

Executive Summary | POEC: Forms and Workflows

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Our aim was to determine how to simplify form submissions and student-initiated requests with more automated routing and communication to improve the operational side of the student experience. Initial assessment has been focused on collecting data on the frequency of each request; determining the layers of approvers for each request; and soliciting feedback from academic advisors who are often the individual's guiding students through these processes. The assumption at the beginning was that it was primarily the mechanism of submission itself, e.g. Adobe Sign or static PDF, that was the source of inefficiency, but it has also been demonstrated that the current style of communicating instructions for completing requests also needs to be updated and clarified.

Frameworks and Method:

Under the Mintzberg Model, our case study issue is within the support structure of the University. Navigating the operational pieces of the university is not the operating core but a necessary part of supporting the operating core.

We examined the issue using Bolman & Deal's (2013, 2017) four lenses to examine organizations: structural components, human resources, political lens, and cultural lens.

Finding 1: Volume and Variation of Workflows

In 2023, the Registrar's Office received and processed nearly 3,500 student-initiated requests that required staff to manually update the student record. Requests range from Late Add Petitions, Course Withdrawals, Course Substitutions, Change of Major, Enrollment Verifications, and more.

Most of these student-initiated requests are related to CSU and campus policies that vary on who must approve an action. Currently, a Change of Major does not require any program or advisor approval (except for Nursing), so a student request may go directly to the Registrar's Office for processing. However, a Course Withdrawal requires instructor approval and program chair approval. The addition of approvals creates additional complexity in a workflow.

Our current solution for most student-initiated requests is to use Adobe Sign. This platform requires a student to initiate a request, and then log into their email account to complete the actual form. A quick snapshot on April 12, 2024, showed 178 Adobe Sign forms that were initiated between January and April but not actually submitted. This indicates that the student did the first part but did not go to their email account to fill out the form.

For requests with multiple approvers, students must also route their requests to the correct email addresses for each approver. The form will give directions on whom to send their request to and how to locate the campus email directory. However, this puts the onus on the student to either research the correct individual or reach out to the Registrar's Office or an Academic Advisor for guidance on routing.

From Bolman & Deal's structural lens, there is a need for lateral coordination across departments and divisions to provide a good student experience when navigating a record request or exception. While the Registrar's Office is the department responsible for processing student-initiated requests, it is often Academic Advisors, EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) Advisors, case managers, and many other frontline student services professionals providing guidance to our students. Additionally, many of the approvers for student-initiate requests are faculty chairs and faculty advisors.

Finding 2: Lack of Clear Direction on the Processes

Unrelated to an actual form or workflow functionality, is the complexity and lack of clarity of a particular process or policy. While the sample is small, four out of four academic advisors who responded to our survey indicated that they only somewhat agree that they can confidently explain Registrar's Office forms and their process flow to students. If advisors are not very confident in navigating our processes, we cannot expect students to be able to easily navigate our processes.

Additionally, Rapid changes in workflows and processes over the past several years created multiple formats, including fillable forms, Adobe Sign, web applications and still the occasional static form. This creates an inconsistent user experience when navigating operations.

In addition to the actual functionality of a form or workflow, we should also be scrutinizing the ways in which we disseminate information. For example, replace long emails or lengthy webpage content with short video tutorials and more visual content. Advisor feedback indicated a strong desire to more clearly define timelines on when to expect a response and to build in confirmation notices. Advisors also identified the process that generates the most questions is the course withdrawal process – a process we have already converted to a web application with an automated workflow.

Finding 3: Limited Human Resources

From the Political Lens, accomplishing our goals will affect workload across multiple departments including Registrar's Office, Student Systems, and ITS (Information Technology Services). It will be important to approach our planning and timelines by considering competing campus priorities from stakeholders.

Next Steps for Student-Initiated Requests

While the team is planning for an approach to utilize custom web applications with PeopleSoft integration to create automated routing, we want to ensure the workflow documentation is memorialized should we move to a different platform in the future. The reason we are choosing the custom web applications is that there is no vendor cost to university, and we have examples of the applications working well. Automatic email communications can be sent as approvers complete their portion, keeping students informed of the status and timeline. Technical documentation will be created and maintained should a different programmer need to maintain the application.

Preparation is everything when it comes to thoughtfully and sustainably overhauling our student forms. Our next steps involve organizing all request types, documenting the various approvers, and

determining the most frequently submitted forms to assist in building out a realistic timeline. Requests that have a similar line of approvers and workflow can be grouped together for implementation into a web application. Requests that have substantial volume such as the Change of Major, could be prioritized to have an immediate impact on the student experience. This information will be used to create a realistic timeline for our campus Information Technology to efficiently roll out web applications for our forms while balancing the other needs of the campus.

At the same time, the Registrar’s Office will examine the resources and direction available on our website to streamline the information for students. Processes identified as confusing or difficult to explain should be targeted first. Collaborating with Academic Advising and receiving feedback from students would be important steps in ensuring the information is easily digestible. We know there is a strong desire to indicate specific timelines to students and advisors up front which can be difficult to do when the timelines are often dependent on approvers outside of the Registrar’s Office responding to the student requests. The office can assess standard turnaround times to publish and provide clear direction on next steps if a request falls outside the standard turnaround time.

Sample of request type organization:

Group/Dec Type	Title of the Form	Number received in 2023	Current Format	Recommendation	Initiated By:	Addressed To 1:	Addressed To 2:	Addressed to 3:	Automatic workflow?
Add/Drop	Late Add Petition	693	Adobe Sign	Web application	CSUCI student	Instructor of the Class	Program Chair for the class (e.g. Math chair for a Math class)	registrar@csuci.edu	No - student will need to enter instructor email address & program chair email address; auto-route to registrar if approved
	Course Withdrawal Form		Web application	n/a	CSUCI student	Instructor of the Class	Program Chair for the class (e.g. Math chair for a Math class)	registrar@csuci.edu	Yes - auto-routes to instructor and program chair
Course Substitutions	Petition for Exception	296	static PDF	Unsure	CSUCI student	Varies	Varies	registrar@csuci.edu	No
	Exception to Course Repeat Policy	235	Adobe Sign	Web application	CSUCI student	Program Chair for major course, Director of Advising for GE course	registrar@csuci.edu		No - student will need to enter program chair email address; auto-route to registrar if approved
	Petition to Participate in Commencement	57	Adobe Sign	Unsure	CSUCI student	registrar@csuci.edu			Yes - auto-routes to registrar
	GE / Graduation Requirement Course Sub	48	static PDF	Adobe Sign	CSUCI student	Chair of GE Committee	registrar@csuci.edu		Potentially, if moved to Adobe Sign. Currently no - student submits to registrar; registrar routes to GE chair; GE chair routes back to registrar.
	Audit Petition	1	Adobe Sign	Web application	CSUCI student	Instructor of the Class	registrar@csuci.edu		No - student will need to enter email address of instructor; auto-route to registrar if approved
Change of Major/Minor	Change of Major/Minor	567	Adobe Sign	Web application	CSUCI student	registrar@csuci.edu	n/a	n/a	Yes - auto-routes to registrar

2023 Request Type Volume:

Documents of Interest

Processed 01/01/2023 - 12/31/2023

