johan Bos-Beijer, Financial Partners deputy general manager.

According to Jackie Anderson, Financial Partners project team member, "The portal provides detail-level features, information, design and functionality for all of our financial partners. We really needed to give the community an easy-to-use view into our world and theirs."

Users will be able to access important financial partners data, such as updates of division projects, calendar activities and links to FSA business systems. There are also links to other sites that the community indicated were important, such as the FP Data Mart, FMS and NSLDS.

The portal was tested recently by members of the financial community and received praise. One tester said, "It's great. The navigation is easy and the layout is attractive." Another user said, "I think the portal will be a great resource for the community. The fact that we can link and the data is 100% relevant is a great accomplishment."

The Financial Partners staff is thrilled with the success of the test. "We are very excited at the opportunity this project provided for us to work hand-in-hand with our community members. The project also enabled us to establish a dynamic team comprised of FSA staff, Mod Partner members and active participants from our community," said Johan.

Customers Click Instead of Lick

New Payment Service Lets Customers Repay Online

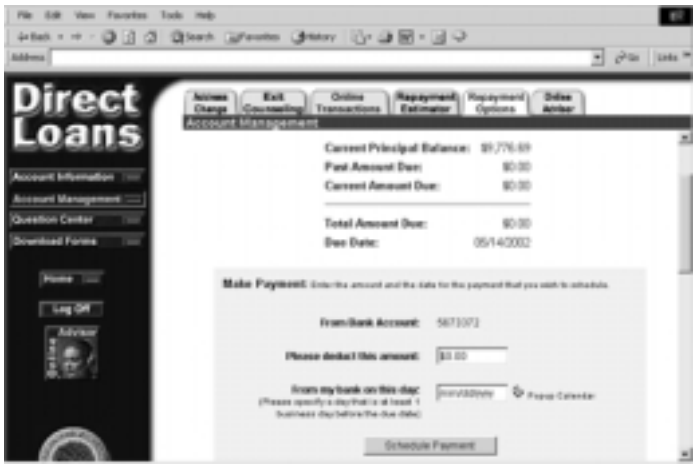
Direct Loan customers can now kiss stamps goodbye. In the next step toward modernization, FSA and our Modernization Partner launched the first stage of eServicing last month, a service that eliminates the paper process for Direct Loan borrowers who choose to pay back their loans online.

"This service will save borrowers a lot of time – just two clicks and their bill is paid," Stacy Roux of Accenture said.

eServicing saves time and money for the customer and FSA. The first service, Electronic Bill Presentment and Payment, allows borrowers to view their bills and make payments on the Direct Loan Web site. The second, Electronic Correspondence, lets borrowers receive their Direct Loan correspondence through e-mail. Borrowers can access both of these services through the Direct Loan Web site – http://www.dl.ed.gov.

"I see eServicing helping borrowers make payments on time and more often," said La Teata Jackson of Direct Loan Servicing. "It is easier to make an electronic payment than it is to write a check, put it in an envelope, buy a stamp and drop it off at the post office."

Electronic Bill Presentment and Payment and Electronic Correspondence were launched on March 24, and the first customer used the service on March 26 to pay back a lump sum for his entire $77,000 worth of loans.



Customers can view their balance and amount due, and sched-

The tools for the second phase of eServicing, Electronic Customer Relationship Management, were deployed to Direct Loan Servicing Centers in April. By the end of the summer, 700 customer service representatives will be using this tool to deliver consistent, complete and accurate information.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

This year's **NASFAA conference** will be held July 21-24 in **New Orleans, LA**. For FSA staff attending the NASFAA conference, a block of rooms is reserved at the government per diem rate at the Ritz Carlton, located approximately four blocks from the conference hotel. If you have any questions please contact Dottie Black.

You can find more information on this year's NASFAA conference at http://www.nasfaa.org.

A History Lesson: HEA

Part 2 in a 3 Part Series

Congress anticipated social change when it passed the Higher Education Act in 1965 and added a provision requiring reauthorization of the Act every five years. Reauthorizations have since changed many aspects of the HEA. The same standards still apply today — improving institutions as learning centers, improving teaching quality and distributing money to exceptional students — but higher education has changed since 1965, and the reauthorizations have adapted to the changing standards.

For example, Title VIII now consists of 11 new sections providing aid for groups the original act didn't include. There is a provision that gives grants to states so incarcerated youths can get a postsecondary education while in jail. Another section allows the Education Secretary to set aside money for nonprofit organizations established to research and collect artifacts relating to the Underground Railroad.

Look for the final history lesson on the HEA in next month's *FSA Now*.

FSA*Now*

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FSA Now is monthly newsletter for FSA staff and operating partners available on FSANet. To share feedback or contribute ideas, email FSA Communications, or contact Lisa Cain at (202) 377-4003.

MyFSA

My FSA sat down with Marianella Garcia of Student Aid Awareness to talk about the new Students Portal.

Q: What was your role in the creation of the Students Portal?
A: I was there from the beginning, when we started brainstorming before the portal project was underway and, later, I provided some of the content—specifically, *The Student Guide* and *Funding Your Education*.

Q: What do you think is the best individual feature of the Students Portal?
A: I can't think of just one feature. I'd have to say two. The first one is personalization; users will get what they need and want from the portal. They won't have to get lost in the site or have to go through page by page to find something useful and relevant to them. The second feature that I like is that it's made for students of all ages. Students and their parents can start using the portal in the eighth grade. I also like that there is a Spanish version available, and that it's being release at the same time as the English version.

Q: What is your opinion of the Students Portal overall?
A: For a first release, it's great! A lot of feedback is expected from many students and that will make the portal even better. This portal is truly a collaborative effort between FSA staff and the Modernization Partner. You get a much better product when you work as a team, with the same goal in mind...help students!

Q: How will the Students Portal contribute to the goals of the Students Channel and FSA as a whole?
A: It will increase customer satisfaction, reduce unit costs and increase employee satisfaction. Unit costs will be reduced because students will be able to access publications and other information online rather that requesting it by mail or waiting for their schools to get copies. It will increase employee satisfaction because employees and Modernization Partner staff developed it; it contains information we think is relevant.

ED and FSA employees can also use it as a one-stop-shop resource. We can see our work as a whole.

Q: How will the Students Portal help our customers?
A: Because of personalization, they will be more involved in the federal student aid process and get the information they need and want. A personalized portal makes the government more approachable. FSA will show one face to the public, and customers won't have to be looking all over for information and only be able to get it bit by bit.

For those who opt out of personalization, well, they are the lucky ones who get to see all of it.

This is the first time all federal student aid information is in one place and that is a very helpful tool in making FSA more within our customer's reach and not have them feel they are just another number in another government bureaucracy.

Coming Next Month...

The Electronic Records Management Project,

The Consistent Data Initiative

&

Part 3 of the History Lesson on the Higher Education Act