**A Paperless Revolution: The Innovative Use of Technology for
Student Organization Management**

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In December of 2007, the Texas A&M University Department of Student Activities launched an online student organization management system that allows the university's 800+ recognized student organizations to streamline the processes and resources related to their student organization experience. This cutting-edge system, known as StuAct Online, was designed in-house by Student Activities IT staff members using open-source software. Collaborative partners included other functional areas within the department, including Student Organization Recognition, Risk Management and Organizational Development Services, and the Student Organization Finance Center.

With over 10,000 registered users, StuAct Online has had a profound impact on the department and its constituents. In the last year, the department has witnessed increased student learning, increased accessibility to departmental resources, greater consistency of services across the department, and a greater efficiency of processes for student leaders and staff members alike. The guiding priorities for the development of StuAct Online included user-friendly and accessible student organization recognition requirements, enhanced training and development, and easier paperless access to finances and forms.

StuAct Online was developed internally by the department's Information Technology team using popular third-party frameworks and modular components. At the time of the system's launch, 400 hours of programming time had been invested in the project's development, a notably low requirement considering the complexity and scope of the project. This rapid development cycle was driven by an emphasis on lightweight, efficient and reliable code, allowing features to be easily added that were tailored to the unique needs of the site's users and administrators. This ease of maintenance has contributed to the IT team's ability to continuously improve and expand the system.

The department's applications are hosted on servers maintained by the Division of Student Affairs Information Technology Department. This hosted solution has allowed the small team of two IT staff members in the Department of Student Activities to focus efforts on the development of quality applications such as StuAct Online without the time consuming effort of server maintenance and patching. An updated version of the site, StuAct Online 2.0, launched in January 2009 and features a streamlined user experience and several new features for form, event, and organization management. This new version of the site was the result of several months of user assessment and feedback collection, and involved over 600 hours of additional programming time.

The features of StuAct Online were designed to help students meet the expectations of Texas A&M's "guiding boundaries" while promoting shared responsibility for seeking and retaining knowledge.[1] This structure enables greater student learning throughout organizational processes. For example, student organization recognition at Texas A&M requires the annual completion of seven items including roster changes, trainings, and constitution updates. StuAct Online provides every organization with a "Recognition Checklist" outlining the steps necessary to meet each requirement and providing a visual overview of the organization's progress in fulfilling these steps.

Whereas previously these processes had to be completed in person during business hours, students and advisors are now able to manage the administrative functions of their student organizations from any Internet-friendly location at any time. The increased accessibility of Student Activities resources is an invaluable advantage of the system. For instance, a number of paperless forms are available on StuAct Online, including applications for new student organizations, event planning forms, travel registrations, and financial statements. Our forms engine allows organizations or individuals to fill out multiple pieces of information, save unfinished forms, and upload documents as supporting material for these items. The paperless forms also allow for multiple levels of review and approval by staff members.

Partnered with increased accessibility to resources is consistency in services. StuAct Online ensures that every organization receives essential information in a uniform format through user-friendly, descriptive, automated communication. An automated email notification system helps inform users of upcoming deadlines, important messages, or tasks that require their attention. This communication not only helps to ensure equal treatment and articulation of expectations to every student leader and advisor, but it also helps to hold organizations to equal standards – from recognition to finances, risk management, and awareness of opportunities.

Finally, the greatest impact of StuAct Online is on the efficiency of processes. StuAct Online creates an easy way for staff, advisors, and students to track the requirements and administrative functions for their organizations. For example, students needing to fulfill their required training component for recognition can view upcoming seminars, register for the seminar of their choice, and download a reminder of the seminar to their Outlook or iCal calendars with three quick clicks of the mouse. Upon arrival to the seminar, the student's ID card is swiped and any organizations with which he/she is associated instantly receive credit for the training. Prior to StuAct Online, many of these processes were done in person and/or by hand, so the Event Management feature of StuAct Online has increased both the efficiency and accuracy of departmental processes.

In sum, centrally locating information in an online system for student organizations at Texas A&M University has increased student learning and greatly improved the accessibility, consistency, and efficiency of our departmental resources and services. The implementation of the StuAct Online

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[1] For more information about the Facilitator University Model adopted by the Department of Student Activities at Texas A&M University, please refer to "The Rights and Responsibilities of the Modern University" by Robert Bickel and Peter Lake (Carolina Academic Press, 1999).

system reduces the administrative strain on Student Activities staff and better meets the needs of student organizations. StuAct Online provides thorough and easily accessible information that challenges students to take ownership for the continuity and success of their organizations. The innovative use of technology for student organization management has replaced our need to discuss *process* with our ability to focus more on developmental conversations about *progress*.

A narrated tour of StuAct Online can be viewed at http://studentactivities.tamu.edu/naspa.