

THE MISSION OF THE REGISTRAR TODAY

INTRODUCTION

What will be the role of the registrar in the future? This will not be a technical discussion but a philosophical one, intended to make you think about how the role of the registrar is evolving and changing. The future is not some far off event, but is an evolving present. The future is a journey that starts at the end of our toes each morning. Some registrars are concerned that because of the capabilities of computers, the registrar may not have a place in the future. I have a different view. To paraphrase Pogo from the comic strips, "I have seen the future, and it is us". Registrars need to consider their mission today in order to prepare for the future.

CAUSES OF CHANGE

In order to look at the changing mission of the registrar, we will look first at the causes of change, then look at the historical mission of the registrar, and finally at how the mission and functions of the registrar are changing.

Some people point to technology and computers as a cause for change on our campuses. Computers and record automation are not causing change, but are a result of change.

What are some of the factors causing change on our campuses?

Budget -- Campus budgets can certainly cause change. Tight budgets cause campuses to look for more efficient ways to accomplish tasks and provide better service. Better budget times result in expansion of services.

Demographics -- The changing composition of the student population, age, sex, nationality, and ethnic groups change the way that students are taught and the way services are delivered to them. For example, an older student population expects a different level of service. Changing from a primarily male to female population or having an increasing number of international students causes changes in the way the campus delivers services to students.

Legal Issues -- New laws change the way services and instruction are delivered to students. The Buckley Amendment had its effect on how we keep records, and the newer legislation regarding financial aid and reporting graduation rates will also change how we function as an institution.

Politics -- The concerns and attention of political leaders can change the way the campus operates. The views of government officials within the state or on governing boards can influence the direction of a campus. Changes in campus leadership can change the emphasis and types of service.

Service Expectations -- The competition for the best students and faculty require campuses to be more attune to providing improved services. The expectation for better service support changes the way we perform our duties.

Technology Availability -- As the prices of hardware and software come down and as new inventions present better ways of performing our functions, we take advantage of their capabilities in order to meet the needs of the changing environment of the campus.

There are many factors that cause change on our campuses. In general, students and faculty want more personal service and improved access to information. Technology is used as a way to improve service and access to information.

BASIC MISSION AND FUNCTION

What are the functions and duties of the registrar? There is always discussion among registrars about their diverse duties and sometimes good-natured humor about the fact that no one seems to know exactly what the registrar does for a living. Most registrars have a firm grasp of the basic functions of the position -- coordinating registration activities, keeping class rolls, recording grades, maintaining the permanent record, certifying enrollment, and issuing diplomas and transcripts. However, no two campuses will have the same combination of functions within the registrar's office, and when registrars get together, there is uncertainty about how much their offices do have in common.

*At one time,
the registrar did
everything ...*

*Technology can turn the
registrar into an invisible
entity on campus.*

*Will the registrar
disappear?*

There is a very good reason for the confusion about our mission and function. The beginnings of the registrar are described by C. James Quann and Associates in the book *Admissions, Academic Records, and Registrar Services*. The creation of the position dates back to the end of the 12th Century at three universities, Bologna in Italy, Paris in France, and Oxford in England (Quann, 1979, p. 4). The title of "registrar" first appeared at Oxford in 1446 (Quann, 1979, p. 5). At one time, the registrar did everything from admitting students, taking attendance, collecting tuition, selling books, distributing financial aid, paying faculty, keeping the minutes of faculty meetings, and making announcements in classrooms. Registrars were the original general purpose campus administrators. A study of possible registrar duties done by Floyd Barrett O'Rear, Ph.D. in 1925, includes a list of 359 tasks (O'Rear, 1925, pp. 53 - 60). If you look at the duties of registrars across the country today, you can still find remnants of odd combinations of responsibilities in the job descriptions.

Regardless of the mixture of responsibilities, one thing that all registrars share in common is that their primary func-

tion is to support the instructional mission of their institutions. This mission is accomplished through the functions of conducting registration and keeping the academic records.

As a result of technology, the registration and records functions are becoming more automated and the registrar is becoming a data manager. Data management is a wonderful responsibility for the registrar to have in the Information Age. However, there is danger lurking in the lure of technology. Technology can turn the registrar into an invisible entity on campus. As faculty and students gain more direct access to data, there is less need to come see the registrar. Is the registrar a necessary position? Will the registrar disappear?

EVOLUTION OF RECORD KEEPING

As we are propelled by change into the next century, we need to stop and take a look at how record keeping has changed to see where we should go in the future.

From the 14th through 18th centuries, the registrar kept student records in journals. The journals were safely locked away in their desks and offices. In the 19th century and early 20th century, handwritten records were kept on record cards and stored in file cabinets and vaults. By the 1950's, technology had advanced to the stage of using typewriters to make entries.

Many campuses saw an explosion of students in the 1950's. As registrars struggled to adapt to handle the large numbers of students on campus, they turned to technology to deal with the increasing volume. A number of the specialty areas such as admissions, housing, financial aid, faculty secretary, and bursar splintered off as the volume of activity became higher and more complex.

As the registrar's responsibilities were subdivided, the office was left with more low profile functions that did not require a skilled work force. As the registrar changed from campus administrator to records and registration technology expert, they have been seen more as student records specialists and have been losing their distinction as a faculty and academic service resource. Registrars now find themselves buried under layers of reporting officials and moved under non-academic divisions. At the same time, the heads of academic divisions are creating new positions, assistant vice presidents or assistant provosts, to provide the research and advice that registrars once provided. This may not be true everywhere, but there appears to be an alarming trend where the registrar is becoming an invisible administrator.

THE NEW ROLE OF THE REGISTRAR

Why should this be of concern? Why not be content with the role of data manager records specialist? Even as a records specialist, the registrar remains one of the few general purpose offices that works with a broad spectrum of people. The registrar is in the best position to coordinate campus-wide pro-

jects and this unique position should be used to best advantage for the campus. Campus operations are becoming more complex and there is a need for someone who can improve communication between faculty, students, and administrators, better coordinate interdepartmental activities, and encourage a service atmosphere. Teamwork between faculty, students, and administrators is paramount at a time when understanding and change are needed for the survival of educational institutions. Computers and technology offer faster and wider access to information by distributing availability to more people. However, these people must be ready to deal with the technology. The increase in speed and availability makes it more critical that systems are running properly and that the accuracy and security of the data are better managed.

The registrar works with students, instructors, departments, school deans, libraries, vice chancellors, the Student Affairs offices, the Alumni Association, the Development Office, the Athletic Office, the Budget Office, the Accounting Office, the Human Resources Office, and the Physical Plant. The registrar can practically open the campus phone book to any page and find an organization that depends on them for some type of information or coordination of activity. However, as long as registrars view themselves as just record keepers, this potential will never be realized.

Computers are transforming record keeping tasks from voluminous transactions that once required small armies of manual laborers into transactions that students and faculty perform for themselves. The service functions that exploded across campuses among various offices in the past, could fall back into a more centrally controlled academic services environment. Instead of disjointed offices passing students around, one office could coordinate providing services to students and faculty, while also ensuring that the technology supports the underlying system. This has the advantage of providing consistent, seamless quality service where information must flow from function to function.

It will take many years before campuses accept this global approach to service management. However, this approach is already possible with the tremendous growth of integrated data bases that are interactive with students and faculty. Vendors have already recognized the need to package student information system data bases with records, admissions, financial aid, and accounts receivable as integrated systems.

THE FUTURE CAMPUS INFORMATION SYSTEM

Think of the things that are already possible or soon to be possible. Students can shop for colleges based on information available in national data bases. Students can submit electronic admission applications, College Board test scores, and electronic transcripts from their high school or previous college. The electronic transcripts can be fed into an automated transfer course evaluation system and an automated degree audit system. These systems can match up course equivalents and degree requirements with the results being sent back to

students. The students then register from home through telephones or personal computers, and pay tuition through bank draft or by credit card by touch tone. Financial aid applications come from outside application resources that feed internal aid packaging programs that automatically transfer funds to the students' accounts. Students use information kiosks or touch tone phones to inquire schedules and grades, to update address information or to request transcripts.

Faculty will keep their grades in electronic grade books and submit grades electronically to the student data base. Departments will use fourth generation report writers and optical disk storage networks for access to institutional statistical reports. The one constant in this technological world is that there is input and output. The variables are the method of input and output, and who has access to the information.

Where is the registrar in this picture? This electronic future needs a high level coordinator whose job is to make sure the data specialists have the various functions working correctly (auditing the accuracy of data and enforcing privacy and records security) and provide well-trained staff that assists constituents (faculty, students, other campus administrators) with getting the information they need from the system. This person must be able to see the whole picture, look at the various processes that connect to each other, and assist students and faculty through the bottlenecks and complexities.

Does this sound familiar? This centralized service approach is the way registrars originally started. Registrars should be positioning themselves as academic service leaders and student information system leaders. Registrars need to reaffirm the faculty and student services component as well as the records technology component. Registrars now provide a service as the regulatory agency of campus academic policy. Most enforcement will be done in the future through controlling the data base. By controlling the information system, the registrar can monitor the creation of new courses and programs. They monitor grades and graduation. They protect the content and integrity of the academic transcript.

Because the registrar certifies the academic process, they need to stay close to the source of academic authority, the faculty and the chief academic officers of the campus. Many of the academic policies and decisions drive administrative functions. Administrative capability must also be factored into academic decisions. If the registrar does not adopt this campus role to serve faculty and students and be the leader in maintaining the student system, then someone else will and the present duties of the registrar will disappear in the next century.

THE SERVICE MISSION AND NEW SKILLS

What is the next step? While we may not be able to revise immediately the institution's organizational chart, we can focus our efforts on giving the institution the type of

leadership it needs. The registrar's mission statement can be a starting point for molding the future. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we developed a plan to redefine our mission through a new mission statement and develop a new philosophy. Our mission statement is attached to the end of this article.

Our mission statement recognizes that we are a record keeper and data manager for the institution, but it also recognizes our unique position. Our job is not only to enforce academic policy and but also make recommendations on policy. Because we work with both faculty and students, policy or procedural recommendations can be tempered with a concern for fairness to both students and faculty. We shifted our priority from record keeping to making service to students and faculty our first priority. Record keeping falls in place as an important function, but only when viewed in the larger context of providing service to our constituents. No matter how accurately or securely the records are kept, those records have little value if students, faculty, and other administrative offices can not obtain the information they need.

The service management philosophy has two important components. The first component is to put people first. Assess what constituents need. Select technology that helps people. The second concept is to recognize that the role of management is to support the service providers. Provide them with the knowledge and tools they need to get their job done. The service providers are the ones that actually represent the campus in their daily interactions with others.

First, the registrar must assess the needs of their constituents. Looking back at our roots, many registrars were faculty who took on the administrative functions. This tie to faculty is becoming weaker and weaker. The registrar must be proactive and seek meaningful contacts with faculty by attending faculty council meetings and reading current literature on higher education. The registrar can visit new faculty chairs or invite them to lunch or to the office. The registrar can ask to serve on campus committees, if not as a regular member, then as an ex officio member. This ability to write and communicate with the faculty is important to the success of the registrar. The registrar must have the ability to communicate ideas and have those ideas accepted, supported, and implemented.

The registrar should encourage contact and discussion with campus student leaders. Ask for student representation on committees when practical or at least seek the advice of students when planning changes in procedures or policies. Survey students that are passing through the office about the service. Ask for suggestions and implement them.

Second, the registrar can be of service by providing much needed leadership in coordinating campus projects that require teamwork from diverse groups. The registrar wears many hats and is in the best position to coordinate activities between faculty and students, faculty and administrators, students and administrators, and between administrators. The key is for the

registrar to look beyond departmental needs and to look at broad campus issues as their responsibility. There are very few people that can take on a campus leadership role and this role is missing on many campuses.

There is a difference between good management and good leadership. Management is doing things right, accomplishing goals. Leadership is doing the right things, setting the goals. Dr. Stephen R. Covey describes leadership in his training tape, "The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People". He describes a safari making its way through the jungle, hacking at the undergrowth with machetes. The managers are there giving encouragement, conducting machete technique seminars, and keeping the machetes sharp. The leader climbs a tree to take a look at the landscape and choose the right direction. The leader takes a look and shouts back to the managers, "Its the wrong jungle!". The managers shout back, "But we are making progress!". The registrar can be the best record keeper in the world, but if the registrar's office is not working toward campus objectives, the office is going in the wrong direction.

The registrar must use their special vantage point and look for trends and weaknesses on the campus and develop strategies to address them. Some trends are close to home, such as improving registration systems, shortening transcript production time, working on problems with the academic calendar or exam schedule. Some issues combine student and faculty interests like degree audit systems, automating or streamlining advising functions to allow faculty more time to talk with students, or improving communication with the Physical Plant to better coordinate classroom repairs and improve classroom conditions.

Some successful projects where registrars have brought together diverse campus groups have been: (1) chairing meetings of Student Information System Users groups with membership including the school deans, admissions, financial aid, cashier, housing office, Student Affairs, Campus Police, Student Infirmary, International Student Office, (2) calling meetings to coordinate activity with school level registrars; (3) acting as coordinator between administrative offices such as cashier and financial aid, and offices involved in year abroad programs, exchange programs, or off campus study programs; (4) serving as project heads for implementing campus card networks; or (5) being an advocate for campus wide microfilming or imaging systems.

Third, in order to have the staff prepared to carry out this mission, the registrar must be a model of time management. Set goals and priorities in order to do the right things and not just do things right. There is a great deal of literature on time management and goal oriented management. Just about any of them will work. The secret is to find one that makes sense and works for you.

One way to find the time to climb the trees and become more productive is through staff development and delegation

of duties. All the staff within the office must be well trained, motivated, and prepared to do their jobs. Good management techniques should be taught through training and professional development activities.

This training should be provided for every person in the office, not just the supervisory levels. Dr. Covey explains the importance of the goose and the golden egg. The goose is production capability which is the effort of the people in the organization. The golden egg is the production output, the service and goods provided. If you starve the goose, production suffers. By providing the staff with the knowledge and tools they need, then services will improve. The service provided by your staff will be as good as the support you give your staff.

Computer and communication skills are becoming a requirement to work in the registrar's office. Unskilled labor is no longer acceptable. The extent of knowledge required to be a registrar has gone up considerably in the past few years. The registrar and the management staff require a broad base of education in order to understand technology in the context of the educational process. The registrar also needs very specific knowledge in order to research and design systems and procedures that meet the needs of the faculty and students.

By having well-trained people at every level, this allows delegation of everyday decisions and tasks to more people. It leads to positions being upgraded with more interesting work and higher salary. In any case, the training gives people a sense of self-esteem and delegating meaningful tasks promotes job satisfaction.

This also means that organizational charts will change. There will be more assistant registrars or other comparable management level positions supervising automated functions in addition to those managing the service providers.

Well trained and motivated staff provide better service to students, alumni, and faculty, who respond more positively to the staff. This gives supervisory staff more discretionary time for planning. Supervisors and managers then spend more time climbing the trees and developing a direction for the office.

FUNCTIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

There are three important functions that the registrar of the future can perform as technology extends access to the system users.

First, the registrar can be a leader in the development of campus systems that tie the academic and administrative functions together. The registrar is in the best position to understand how information must pass through the initial entry points and be distributed to others. The basic student record maintained by the registrar has been the hub through which information has flowed to those that need it. The future indicates that there will be distributed client-server networks.

Someone must know who has what data, insure that the data is available, and that the integrated systems provide accurate and timely data. Poor systems design will be detected immediately because the faculty and students will be systems users. On-line registration systems are a good example of this. If the computer goes down or slows down, hundreds of campus administrators and thousands of students immediately notice the problems as they are trying to conduct their business.

The second function of the registrar is to validate the data that is flowing into and out of the system. Consistency in the coding of information becomes even more difficult and more critical as data comes into the system from more diverse sources. The old systems permitted only experienced clerks and processors to enter and access the data. Future systems will have information coming in from numerous sources like data services, students, faculty, and other administrators. The data flowing out of the system will be accessed by people not as familiar with the coding structure of the data elements. Inconsistency in the way the data is allowed to be stored will cause confusion for people trying to understand the information. The registrar enforces academic policy and data integrity through the maintenance of system controls.

The third function is to be a resource to all the system users of student information. Someone must help the users use the system. The registrar can provide the coordination of services to assist students and faculty members in understanding how to enter information, obtain information from the system, or deal with problems with the system. By working with the system users, the registrar can determine how well the system is functioning and recommend changes to continually upgrade the system to meet the demand of the system users. The integrity and accuracy of the information contained in the system will be determined by the training and preparation of the users of the system.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, when people in our profession discuss the future of the registrar, many think in terms of advancements in technology. There is no doubt that technology continues to change the way we do business and it is occurring at an accelerating pace. It is easy to become buried in the technology in order to stay competitive. If we concentrate only on technology, we will become invisible administrators. Our choice of technology should be determined by what technology supports the mission of the campus and not just the internal operation of our offices.

Technology will reduce the number of tasks and transactions we must perform. Our mission will be supported through the development of our offices to coordinate systems design, protect the integrity of the data, and help students and faculty interact with the information within our campus systems. This means moving from production line methodology to service methodology.

Campuses will need people who understand the educational environment, who understand the developing technology, who can see the big picture of how the campus must develop its people and use technology for better service, and provide leadership in helping the faculty accomplish the academic mission of the campus. Who better to supervise and perform these tasks than the registrar, the first general purpose administrator and original service coordinator for the faculty and the students?

The registrar must become the Renaissance manager, a person whose knowledge must span computer software, hardware, statistical analysis, accounting, quality service management, labor relations, human psychology, and motivation theory. The registrar is certainly a vital link in an institution's ability to meet its educational mission.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Jim Greene, University Registrar Emeritus, Georgia State University for his encouraging words to write this, to Tom Black, Associate University Registrar at UNC-Chapel Hill for the many ideas he contributed and the rest of the assistant and associate registrars at UNC-Chapel Hill for their thoughts and encouragement, to Bill Fierke, Associate Director, Admissions and Records, University of Illinois -Urbana/Champaign for his notes on the history of the registrar, and to the members of the Registrars of the American Association of Universities for their comments and suggestions.

References

Covey, Stephen R. 1990. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Provo: Covey Leadership Center.

O'Rear, F.B. 1925. *The Duties of the Registrar: An Analysis of the Work of the Registrar in Schools for Training Teachers in the United States, with a Development of Some Forms in Relation to Services Rendered*. Southwest Missouri State Teachers College. Springfield: Inland Printing Company.

Quann, C. J. and Associates. 1979. *Admissions, Academic Records, and Registrar Services. A Handbook of Policies and Procedures*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.