

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Agenda Item Summary Sheet**

**Committee:** Audit Committee

**Date of Meeting:** March 19, 2008

**Agenda Item:** Update on Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) and Course Applicability System (CAS) Implementation

Proposed Policy Change       Approvals Required by Policy       Other Approvals       Monitoring

Information

**Cite policy requirement, or explain why item is on the Board agenda:**

When the Office of Internal Auditing released its final report on Student Success Measures and Systems in October 2007, the Audit Committee requested that Internal Auditing return in March 2008 with a status report on the progress that colleges and universities were making toward full implementation of the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) and Course Applicability System (CAS).

**Scheduled Presenter(s):**

John Asmussen, Executive Director, Office of Internal Auditing  
Beth Buse, Deputy Director, Office of Internal Auditing

**Outline of Key Points/Policy Issues:**

- The October 2007 report on Student Success Measures and Systems focused on (1) testing student success measurements, which are a component of the system-wide accountability framework, and (2) implementation of MnSCU systems (DARS and CAS) intended to facilitate student academic progress for transfer and degree completion

**Background Information:**

- Vice Chancellor Baer sent a letter to all presidents requiring colleges and universities that had not fully implemented DARS and CAS to submit an implementation plan by November 2, 2007.
- On February 10, 2008, Vice Chancellor Baer and Trustee Scott This, Chair of the MnSCU Audit Committee, approved extensions of until June 30, 2008, at the latest, for twelve colleges and universities to fully implement the DARS and CAS systems.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**BOARD ACTION**

**UPDATE ON DEGREE AUDIT REPORTING SYSTEM (DARS) AND COURSE  
APPLICABILITY SYSTEM (CAS) IMPLEMENTATION**

In October 2007, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Office of Internal Auditing reported that 26 of the 37 colleges and universities had not yet fully implemented the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) and the Course Applicability System (CAS). Full implementation of the systems had been expected to occur in 2003 and 2004. In response, the Board of Trustees approved the following motion at its November 14, 2007, meeting:

*Colleges and universities need to fully implement DARS and CAS by December 31, 2007 or receive approval from the Senior Vice Chancellor and the Chair of the Audit Committee for an implementation plan and timeline later than December 31, 2007, but in no event later than the academic year.*

**Approval of College and University Implementation Plans**

Presidents from the 26 colleges and universities submitted implementation plans to the Senior Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs specifying when full implementation would be achieved.

- Fourteen presidents indicated that their college or university would have the systems fully implemented by the December 31, 2007 deadline.
- Twelve presidents requested extensions for their college or university beyond the December 31, 2007 deadline.

Staff from the Academic and Student Affairs Division and Internal Auditing reviewed the twelve plans and found that seven of the implementation plans were acceptable: Anoka Technical College (June 30, 2008), Fond du Lac Community College (June 30, 2008), Itasca Community College (April 1, 2008), Mesabi Range Community and Technical College (June 30, 2008), Rainy River Community College (April 30, 2008), St. Cloud Technical College (June 1, 2008) and Vermilion Community College (January 2008).

Representatives from Academic and Student Affairs and the Office of Internal Auditing met with the remaining five college and university presidents and their staffs in December and early January to discuss questions and concerns with their implementation plans. The following institutions were visited and agreed to make certain modifications to their plans to make them acceptable:

- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- St. Cloud State University
- Metropolitan State University
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College
- Northwest Technical College – Bemidji

Once the modifications were made, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs and the Audit Committee Chair approved the twelve implementation plans on February 10, 2008.

### **February 2008 DARS/CAS Implementation Status**

During February 2008, the Office of Internal Auditing reviewed the DARS/CAS implementation status at the 26 colleges and universities who were not fully implemented as of the October 2007 report. The following is a summary of the results of this review:

- Thirteen of the fourteen colleges and universities had completed their implementation by December 31, 2007 as indicated in their plans. Minnesota State University Moorhead had indicated it would be implemented by December 31, 2007; however, a misunderstanding of the expectation for course equivalencies resulted in the university not having course equivalencies defined for all MnSCU colleges and universities. The university is in the process of defining and writing rules for all MnSCU colleges and universities and will meet the June 30, 2008 deadline.
- Of the remaining 12 colleges and universities, three have fully implemented and the other nine are on track to be fully implemented by the June 30, 2008 deadline.

### **Definition of Full Implementation**

While the plan is to have a full implementation of DARS and CAS at all colleges and universities by June 30, 2008, it is important to clarify what is meant by being fully implemented.

Colleges and universities need to have the following elements in place to ensure that students, advisors and other users of DARS degree audits<sup>1</sup> have reliable reports to use.

- **Academic Programs Encoded** – An inventory of academic program requirements for each degree, diploma or certificate program offered by the college or university.
- **Course Equivalencies Defined** – Rules for processing transfer-in courses. The expectation set by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs was that all MnSCU

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<sup>1</sup> A 'degree audit' is the individual student report produced by DARS that contains academic program requirements along with courses taken by the student, including transfer courses that meet those requirements. It also tracks what courses the student still needs to complete in order to receive a specific academic award.

colleges and universities would define course equivalencies for all other MnSCU colleges and universities, at a minimum.

- **Transfer-in Courses Entered** – Courses students have previously taken at other colleges and universities, based on official transcripts.
- **Academic Exceptions Entered** – Student specific course and requirement substitutions and course waivers approved by college or university officials. An example of a course substitution would be for an academic dean to approve a petition from an individual student to use a course no longer offered at the institution to meet a requirement within a current academic program. Once the course substitution is entered in DARS, the student's 'degree audit' would show the requirement as being met. Prior to DARS implementation, this information was typically only available in manual student files in the registrar's office or an advising area of an institution.

Although full implementation of these elements will ensure reliable Degree Audit reports for all students who enroll after June 30, 2008, reliable reports may not be available for all currently enrolled students. Some institutions are faced with a substantial backlog of transfer courses and academic exceptions accepted in prior years. Each institution will need to determine priorities for recording these past transactions. It may be prudent for institutions to alert students that the reports may not be complete and have a mechanism for individual students to request that past transfers and exceptions be recorded. Furthermore, it would be reasonable to establish a future target date when information for all currently enrolled students will be up-to-date and reliable. Until that circumstance occurs, some inefficient business practices will have to be retained by colleges and universities that do not have current DARS records for all currently enrolled students. Internal Auditing will work with the Academic and Student Affairs division on the feasibility of establishing such a target date.

### **Technology Issues**

For over three years, the ITS Division has not had adequate staffing to support DARS and CAS. Three failed employment searches have contributed to the length of time without adequate support. The ITS division is currently in the process of conducting another employment search.

One specific project that has been delayed due to inadequate IT resources is E-Transcript. This project would electronically transmit transcript data from one MnSCU college or university to another MnSCU college or university and automatically populate transfer course detail records in DARS. Currently transfer students have to submit paper copies of transfer transcripts to colleges and universities. The specific transfer course detail then needs to be manually entered into DARS. Automating the transmission of MnSCU transcripts would result in increased efficiency and accuracy of data. One college told us that they anticipate saving one employee position a year once the E-Transcript is in production. The ITS division has committed to completing this project by September 2008.

*Date Presented to the Board of Trustee: March 19, 2008*