Frequently Asked Questions About:
the CMS/Student Administration System Implementation

1. What is a Student Administration system?
The Student Administration system is the software on which Admissions, Student Records, Student Financial Aid, and Student Accounts are processed. This system provides the student information that is used for such functions as registration, bill paying, and advising. As such, the Student Administration system is important in the activities of students, faculty, and staff.

2. Is the Student Administration system part of CMS?
Yes, the Student Administration system is one of three major systems that are included in what the CSU has called the Common Management System (CMS). The other two systems are the Finance system and the Human Resource system. Cal Poly implemented the Finance and Human Resource systems in 2001 and has been operating successfully with them since that time. All three systems are licensed by the CSU from PeopleSoft.

3. Why was PeopleSoft selected and who was involved in that selection?
PeopleSoft was one of only two companies which offered the full package of systems to support administrative functions in large universities. Between the two companies, PeopleSoft was offering current technology as well as a commitment to higher education. The other company, Systems and Computer Technology (SCT), had a good product but the product was aging. SCT was developing new products that were focused on smaller universities.

Cal Poly, working as a part of a task force formed by the Chancellor’s Office, took a lead role in the evaluation and selection of the PeopleSoft system. The Chancellor’s Office, based on recommendations from this task force and the campuses, made the final decision in 1998 to license the PeopleSoft product. This decision has been made for the CSU and it provides the system functionality we need at Cal Poly. The cost of maintaining all three major systems is a part of our annual budget, even now when we are operating only the Finance and Human Resource systems. In addition, we provide full resources and funding to maintain and support our current Student Administration system.

4. Is the CSU deferring implementation of the CMS systems?
During the 2003-04 budget presentation to the legislature, the Chancellor committed to the legislators that the CSU would endeavor to defer CMS implementation expenditures and he has reported deferrals this year totaling approximately $13 million. These deferrals were one-time efforts to respond to budget shortfalls in 2003-04. The Governor has proposed a $6 million reduction in CMS implementation expenditures in the 2004-05 proposed state budget presented to the legislature in January. The CSU plans to honor that
request and could defer as much as $21 million for 2004-05, including continued deferral of some of the expenditures deferred in 2003-04.

The CSU Chancellor’s Office has requested that campuses review CMS implementation plans and identify potential deferrals. Cal Poly, with the support of the Chancellor’s Office, has determined that it is in the best interest of the campus to continue its Student Administration implementation efforts and has proposed a funding plan that defers the cost of implementation.

5. Why does Cal Poly need a new Student Administration system?
Cal Poly’s current Student Administration system (called SCT Plus) is a main-frame system that has been in place for more than ten years. It was implemented at Cal Poly in collaboration with CSU Long Beach and CSU Los Angeles; both of the other campuses already have implemented the new PeopleSoft system to replace the old SCT Plus system. Cal Poly has enhanced our version of SCT Plus with more than 10,000 campus modifications (including data elements) to provide needed functionality.

The SCT Plus system originally was a 1970’s application built by Westinghouse that was subsequently marketed and supported by Information Associates. Information Associates was bought out by SCT. Recently SCT was acquired by Sungard.

SCT also has Student Administration systems called Banner and Matrix that they developed. In addition, Sungard markets its own Student Administration system as one of the core modules of their Integrated Financial and Administrative Solution (IFAS). While SCT has continued to provide basic support for the old Information Associates system, they are not actively enhancing the system as they are their other systems. This is not surprising given the age and base technology of SCT Plus.

The age of the SCT Plus product affects its available functionality and flexibility. One recent example of this is the new federal requirement that social security numbers not be used as the student identifier. The PeopleSoft Student Administration system was designed to use a simple assigned number as the student identifier. SCT Plus on the other hand was designed to use social security number as the student identifier. While SCT Plus recently upgraded to allow the use of an alternate number as the student identifier, we estimate that it would cost approximately $700,000 to make these modifications on campus.

In addition to the concern about the aging software system, the mainframe on which it operates will be supported by the vendor only through 2006. Both the operating system and the hardware itself will no longer be supported beyond that time and there currently is no other identified need for a mainframe operation on campus. The new PeopleSoft student administration system will run on UNIX servers, be hosted at a centralized data center, and is projected to require no additional campus funding. Our Human Resource and Finance applications currently run there as well.

For these reasons--the aging Student Administration system and the discontinuation of support for the mainframe and the operating system--in order to provide quality service to the students and the full campus community, Cal Poly needs to begin replacing the current system.

6. Will the new system have the same functions as the current system?
Yes, the new system not only will allow Cal Poly to support the current critical business processes and
functions, but it will be fully integrated with the Finance and Human Resources system as well as be consistent with the CSU data gathering and reporting requirements. The new web-based technology will allow students, faculty, and staff to have easier access and more timely information.

7. How much does it cost to implement a new system?
The CSU has licensed the PeopleSoft software and each campus, including Cal Poly, pays for the maintenance of the systems. The implementation of the PeopleSoft Student Administration system at CSU Long Beach cost approximately $12 million. Preliminary estimates of the cost to implement the CMS Student Administration system on the Cal Poly campus are as high as $14.4 million. This initial estimate is believed to be conservative and will be defined better at the conclusion of the “fit-gap” analysis which currently is underway. This analysis is helping to define the system functionality Cal Poly needs as well as refine the implementation cost estimates.

8. How can Cal Poly implement a new system that would cost as much as $14.4 million when we are having such severe budget cuts?
The decision to move forward with the implementation of the Student Administration system in these difficult budget times was hard and involved discussions with many people and groups on campus as well as at the Chancellor’s Office. The compelling issues included that Cal Poly cannot risk not having a valid reliable Student Administration system that is responsive to the functional needs and expectations on campus and that waiting to implement the new system would cost more due to continued maintenance on the old system and rising costs for implementation support.

Cal Poly proposed that the implementation, which is a three-year process, start during the 2004-05 year but that the costs incurred for that implementation be paid over a five-year period following the implementation, a time when the budget climate should be better. The implementation has no impact on the Cal Poly base operating budget for 2004-05. This is a creative approach that allows Cal Poly to be assured that the Student Administration system needed to serve students, faculty, and staff on campus is in place and that the cost to implement it does not draw from the base budget during this time of severe budget reductions.

9. Should Cal Poly hire more faculty instead of borrowing money for the system?
As an entity of the State, Cal Poly has authority to borrow through what is called a Municipal Lease program for capital needs, including software and the related costs of implementation. Departments use this authority regularly for purchases of equipment, for example. There is no such authority to borrow for operating costs, such as faculty salaries. Borrowing for the implementation of the Student Administration system allows Cal Poly to provide assurance of the continuity of service to the campus without using base budget funding that could cause the loss of faculty and staff positions.

10. Doesn’t borrowing simply put off the inevitable cost to Cal Poly?
Yes, but it also allows time for paying for the much needed system when new funding is available. The cost to implement is high, but borrowing is an opportunity to reduce the impact of the cost of the system by deferring the cost during the difficult budget times and, as proposed, allowing up to 8 years to pay for the system (the 3 years during implementation to the extent any funding is available and the 5 years after implementation). To move forward now, without borrowing, could result in the loss of faculty and staff positions.
11. What do industry leaders think of the CMS project?
The California State University System was presented with the Medal of Achievement in San Francisco City Hall April 4, 2004 in recognition of its ongoing CMS computer upgrade. CSU representatives submitted a case study on Common Management System which officially became part of the Computerworld Honors Collection April 4th when the collection was formally presented to the Global Archives. “The Computerworld Honors Medal of Achievement is presented annually to men and women around the world who have made outstanding progress for society through the visionary use of information technology,” said Patrick J. McGovern, Chairman of the Computerworld Honors Chairmen’s Committee and founder of International Data Group. To learn more about the award, click here to read the CSU news release on the topic.