



# FSA *Now*

The Monthly Newsletter for FSA Staff & Operating Partners

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## Learning! Circles! Action!

In September, FSA University launched Action Learning Circles, a new support service for FSA managers.

The program's purpose is to create learning/problem-solving teams that address real work issues and discuss possible solutions. Managers also learn peer-consulting skills and establish informal networks for personal and professional development.

Participants spend their first three group sessions with a facilitator leading discussion; after the third session, participants control the circle. There is currently one peer-led group, which consists of eight managers from various FSA channels. The group meets monthly to discuss business and managerial issues the members regularly

encounter.

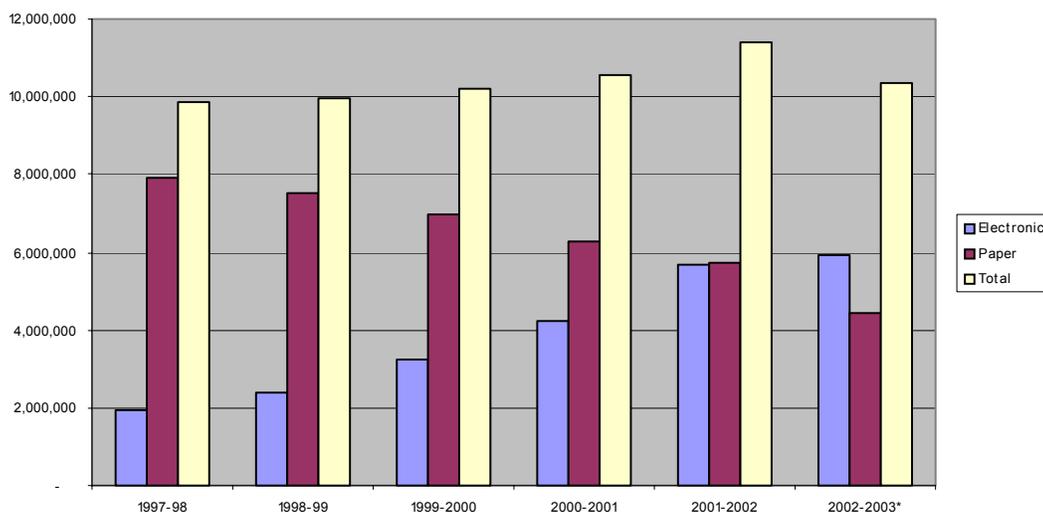
"The Action Learning Circle has definitely been a worthwhile learning experience for me," said FOIA and Privacy Act Fulfillment Team Lead Candice Parrish. "Being in this circle with a group of my peers addressing day-to-day business challenges has helped me to resolve some managerial problems that I didn't know how to face or deal with. I am very excited about the circle and I encourage other managers to get involved to improve their leadership skills and management performance."

In addition to Action Learning Circles, FSA University provides many other manager training services, available through the FSA Manager Excellence

*Please see Learning, page three*

## FAFSA Electronic Submissions on the Rise

Comparison of Electronic vs. Paper Applications



# Fun & Fellowship

FSA University and the Schools Channel hosted the first annual FSA Share Fair and grand opening of the Learning Center on October 2, 2002. FSA staff gathered in the UCP lobby from 10 am to 2 pm to learn about the functions of groups within and affiliated with FSA.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), Communications, Financial Partners Channel and the Health Unit, among others, gave short presentations and informational brochures explaining their services. Nurse Pietz of the Health Center focused her presentation on lifestyle keys to good health and long life and also performed blood pressure screenings for Share Fair participants.

The Ombudsman's Office shed light on their responsibilities in FSA. Ombudsman Specialist Connie Jesse said, "The purpose of our

display is to let people know what we do. We handle all aspects of student loans including collection practices and account balancing." The Share Fair also featured FSANet and the Financial Partners Portal and Data Mart.

Jenny Smith of the CFO Channel said, "We are here to discuss our vision, and the optimal goal is to progress to a clean audit."

The Share Fair gave FSA staff an opportunity for fun and fellowship and allowed the staff to learn the inner workings of the organization. The Share Fair provided a short refresher course on the goals of each office in order to keep FSA focused on its collective goals as an organization.



*The competition for prizes at the FSA Share Fair was intense, as Students Channel's Lisa Howell proves during a game led by the Schools Channel's Robb Browning. Barbara Morgan, Schools, waits for her turn in the hot seat.*



*Attending the FSA Share Fair are (clockwise from above): Dena Bates, Students, and Molly Rouse, Accenture; Calvin Thomas and Julie Mattingly, Human Resources; and Connie Jesse, Ombudsman.*



## FSA Now

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Program. Some of these services include team-building support, small-group coaching and "Practice Fields," a facilitated peer group in which members discuss an agreed-upon topic. The most popular service though, is individual coaching. This service develops "coaching" relationships between FSA managers and professionals, similar to the relationship between a coach and an athlete.

"We wanted to focus on performance and accountability for real work in FSA," commented FSA University Deputy Director Bill Ryan about manager training. "We believe the best value we could offer managers was not a long series of in-class experiences unconnected to real work, but a single introductory session focusing on the idea of performance accountability, followed by ongoing performance support options. Managers pick what they need, when they need it. Learning Circles are one example."

For more information on manager training, contact FSA University's Bill Ryan.

# Senior Managers Deciding FSA Priorities for 2003

Have you noticed a strange quietness in FSA on Wednesday and Friday mornings? That's because senior managers were gathering for the past month to create FSA's strategic plan for fiscal year 2003.

"In the past, each channel or enterprise area decided on their projects for the year. Those were rolled up into our Performance Plan," said Cyndi Reynolds, director of FSA Performance. "This year, we're working as a team to decide on the overall strategic priorities for the organization."

In addition to determining the strategic goals for FSA as a whole, managers still brought their areas' projects to light. Projects that address our strategic goals were ranked according to value to the organization and urgency. These were cross-checked against Departmental priorities as outlined in the ED Strategic Plan and the President's Management Agenda. For example, projects that help FSA achieve a clean audit and get off the GAO high risk list received a higher priority. As the list of priority projects developed, managers aligned costs with our budget.

Once the whole process is complete, FSA will have a coordinated, strategic plan outlining our priorities for the year and guiding our work. Stay tuned for more details as the plan is finalized.

## **EXTRA! EXTRA!**

### **New CFO Announced**

Effective Nov. 3, 2002, Victoria Bateman became FSA's new chief financial officer. Bateman most recently served on ED's Management Improvement Team, working to reconcile the old "feeder systems" (accounting systems) into the new ED and FSA financial systems. She previously worked at FSA as the director of Financial Management and served as a financial advisor to the assistant secretary during the creation of the Direct Loan program.

### **Lender Reporting System Online**

On October 1, the Financial Partners Channel released the online Lender

Reporting System (LaRS). LaRS is the culmination of the Lender Redesign project, an initiative to modernize and simplify the lender reporting process. This new system converts major transactions with financial partners from paper-based to electronic processes, such as replacing the 799 billing form. It also improves FSA's ability to evaluate guaranty agency and lender performance by increasing data accuracy and making the data available at a faster rate.

### **FSAnet Demonstrations**

FSA Internal Communications is conducting demonstrations of the new FSAnet at different channels' monthly staff meetings. The goal of the demonstrations is to educate

FSA employees on how to use the intranet and highlight some of its new features. If your channel is interested in a demonstration, contact Lisa Cain.

### **Three Conferences Scheduled Before End of Year**

ED is hosting two Electronic Access Conferences (EACs) this fall. The first was held in Orlando on November 4-7. The second will be held in Las Vegas on December 3-6. Following the first EAC, FSA CIO hosted its Software Developers Conference on November 8, in Orlando. This conference is designed for third party software developers who create financial aid software for schools.



# My FSA

## **My FSA spoke with Lorenzo Moore from CIO about his October 30th lunch with Secretary Paige**

**Q: Why did you want to attend the lunch with Sec. Paige?**

A: This was an opportunity to meet a government official who is actively shaping the future of our country through knowledge. I believe that our knowledge base motivates our actions.

**Q: What new information did you learn at the lunch?**

A: I met other employees from the department and learned of their daily challenges. I also learned that the lunch is not just a photo opportunity; I felt that Secretary Paige's questions were a sincere effort to improve the workings of the department.

**Q: What information did you share?**

A: Secretary Paige asked three questions. The first question was designed to give him a sense of who I am, so I gave him a quick bio. The second question was to suggest changes that will make the department a more appealing

place to work. I suggested that the job announcements should more accurately reflect the position advertised. The third question was what changes I would make if I were secretary. I said that my first task would be to hire him, or someone like him, because I am an information technology person with expertise processing top-secret information, and I would need someone with a better grasp of how educational programs work.

**Q: What did you learn about FSA's role in ED (or ED's strategic plan)?**

A: The time was limited, so our conversation was limited to answering the three questions the Secretary asked.

**Q: What was your favorite thing about attending the lunch?**

A: The fact that I was given the opportunity to speak to the Secretary.



*On October 30, FSA received the PostNewsweek Government Information Technology Agency Award. The award recognizes excellence in information resources management within government agencies. Selections are based on group performance rather than individual accomplishments.*

## ***Coming Next Month...***

An Explanation of FSA's Strategic Plan,

How to Achieve Clean Audits

&

My FSA interviews new CFO Victoria Bateman