

# **FEATURING BEST PRACTICES OF STATE AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**

## **Improve Quality of Administrative Processes Process Simplification**

**University of Virginia  
implemented this best practice  
in 1994**

*Qualifying under the  
Best Practices catalogue*

3 Provide Capabilities  
34 Develop resource capabilities  
344 Manage improvement and change

### **Best Practice Summary (how it works, how you measure it)**

Process Simplification, the University of Virginia's quality-improvement initiative, features projects designed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of key administrative processes that impact faculty, staff, and students. Process Simplification was established in 1994 to further the goals of decentralization – to improve customer service, to reduce costs by eliminating duplication of effort, and to tailor processes to meet the requirements of the University community in the areas of financial administration, purchasing, and human resources. Over the past five years, 225 faculty, staff, and students have worked on teams to improve the way new employees are hired, oriented, and trained; simplify the payroll distribution system; make the travel reimbursement process more efficient and easier to understand; and set the groundwork for improving the quality of the research administration process. Recent endeavors have focused on student-enrollment services, specifically on the implementation of a summer-orientation program for new students.

During the past five years, several teams have been formed to assess and recommend improvements to administrative processes. A number of the recommendations proposed by these teams have been implemented, while others are still underway. Teams consisting of employees from various end-user areas have addressed the following issue areas: New Employee Orientation, New Student Orientation, Transcript Issuance, Classified Staff and Faculty Hiring Processes, Limited Purchase Orders, Employee Training, Check Distribution,

Research Administration, Electronic Forms, Web-Based Forms, Electronic Transactions, Prospective Undergraduate Student and Parent Interactions, and Summer Communications with Current and Prospective Undergraduate Students.

## **Impact on the Process Organizational Performance (OUTCOMES)**

The on-going improvements achieved through process simplification make University activities more effective and result in cost savings that provide additional resources for instructional purposes. Over the last four years, process simplification has accounted for nearly \$4,240,938 in savings, the majority resulting from the vendor credit card: \$1,908,250 in savings during 1998-99; \$1,399,000 in savings during 1997-98; \$755,750 in savings during 1996-97; and \$177,938 in savings during 1995-96.

The following is a brief summary of the key results and benefits derived from Process Simplification initiatives:

- The Check Distribution team developed recommendations that led to a shift to a bi-weekly pay schedule for wage employees, and to the successful implementation of direct deposit for all wage and over-time payments. As a result of creating a more efficient and less labor-intensive distribution system, the University expects to save the equivalent of five people.
- By increasing the maximum amount of a limited purchase order from \$1,000 to \$5,000, the \$5,000 Limited Purchase Order team not only offered greater autonomy for end-user departments in the purchasing process but also expedited procurements. The implementation also reduced administrative efforts for small-dollar purchases University-wide. The administrative savings from this project are approximately \$41,000 a year.
- Due to the work of the Local Expenditure Limits/Approval Authority team, the number of vouchers sent to deans and vice presidents for approval has been reduced. By simplifying and clarifying the approval process for routine expenditures, exceptional transactions should receive the thorough review they require.
- The Short-Term Enhancements to Sponsored Programs team identified University needs for information contained in the sponsored-program database and successfully developed the means for accessing it. Primary gains are in time savings and enhanced service delivery.
- Key outcomes of the Travel Reimbursement Policies and Procedures team include a simplified travel planning and approval process, time savings for travelers and travel processors, and increased departmental accountability. Use of the electronic book has increased from approximately 20 percent in June 1998 to 46 percent in November 1998.

- The University Purchasing Card team successfully implemented the American Express Corporate Purchasing Card Program at the University, which facilitates small purchases and reduces the cost of recording transactions in the University's accounting system. With the cost of processing and paying a bill calculated to be between \$50 to \$75, savings resulting from implementation of the card are estimated at \$1.4 million for fiscal year 1997-98.
- The Classified Hiring team's recommendations include offering different levels of services depending on hiring officials' needs; improving the existing on-line employment system; moving toward a Web-based employment process; reviewing and simplifying the current system of knowledge, skills, and abilities; revising the application packet; and offering training for hiring officials.
- Expected benefits of the Enhanced Employee Training Team include significant time savings for employees, a decrease in the amount of time it takes a new employee to learn the job, reduction in errors and problems, higher employee morale, and increased service to customers. In July 1999, the implementation team launched the Training and Resources for Administrative Knowledge (TRAK) web site -- a comprehensive listing of the administrative skills and processes that supervisors can use to determine the administrative knowledge and skill requirements for each employee, and as a directory of administrative workshops and one-on-one training available throughout the UVa community. A pilot version of TRAK placed third in the 1998 "Special Interest Group for University & College Computing Services (SIGUCCS) Web How-to-Guides Awards."
- The Faculty Hiring Business Case team reviewed the faculty recruitment and hiring process and identified improvements in the areas of technology, training, and communication, which should result in a process that is seamless and efficient, practiced consistently throughout the University, clearly understood, and easy to learn and use.
- The University is implementing a new employee orientation process that begins with a pre-employment benefits sign-up, continues as an ongoing education and training effort within the employing department, culminates in a New Employee Welcome and Resource Fair. Implementation of this initiative should result in a workforce that is committed to the University's mission and understands the role of departments and the importance of individual contributions in accomplishing the institution's objectives.
- The Transcript Issuance work group was formed to improve the current transcript issuance process, namely simplifying billing and collection, and has developed recommendations to increase payment options, including using credit cards, in order to eliminate the billing process, enhance available payment choices, and move toward a web-based request process. Changes to the current process depend on an institutional effort to establish a secure infrastructure for credit card transactions.

- The New Student Orientation Program was implemented in July 1999. Nine summer sessions were conducted between July 8 and August 27 enrolling 93.4% of the total population of incoming new students. As part of this two-day summer orientation program, students took placement exams, met with faculty advisors on a one-on-one basis, departed with a tentative fall course selection, and were introduced to life at the University. The main objective of adding the summer component was to make fall orientation more academically focused.
- Representing the largest Process Simplification effort to date, the Research Administration team offered recommendations to facilitate research at the University, improve the quality the current process, make it more effective and efficient, and establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability throughout the process.
- The Web-Based Forms team is in the process of placing all non-automated University paper forms on the World Wide Web to eliminate or make more efficient the use of paper forms. Anticipated benefits include annual combined savings for departments estimated at \$13,000, the most current version of forms available to users, and moving the University another step toward an automated and paperless workplace with 140 web-based forms available for use.

For more information, visit the Process Simplification Web site at <http://www.virginia.edu/~process>.

## **Best Practice Qualification**

Few higher education institutions have quality improvement efforts as extensive as the University's. This has been verified through comparison with other institutions' quality improvement efforts by external consultants with a detailed knowledge of the University of Virginia environment gained through an involvement with the implementation of the University's new Integrated Systems Project. In many instances, the recommendations implemented through the Process Simplification effort have employed the most recent technology. Many of the University's customers have reported greater satisfaction with the improved processes or functional areas. The Process Simplification initiative is one of the most visible ways the University is preparing for the 21st century by promoting excellence and continuous improvement of its administrative functions. This effort allows the University to maintain and promote its excellence by building a solid administrative infrastructure.

## **For Additional Information**

Office of the Vice President for Management and Budget  
University of Virginia  
P. O. Box 400228  
Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4228

Christina Morell  
(804) 924-0761  
[cm5c@virginia.edu](mailto:cm5c@virginia.edu)

Peter Farrell  
KPMG Consulting  
(804) 243-0346  
pjfarrell@kpmg.com