

Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association Inc

Submission

To: Helen Kavanagh, Postgraduate Member, University Council
From: Anthony Long, Research Officer/Office Coordinator
Subject: PeopleSoft
Date: June 14, 2002

Introduction

The Postgraduate Students' Association (PGSA) wishes to comment on the Report entitled "PeopleSoft and the University", having received considerable feedback from a large number of university administrative and academic sections about the PeopleSoft system. The PGSA agrees with these groups that there exists a need to address what many feel is an attempt by the University to provide a revisionist version of the implementation of PeopleSoft.

The PGSA is of the opinion that postgraduate students have been affected negatively by the implementation of the PeopleSoft system, as has therefore compiled a report to reflect its concerns. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the author, whose own personal opinions are not expressed. The report has been compiled from a large selection of comments the PGSA has received. The individuals have asked to remain anonymous.

Summary of evidence

Whilst some of the points raised in "PeopleSoft and the University" are valid, the PGSA is of the opinion that many of them are not, including:

- The need to outsource the project of overhauling the University's information system. Given that the previous one was written in-house and the enormous sums of money spent on its replacement, a system tailored to the needs of this University could have been created;
- The reduction of "ongoing dependency on external consulting resources". The implementation of PeopleSoft increases, not reduces, such dependencies;
- The meeting of "the University's current functional requirements". Given the problems with PeopleSoft, this has clearly not been achieved;

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- The meeting of “basic management reporting needs”. In light of the University’s inability to compile accurate DEST figures, this requirement has not been fulfilled;
 - The reduction of “dependency on key ITS staff for maintenance of systems”. Given the current problems with PeopleSoft, the PGSA questions whether this has occurred;
 - The “movement away from an expensive CA General Ledger Product to PeopleSoft Financials”. Given that the implementation of the PeopleSoft system has cost the University nearly \$20m, the PGSA finds it hard to believe that savings have been made by not using the Computer Associates package.

A common complaint received by the PGSA was about the nature of the data the PeopleSoft produces. Everyone who spoke to the PGSA complained about the frequent irregularities contained in the data, which has resulted in the following issues:

- Increased workload, as staff members have been forced to check the accuracy of data;
- Students are being enrolled in the wrong subjects, and even courses. In addition, postgraduates are being assigned to disciplines to which they do not belong because the PeopleSoft system does not recognise the discipline in which they study;
- Student numbers in courses and even in faculties are not available. Detailed searches, such as for international or indigenous students in each department, are not possible;
- Students have been incorrectly invoiced. Problems have included the issuing of incorrect student services fee invoices, students being not invoiced at all, fee-paying students being incorrectly invoiced, in some cases on multiple occasions, even though the fee had already been paid;
- Errors in data transfer between components of the PeopleSoft system: information that was correct has been transferred incorrectly;
- The inability to provide DEST with accurate enrolment figures on time;
- The University’s inability to invoice students for their student service fees. Although that most students have now received such invoices, a considerable number still have not, and there are many errors on the invoices that have been issued;
- Students are incurring debts that do not exist, and face consequences as a result, including the denial of access to buildings, library facilities, academic transcripts and financial loans. Potential future problem areas include examinations and graduations;
- When information is forthcoming from the system, there exists considerable doubt that it is accurate.

A related comment that the PGSA received frequently was the inflexible nature of the PeopleSoft system. The inflexibility of the system’s categories has caused large, otherwise unnecessary changes to be made to basic University procedure. Although many such examples were raised, this report highlights only two: firstly, PeopleSoft’s inability to address full-year subjects, as the system deals only with semester courses; secondly, the necessity to change the title of University policies, applications and courses – for instance, ‘study leave’ to ‘leave of absence’. Another complaint has been the inability to fix even the most simple errors in the data, as not only do individuals not have access, who previously have been allowed to, the system itself will not allow such changes to be made.

Another common complaint the PGSA received was about the implementation of the PeopleSoft system. Given that the University has spent over \$12m on consultant fees, but

only \$895000 on professional development, there has been considerable comment about the lack of expertise in working with the system. One comment stressed that there are not enough people who are competent in using the system, and that the University has not employed people who can write reports on the data the system produces. Individuals complained very few people had access to the system, meaning that not only did it delay their own work, it also meant that they were unable to check data that they themselves doubted without having to rely upon somebody else to do it for them.

Related to the previous point are the comments that questioned the University's decision to employ the PeopleSoft system. In the report "PeopleSoft and the University", a reason given for the University's decision was that the PeopleSoft system had a strong presence in other Go8 universities. However, many of the individuals with whom the PGSA spoke were of the opinion that in light of the massive problems that other universities encountered, the University of Adelaide should have examined more closely such problems, and reviewed its preference for PeopleSoft. Evidence of such issues was most recently highlighted in an article about the situation at RMIT in *The Australian*.¹ However, comments the PGSA received about the implementation of PeopleSoft at other Australian universities were not all negative: one individual commented that the system "seemed to function" at the University of Queensland, and that when it worked, it did a reasonable job. However, such positive comments need to be placed in context of the numerous problems the PeopleSoft system has caused this University.

Perhaps the most worrying comments the PGSA has received about PeopleSoft were in regard to the University's attitude towards the issue. A common view was that the University has not been open and honest about the success of the system. A statement one staff member made perhaps best sums up this view:

The most offensive aspect of the entire PeopleSoft issue is the University's cover-up of the problems, rather than its implementation of the system.

This comment is supported by the numerous anecdotal examples the PGSA received (but chose not to include in this report as they often revealed the identity of the individuals making the comments), as well as by the common general problems outlined in this report.

A further point of concern raised in the report to the University Council is the acknowledgment that "[t]he quality of the PeopleSoft suite of products has improved dramatically in the four years since the University made the decision to purchase". Given the current level of problems with the so-called 'improved' version, the PGSA questions the initial decision to purchase the product.

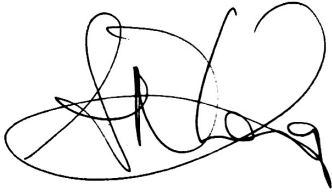
The PGSA is also concerned about the future of the PeopleSoft system at this University. There have been rumours that the system may be in the process of being phased out – whether there is any truth in the rumour, or whether it is merely wishful thinking is unknown to the PGSA. The PGSA is also concerned about the costs the system will incur in the future. There is no indication as to the cost of the proposed upgrades to version 8.4 and beyond. Furthermore, given the current problems with the system, there exists concern that they will be replicated with each new upgrade to the system.

¹ Gavin Moodie, "Tough path to basic accounting," *The Australian* April 24, 2002: 35.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted an excessive number of areas of concern that exist at this University about the PeopleSoft system. The PGSA is of the opinion that such problems cannot be simply 'forgotten' about or hidden by the production of a revisionist report to sanitise the extent of such problems. Furthermore, the PGSA hopes that this report will receive the attention that it deserves, given that the this Association's knowledge, no such similar report has been produced by any area of the University.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Long', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Anthony Long.
