Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Publications

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It's Ten O'clock: Do We Know Where Our Students Are?

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It's Ten O'Clock: Do We Know Where Our Students Are?

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Project Description:

 "Do we know where our students are?" will ensure that Virginia Commonwealth University has the ability to identify the current residential location of students at any time such contact is warranted, for instance during an emergency. We propose a system that secures at regular intervals up-to-date contact information. Conceptually, the project is designed to help VCU better serve its students, promote a safer environment, raise student awareness of how crucial it is to provide the university with up-to-date contact information, and ultimately improve the relationship between the institution and its neighboring communities.

Project Goals:

- Identify the current residential locations of our students
- Enhance implementation of the emergency management system
- Promote student safety
- Improve relations between VCU and local communities

Strategies:

Our approach was to gain feedback from relevant university officials by interviewing and discussing outcomes and feasibility.

Action Steps:

1. Initially, we sought information on the state of relations with the various communities around VCU to try and determine potential directions for our project.
2. Met with the VCU Neighborhood team to determine the state of community relations, talk about problems in the community
3. Mike Flanigan (Banner student implementation leader) informed us that historically it was mandatory for students to update their address periodically, with a 'registration hold' being placed on the student account if the student did not update his or her information. However, this process ended up being too cumbersome because it created a bottleneck in the registration process due to the high number of student holds. Additionally, it was determined that the value of the postal address was waning with increased communication through e-email.
4. Reuban Rodriguez (Associate Vice Provost, Dean of Student Affairs) helped us identify the need for a reliable student address information system.
5. Anjour Harris (Registrar), Mark Willis (Chief Information Officer), Elizabeth Via, (Associate Registrar), confirmed that VCU has the technical capability to implement a student address system without much difficulty.
6. Student Government Association and Graduate Student Association offered their support.
7. John Venuti (Chief of Police) offered his support.
8. Martha Harper (Off-campus student services coordinator) offered her support.

Outcomes:

➢ Meeting all the University officials narrowed our focus further and reemphasized the need for requesting students to update their contact and emergency information on a regular basis.

➢ Towards that goal, we requested and received letters of support from University constituents to include in our proposal that will be submitted to Dr. Henry Rhone and the Provost's office.

➢ We developed a list of strategies for obtaining student buy- in and raising awareness among all students regarding the value of updating personal information with the university.

➢ Ultimately, this will promote student safety and improve relations between VCU and local communities.

Process Observations: **Team and Project Building**

- Team is comprised of articulate, opinionated, intelligent individuals whose varying capabilities constitute a healthy balance to support the project.
- Project consensus was easily reached due to the foundational need for a larger, long-term effort to support community building between the University and its neighbors.
- We have not "stormed" but developed an ability to work together based upon mutual respect for each others' time and ability to contribute to the project.

Recommendations:

In an effort to ensure the safety of our students and to have timely information regarding their location within the broader community the "Do We Know Where Our Students Are?" team recommends:

1) Prior to Spring 2012 registration, e-services include an address update reminder upon log-in. This can be in the form of a pop-up window (with the option of clicking and updating immediately or at a later stage) asking students to update their emergency contact and current address information. This modification to registration module can be completed in-house by VCU Technology Services. According to Technology Services, this addition to Banner may 'cost' approximately 40 to 60 manpower hours.

- A public relations campaign be implemented to educate students as to the importance of updating their address information to ensure student safety. A student-led public relations campaign would provide the best opportunity for project success (stickers, posters, Facebook blasts, etc...).

- A platform for delivery of this message already exists - University Annual Safety Forum (last one held April 1, 2010) sponsored by the University Safety Committee (http://www.safety.vcu.edu/). Members serving on the committee include representatives from the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services, VCU Police, Human Resources, Residential Life and Housing, Staff Senate, Faculty Senate, Student Government Association, the student body and other interested constituencies.

- There is a need to ensure that this information (student address updates) remains within the university and not be directed to the student directory which is public.

Conclusions:

Despite the inherent challenges such as student privacy issues, University officials recognize the importance of having regularly updated student contact and emergency information. Technology and modernization have removed the immediate need for accurate student residency information for Records and Registration, HOWEVER, a need remains in the area of student and community safety. The current text-messaging alert system during emergencies can be ineffective as mobile communication devices often do not work (ex: 9-11, recent earthquake). It is essential for VCU to know where students reside off-campus. Our proposal to periodically update student information requires minimal monetary and time investments because much of the technical infrastructure is already in existence.

Big VCU letters at Shafer Court on the Monroe Park campus. Credit: flickr.com/cc license/Taber Andrew Bain

IT'S10 O'CLOCK: DO WE KNOW WHERE OUR STUDENTS ARE?

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Vision

Virginia Commonwealth University students will be engaged in a safe learning environment which promotes positive interactions with neighboring communities.

VCU Strategic Plan: Quest for Distinction

The mission of VCU calls for a commitment to sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic, and cultural vitality of the communities VCU serves in Virginia and around the world.

Therefore…

To enhance our relationships with our neighbors and achieve our vision, it is vital for the university to have up-to-date address information for our student population.

Goals

- ☐ Identify the current residential locations of our students
- ☐ Enhance implementation of the emergency management system
- ☐ Promote student safety
- ☐ Improve relations between VCU and local communities

Strategies

Our approach was to gain feedback from relevant university officials by interviewing and discussing outcomes and feasibility.

Action Steps...

- □ **VCU Neighborhood Team** - The team consists of representatives from the Division of Community Engagement, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services, the VCU Police Department, the Division of University Relations, the Student Government Association, the Office of Sustainability, Off Campus Student Services, Judicial Affairs, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and the Wellness Resource Center.

- □ **Martha Harper** (Off-campus student services coordinator)

Action Steps…

- **Mike Flanigan** (Banner student implementation leader, Office of the VP for Student Affairs)

- **Anjour Harris** (University Registrar)

- **Elizabeth Via** (Associate Registrar)

- **Mark Willis** (Chief Information Officer, Technology Services)

VCU communicates to students primarily through electronic media.

Information related to student accounting, grades and course schedules are transmitted electronically. There is less of a need to mail items to a student's physical address.

VCU eServices
Virginia Commonwealth University

- Currently, students must update their addresses through e-services.

- There is nothing that proactively stresses the importance of updating this information

There are approximately 27,500 students who do not reside in campus housing.

If they have not updated their address information, VCU may not know how to locate them.

Action Steps…

- **Reuban Rodriguez** (Associate Vice Provost, Dean of Student Affairs and Mentor of GEHLI Team D)

  "Through coordination and cooperation with university and division resources, his office provides the services and support to students, faculty, staff and parents through a wide range of programs and activities, as well as assists students in resolving problems and advocates for students, when appropriate. It also provides oversight for the administration of the university's disciplinary procedures and the honor system."

Fan Census Project

Action Steps…

John Venuti (Chief of the VCU Police Department)

The mission of the VCU Police Department is to provide a safe and secure learning, living, and working environment for the students, faculty, staff and visitors of Virginia Commonwealth University.

VCUalert⊙

- To communicate with students regarding emergencies, they must subscribe to the VCU alert system to receive text messages.

- If they do not subscribe, they may not hear of a crisis until it is too late.

- During some emergencies digital communication is reduced.

Action Steps…

- Adele McClure (Student Government Association)
- Tobias Guennel (Graduate Student Association)

The past presidents of the Student Government Association and the Graduate Student Association shared concerns about threats to student privacy.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

- Students have the right to request that their directory information is not released to others without their consent.

- Students need to learn and understand why updating their address information is important to the university.

- In the event of an emergency, family members will want to be assured of student safety and, if they cannot reach the students, they will most likely contact the university.

- If the university doesn't know where students are residing, it cannot provide information to families.

Although both student government presidents communicated that students may not want their address information released to the public, they nevertheless felt that student safety was of greater concern and recognized the need for up-to-date address information.

Outcomes

- Meeting with the University officials narrowed our initial focus.

- Ultimately, we believe this essential first step of obtaining accurate student data will promote student safety and lead to the improvement of relations between VCU and local communities.

- We believe that raising awareness among all students regarding the value of updating personal information will require a marketing campaign.

Process Observations

By remaining aware of the importance of process observation, our team was able to:

- ☐ Negate any possible difficulties associated with group leadership
- ☐ Acknowledge and support each others' leadership strengths
- ☐ Keep the more vocal members from dominating group meetings (shared autonomy)
- ☐ Avoid significant disagreement and
- ☐ Acknowledge when unexpressed emotion might have influenced group functioning

Process Observations

- ☐ Team is comprised of articulate, opinionated, intelligent individuals whose varying strengths and capabilities constituted a healthy balance in support of the project's goals.

- ☐ Individual contributions to the team's goals were accepted as valuable without judgment.

- ☐ Disagreement did not impede project development, in fact....

Process Observations

- □ …individual styles of influence were not overbearing.

- □ Project consensus was easily reached due to the need for a larger, long-term effort to support community building between the university and its neighbors.

- □ Contrary to most literature on the subject, our team did not "storm" but developed an ability to work together based upon a mutual respect for each others' time and ability to contribute to the project.

Process Observations: External Factors

- □ Specific project goals developed out of discussions about strengthening the relationships between the university , students and community neighbors.

- □ Most individuals with whom we met acknowledged the value of obtaining accurate student residency information.

- □ Despite a shared understanding of the need for information concerning student whereabouts, <u>we do not know were our students are today.</u>
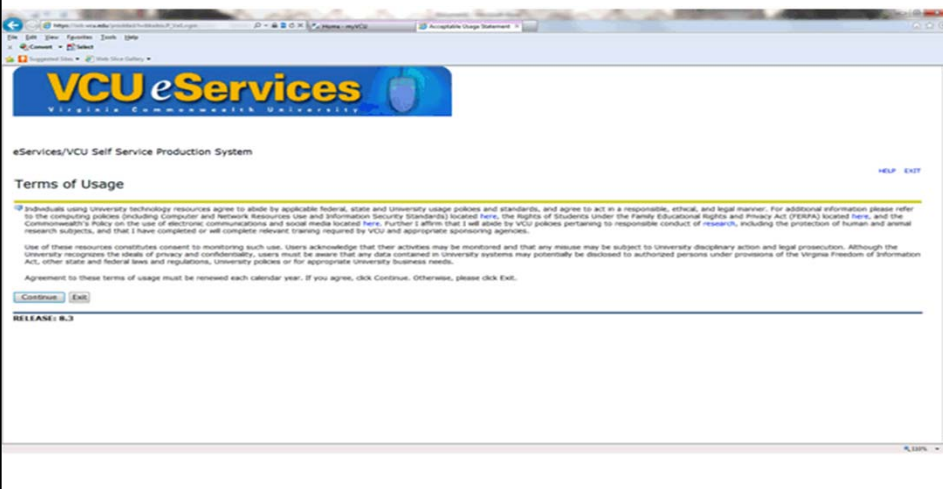
Recommendations

- Update the Banner (eServices) login page to include an 'address update' reminder twice a year beginning in Spring 2012.

- Develop a pop-up window
  - In-house project of approximately 40 – 60 manpower hours
  - Provide technical support during implementation

In last week's VCU TelegRAM....

eServices/Banner Terms Of Use Renewal
Each year the VCU community is required to accept the Terms of Use for access to the eServices/Banner system. To meet this annual requirement, beginning Wednesday, Oct. 5, when logging in, users will see a pop-up window asking to read and agree to the Terms of Use before entering the system. Follow the instructions to complete this process before entering. For questions about this process, contact the VCU helpIT Center at 828-2227 or helpIT@vcu.edu.

Recommendations

- Complying with the address update pop-up window is not mandatory and no academic hold will be placed on those who do not reply.
- Ensure that students understand they can request that directory information not be released without consent.
- Implement a public relations campaign to educate students
  - Student orientation training module
  - Stall Seat Journal
  - University Shuttle Service advertising
  - Annual Spring Safety Forum
  - Social media messaging (Facebook, Twitter)
  - VCU TelegRAM

Conclusions

- Students have been encouraged to update their residency information via the VCU TelegRAM this semester. Between August 15th and October 4, 2011 2749 voluntary address updates were completed through eServices.

- If the university adds a pop-up request that advises students to update their addresses, significantly more students are likely to respond.

Conclusions

Obtaining up-to-date address information improves:

- Our efforts to reach students in case of emergency and ensure student safety

- Our ability to communicate with family members, media and others regarding the safety of our students during an emergency situation

- Relations with our communities as we are able identify the number of students who reside in particular communities

- Our ability to encourage off-campus students to participate in community-based service learning, research and programming.

Future Benefits

Life-long University Engagement

Accurate address information begins the process of regular communication with new graduates, keeping them informed, and developing life-long support. This support is vital in sustaining the university of the future.

Next Steps

☐ Requested and received letters of support from affected parties to accompany white paper

☐ Compose and forward a white paper to Dr. Reuben Rodriguez for submission to Dr. Henry Rhone and the Provost's office

☐ Plan for implementation in Spring 2012

QUESTIONS?