



THE ADVOCATE



A Matter of Communication---Colleague Revisited, or Should the College Get Us All a Bigger Home PC?

The following is a lengthy article on Colleague. The AFT apologizes. However, as I investigated the related issues, the topic grew larger and larger, the affected parties appeared farther and farther apart, and no one seems willing to acknowledge the depth of the problem or accept responsibility for its resolution. An effective technology system is crucial to our operation. The time has arrived to expect some accountability.

In the February 1999 issue of The Advocate, the union focused on Colleague woes. We thought it would be appropriate to revisit some of the issues raised to see how we fared in the Fall 1999 registration and focus on what needs repair before registration for Spring 2000. I visited with several employees in the District and found that the fundamental problem lies in perception and communication.

Several of the folks whom I interviewed feel that Colleague problems are not much different than they were in December of 1998 when Colleague 16 was implemented. The system has been characterized as "a massive storage device requiring manual manipulation of the data." Others believe that the system is much better now. All acknowledged that problems and challenges remain. As I listened to the various perceptions, I was struck by three things. First, everyone genuinely desires to arrive at a computer system that is functional, reliable, and user friendly. Secondly, some problems are not universally recognized. Thirdly, some problems are universally recognized, i.e. some core problems came up in each conversation, but from a different perspective.

Multiple end users of Colleague report a number of problems regarding data

integrity. For simplicity's sake, I will bullet some data reliability problems reported.

- transcripts with incorrect grades
- transcripts with no GPA calculation
- transcripts with a 5.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- transcript which show a 4.0 semester GPA in a semester in which a D was earned
- transcripts which one day show a course grade and the next an I
- transcripts which list a student on suspension one day and an honor student the next

These problems undercut the integrity of our data. We have sent transcripts to other colleges with this incorrect data. Users feel the data is corrupt.

I visited with Ron Stauss, Vice Chancellor of Telecommunications/Information Systems, and Kim Baker, Database Administrator, about these concerns. The odd GPA calculations have occurred. They resulted from a Datatel bug in which transfer evaluations caused Colleague to include transfer courses with our GPA calculation. We have a repeat rule that says if a student took a class elsewhere and repeated it here, we calculate the higher grade and eliminate the lower grade. A user could see the semester grades on the monitor and what appeared to be an inaccurate GPA because the user could not see the transfer course. This problem has been resolved. Other transcript errors, Stauss and Baker believe, are the result of incorrect data entry---human error. They

acknowledge that the data in Colleague 13 was poor but believe that Colleague 16 data integrity is high.

Two other complaints by users across the District are that student profiles are only available through multi-step process and Institutional Research reports rendered obsolete by Colleague 16 are only 60-70% restored. NHC users complain that Child Development reporting cannot be supported. Stauss and Baker acknowledge that two screens must be accessed for students' profiles to be entered, but insist that the process is "not labor intensive." They were unsure on the 60-70% restoration of report capability, pointing out "the Institutional Reports are handled by the Institutional reporting personnel at the Colleges and Mike Green's area at District--not IT[Information Technology] group that handles Colleague installs and modifications. [They] believe there is only one person at each college and one at District that handle programming of these Institutional Research reports." They pointed out that 65% of the 333 requests for a variety of functions and other support from District IT staff directly involved with Colleague have been completed. On the Child Development reporting, Stauss and Baker contend that Baker sent a memo to NHC stating her opinion that it could be supported. Kathryn Ruthven, who was with IT at the time, visited with personnel at NHC and outlined a method to proceed. Sometime later, NHC indicated an intention to use Quick Books rather than a Colleague process.

One of the most serious Colleague-related registration problems is section management, the result, users believe, of upgrading the registration module the Sunday before Fall 1999 registration began. The perception

among users is that District at the eleventh hour before we go live installs an upgrade or a patch without testing. This perception may have grown, at least in part, from the horrors that grew out of converting to R16 over Thanksgiving 1998. The users' perception is that as a result of the registration module upgrade, it was impossible to determine accurate course enrollments because the upgrade could not identify financial aid awards. It would identify them before the upgrade. The inability to identify financial aid meant that it was impossible to determine accurately which students had paid and which students had not. A class roster might show 25 students, five paid and twenty unpaid, but the twenty unpaid did not reflect financial aid, making it difficult to know on Thursday of registration whom to purge and difficult to get an accurate enrollment number. Users say that when they approached District about how to handle the problem, the advice was to look at each student enrolled individually to determine financial aid, an impossible task. Different campuses solved the problem different ways. At NHC, Ken Feld and John Fishero devised a plan to merge financial aid files and unpaid files. John stayed up most of Thursday night manipulating data and devising a report on his home PC so we could conduct registration Friday and Saturday. Before the resulting section management data was available, NHC turned students with checks in their hands away from courses because we could not get accurate enrollment numbers. The cost to the college, both short and long term, may be immeasurable. The toll on our employees, once again, has been high. No employee should have to stay up all night getting a home PC to do what Colleague won't do. The stress on users has been so high that an underground sympathy movement provides support to "victims of Colleague." To ensure that this problem was not unique to NHC, I checked with another college in the District and found that they had similar problems with the financial aid postings but managed to find a method within Colleague to solve the problem. People at that college acknowledge that training is a problem, primarily related to lack of opportunities for end users to practice. (This one's also a District-wide complaint). They also have the sense that college priorities are often moved around the list or into oblivion, and IT has difficulty understanding concerns of end users.

This college perceives that the training problem on their campus has improved lately.



Again, communication and perception are at the core of this problem. Users perceive that Datatel was contacted for assistance in solving the financial aid identification problem and that we are still waiting for an answer. The perception is that Datatel is not adequately responsive to our problems. Stauss and Baker agree that timely response from Datatel is sometimes a problem. However, they insist that Datatel is generally responsive to our needs. They maintain that IT never puts on a patch without testing. Since R16 was implemented, 177 patches have been tested and installed to correct problems. They maintain that on August 8, 1999 IT began testing in their test system a group of patches regarding registration issues and only after all were proven to work correctly were they loaded in "live" so that the Fall registration beginning August 17th would have the benefit of these corrections. They acknowledge that we have gone live with problems, but some of them were due to poor communication. For instance, prior to R16's going live, Stauss and the R16 Steering Committee, which was composed of key users across the district, asked the project managers working with the users and the new system for items which were "must haves" to operate. They received six. After R16 went live, the number jumped to sixty. IT had been told in an R16 Steering Committee meeting that faculty did not use gradebook inserts anymore, so they focused on other priorities. After going live, IT learned that their information was incorrect. On the issue of R16 not identifying financial aid awards for Fall 1999, Stauss and Baker say the problem resulted from the government's being late with indices to determine financial

aid, which meant that Datatel could not provide us with an upgrade. Datatel notified us in April 1999 that the Financial Aid upgrade would be late. They maintain there was no relation to the Registration System upgrade, but rather the fact that "...the 1999 Financial Aid release from Datatel took a step backwards in the area of passing the FA award information to Student Receivables. This update was installed in TEST on August 8th on arrival from Datatel. FA folks tested it and we were instructed by the District FA director on August 13th to move it to LIVE. The FA upgrade did correct several items but also had the bug you mention here. Subsequently, Datatel was alerted to the problem by many schools, and they issued 4 batches of upgrades beginning 9-9-99 and 11-8-99. This process works for Spring/00 registration." Baker noted that she wishes she had known of the home PC plan, because she could have done a query and download in an hour which would have solved the problem. I ran this idea by end users, and they remain skeptical. They point out that on October 19, 1999 Dr. Shugart requested three projects be completed by November 15, 1999. One was financial award identification. None of the three projects have been delivered at this writing. Stauss contends that their "notes show two projects were requested at that October 29th meeting and neither of the requests had to do with Financial Aid." Perception and communication again seem to be at the heart of this issue.

Another area which reflects differences in perception is IT's availability to deal with crises. End users have the perception that three key IT people were on vacation during Fall 1999 registration, which would reflect poor decision making. I checked the records and found that one person who Stauss says has no Colleague involvement was out that week, one was out for one day, but available via pager, and one was assigned to Kingwood working on a project unrelated to registration but available via pager. Stauss points out that this person has network responsibility but has nothing to do with Colleague. All of the Colleague Programmers and Analysts were on duty. Stauss urges everyone to use the Help Desk number (281-260-3100 from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm. After 6:00 pm and on weekends, users may call 281-260-3532 and leave a voice mail. An on-call IT member will be paged and will respond. He emphasizes that if a

message is not left, the system will not page the person on call. Stauss is convinced that adequate assistance was available during this fall's registration. Users complain that pages were returned slowly or not at all. Once again, perception and communication seem to be the issue here.

End users also complain of inadequate training. Stauss and Baker acknowledge that training has been a challenge. Stauss points out that he asked for three analysts and a trainer this budget cycle. He received 80% of the new money for the District Office this cycle and got all four positions approved. His sense is that the lack of money and people has been solved, which will allow IT to provide better and consistent training as well as expand into new areas, including web registration.

Ultimately, the problems connected to Colleague can be resolved with better communication. Stauss acknowledges that his staff does not always know how to rank priorities and has made some incorrect judgement calls. They have set priorities with no guidance. End users believe they have provided guidance which has been ignored. End users complain that problems raised in called summits go unaddressed. Stauss's response is, "In a 'summit', I get many requests from very important to very unimportant. If I hear a show stopper, it immediately goes to the top of our priorities; if the item is nice to have but not mission critical, it goes to the bottom. The process obviously will cause some folks to think their request is not being addressed." Stauss and Baker point out that end users have passed by opportunities to solve problems. For instance, Datatel invited the college to participate in beta testing of a new Colleague release. Stauss agreed to participate "so as to have a say in how some of these revisions were handled to ensure that Community college needs were properly addressed." In addition, Datatel provides to participating colleges financial incentives in the form of credits to bring in consultants or purchase products. Stauss was hoping for twenty three volunteers. He got seventeen with inadequate representation in some key areas.

Everyone acknowledges problems. Everyone has different perceptions of the problems. As I indicated at the outset, everyone with whom I visited

desires to arrive at a computer system that is functional, reliable, and user friendly. I do not believe that the problem lies with individuals. The end users on the campuses are hardworking and dedicated to serving our students. So are the members of IT at district. In my February 1999 article on Colleague, I highlighted the efforts of IT employees who have worked long hours at night, over weekends, and holidays to implement Colleague. The solution is communication. I don't know just how dysfunctional Colleague is. I suspect there are, indeed, many problems. What I know is that communication between IT and college users is dysfunctional. It is time for someone to address this problem, and it must be done quickly. Given the current disconnect between IT and the college users, I believe Dr. Pickelman should himself facilitate or assign someone to facilitate better communication between the parties. Once better communication is established, the facilitator should step out to allow regular meetings between IT and all key college players where the issues addressed in this article and a host of others are discussed and resolved. Stauss indicated in our interview that he has already begun to work on part of this recommendation: "It is my goal to develop a high level Colleague committee somewhat like what NHC uses to determine where budgeted money for technology on campus is spent—I am told that a committee evaluates all perceived needs and determines those of higher importance." He believes the committee should include the following: "VC Educational Programs, VC District Services, two presidents, one VP Admin, one VP Instruction and a Faculty Senate President." I would be remiss if I failed to note two weaknesses in the proposed make-up. The group should be balanced with some end users who are on the front line of Colleague use. Stauss also does not cite the need for an AFT representative. With those two exceptions, Stauss's plan is laudable. However, I remain firm in my belief that, for such a committee to be effective, the Chancellor or a designee must be initially involved. It is time, finally, to demand some accountability.

Alan Hall

Special thanks to Ron Stauss, Kim Baker, Jim Berry, Ken Feld, Earl Campa, and a host of people who wish to remain anonymous.



Facilities Revisited

My article on facilities in the October issue of The Advocate generated so much discussion that I decided to pursue the topic farther by interviewing the person in charge of building maintenance at NHC, Jeff Barber, Director of Facilities and Plant Operations. I found that Jeff generally agreed with the points raised in the article. He pointed out, however, that the window glass replacement we referenced was made with safety glass, at cost of \$500 which he chose to spend, although there is no code requirement to do so. Another AFT member and I had examined the new glass and flat missed the safety symbol. It is difficult to see, but it is there. Barber agreed that we were correct that none of the original glass in this area of the Academic Building is safety glass. Interestingly, the exterior glass going into the new facilities appears not to be either. It is a tempered glass (heat treated for strength), and one could conclude that it is somewhere between the old glass and safety glass. We were also correct that the problem with deterioration in the older buildings is due to budget constraints. In the last three budget cycles, funding for operating costs has remained flat. New funds for equipment such as vacuum cleaners and scrubbers, have been approved for the new buildings. A request for \$15,000 was submitted for supplies for the new buildings. No funds were approved. Apparently the administration believes that paper towels, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies can be stretched infinitely. The same perception seems to exist about our employees. We currently have in building maintenance one supervisor, two full-time employees

and one part-time to handle electrical, plumbing, lighting, etc on all of our current buildings plus Carver and Parkway. We will add three custodians and an HVAC person as the new buildings come online, but no new general maintenance staff. In fact, the college hasn't increased the building maintenance staff from those listed above in the last ten years. In that time we have added an addition to Winship, the CE building, Carver, Parkway, Applied Technology, Child Development, and are currently completing another addition to Winship and the new library—all with no increase in maintenance staff. The problems we see in the older buildings clearly are not the result of the performance of maintenance employees. It is astonishing that they manage what they do and that they haven't quit in the face of the increase in their workload. I'll wager they have not seen a commensurate increase in their salaries. On the issues of mildew and peeling wallpaper, Barber agrees that they are a problem. The stains and peeling wallpaper under outside windows are the result of not re-glazing outside windows, a process which is recommended every fifteen years. The original windows have never been re-glazed. In fact, the college does not follow a regular maintenance schedule on such items. We seem to prefer crisis management. Currently, re-glazing and replacing wall coverings fall under R&R. Cleaning sidewalks and walls is accomplished if there is a surplus in maintenance's general operating budget. Window glazing, cleaning mildew, etc. should be a line item in maintenance's general operating budget rather than depending on R&R or surpluses in the maintenance budget at the end of the year. Something always seems to siphon off available funds. Last year, it was the fire in Winship in Spring 1998 which took \$75,000 to \$100,000 to cover damage repair out of R&R, leaving no money for glazing, replacing wall covering, and cleaning sidewalks and outside walls had to be deferred as surplus funds in general maintenance were reallocated in May.

On the perpetually broken elevator, Barber acknowledged the problem, noting that it has never performed well. The administration looked into addressing the elevator's alignment problem in a new utility package, but it was cut from the final budget, an interesting fact considering NHC's commitment to be supportive of

special needs students. It was added to a deferred maintenance list begun in 1994, a list which has grown immensely. It will be interesting to watch the three new elevators in the library and science wing.

My conclusion after visiting with Barber is that the resources in terms of staff and funding are inadequate to perform a desirable level of facility maintenance. The college must funnel more funds into maintaining our older buildings. Whenever the union has called for increased spending in a particular area in the past, the first challenge we receive is, "Funds have to come from somewhere. Do you want us to take the money out of employee salaries and benefits?" Of course, our answer is no. I'm not sure why this is always the first place to look for funds. Perhaps it is time that the administration stop asking that question and start looking elsewhere for the money.

Alan Hall

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A Real Threat?

Recently, a friendly administrator sent me a copy of a newsletter he had received unsolicited. Titled Dean & Provost, this November 1999 issue includes an article titled "What to Do if Unionization Efforts Start on Your Campus." Topping the front page is a handy routing mechanism so that administration can pass the newsletter around to their cohorts. The article begins with the following:

Chief academic officers know that unionization of part-time faculty and graduate student assistants is a very real threat. Around the country,

thousands of adjuncts and graduate assistants have decided to pursue the union option to enhance their wages, benefits and respect. The situation should not be ignored. At many community colleges adjunct faculty outnumber full-timers, and nationwide part-time professors represent more than 40 percent of faculty members.

And most institutions have come to depend on the "free" labor provided by graduate students when they teach courses as part of their internships.

Have you prepared your faculty to know what to do if unionization efforts begin?

Curiously, unionization is characterized here as "a very real threat." What is it that adjuncts and grad students are threatening to do? They want to "enhance their wages, benefits and respect." I marvel at the mindset that considers such basic human desires a threat. I also marvel that it comes from a group of people whose wages are typically \$70,000 or better annually, whose benefits often exceed those of faculty and staff, and whose position gives them at least "official" respect. I must admit that reading an article such as this goes a long way in diminishing my respect for administrators who think this way. I have always believed that administration, faculty, and staff should work together from positions of mutual respect to solve problems. By and large, we are able to do so here at NHMCCD. However, from the tenor of this article, I can only assume such is not the case at many colleges.

The article continues with a checklist of "do's and don'ts" when unionization becomes "a threat." The checklist has the appearance of a balance sheet, but it doesn't make the article balanced. Under "Practices to Avoid," administrators are told that they cannot fire, threaten, or retaliate against employees for union activities. Under "Permissible Practices," administrators are told they may

- *Express the institution's opinion or [their]own as long as there is no implied threat or promise of a benefit*
- *Urge employees to vote against the union as long as there is no implied threat or promise of a benefit.*

- Tell employees not to sign any union cards being circulated by the union's organizers, but [they] cannot threaten to retaliate if they do sign.

The article goes on to point out that "administrators have had to set the record straight, answering untruthful statements from union officials." Peter Chester, Coordinator of Labor Relations for the California system, says, "(Institutions) are free to schedule and conduct meetings to talk to employees about unionization." The article notes, "Employees often look to their supervisor to tell them what is going on." I would point out that the aforementioned supervisors include the same folks who see employees' desires for improved wages, benefits and respect as a threat.

Why all this hype? I believe it boils down to an issue of control. Those in power often have difficulty with control issues and perceive any empowerment of employees as a threat to their control. The AFT believes the best environment is one where the playing field is relatively level, one where employees are free to participate actively in the decisions that affect their working life. If one looks at the good that has been accomplished by the AFT in this college district, one should find the position taken in this anti-union article laughable. I hope our employees do not rely on supervisors to make the decision for them about what is in their best interest. Supervisors are well paid and in positions of power. You should exercise your right to make affiliation decisions for yourself.

Alan Hall

U. S.-China Trade Deal: Where Does the Union Stand?

There are going to be "winners" and "losers" if China is endorsed by the U.S. and enters the World Trade Organization (NYT Tues. 16 Nov. 1999 C10) Of course some of the winners will be American commercial banks and telecommunication companies, but the textile manufacturers and workers will not fare so well. John F. Nash with Milliken & Co., the big textile manufacturer said, "The administration and Congress are spending our jobs like drunken sailors." John Sweeney, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. is not happy with the deal either. Feeling that the agreement "deals away our democratic principles and most cherished values," he vowed that the union would "fight it." Obviously, having China open its doors to international trade is going to be good for some, and the argument seems to be that with this agreement, China is more likely to change some of its bad behavior. That, of course, is yet to be seen and needs watching. One wonders how American unions' fight for fairness in the workplace will be affected if we align ourselves with a nation so wrought with human rights abuses.

Mr. Tang, a textile worker in China, agreed to speak with a NYT reporter on the promise that his full name would not be given out. On the subject of working conditions, he said (as he pulled out his paycheck), "Look at this! Eighty dollars a month after 35 years of work. We haven't had a pay raise in seven years, but during that time the wallets of the managers have grown fatter and fatter. In this country, the workers have the lowest status" (NYT Thurs. Nov. 18 1999 A3).

This is of course a very big deal. Remember Tianemmen Square? How much has changed in China since then?

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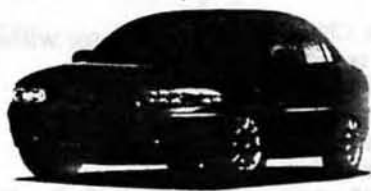
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