



Advancing Global Higher Education

A Case for Electronic Transcript Exchange

San Diego State University – A home grown student information system (SIS)

A conversation with – Susan Reyes, Director, Programmer/Analyst, Enrollment Services, member of the AACRAO SPEEDE Committee and PESC Board.

In an effort to encourage our members with homegrown SISs who are thinking about EDI transcripts to make the transition, we wanted to hear from one of our members who has been using EDI transcripts with a homegrown SIS since 1999 and learn from her how this technology has impacted her institution and share her implementation advice.

Susan Reyes currently serves as the Programmer/Analyst in Enrollment Services and is a long-standing member of the AACRAO SPEEDE Committee. Susan has been with San Diego State University (SDSU) since 2002. We hope her insights into this process prove helpful to you.

San Diego State University has received more applications for admission than any other university in the California State University System for the past three years and has been ranked in the [Top 10 Universities That Receive the Most Applications](#). For fall 2015, SDSU received more than 81,000 applications for undergraduate admission. Because of the volume of applications and transcripts received, SDSU has turned to technology to assist in processing the immense volume of data that needs to be collected, processed and assessed within a relatively short amount of time in order to make admissions decisions.

How long have you been using eTranscripts?

SDSU has been using eTranscripts since the late 1990s. We started with our three largest community college feeder districts and created a system where they produced EDI transcripts, which were saved to an external tape and brought to our campus once a week. Around 2000, an FTP file transfer was established so that the files no longer had to be brought to campus. We also joined the Texas server (now the NSC SPEEDE server) around this time. In the next 10 years, we made some strides to add other local community colleges to our EDI network, but the real push for receiving EDI started in 2011.

Inbound Transcripts

How does your institution receive eTranscripts?

SDSU receives paper, PDF and EDI transcripts from high schools and colleges. High school transcripts typically come as paper or PDF and are processed in the same fashion. Sixth and seventh semester transcripts are often reviewed but are not archived into our document imaging systems. Final transcripts are processed and then imaged into the document imaging system.

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College transcripts are received in paper, PDF and EDI formats. Paper transcripts are scanned and processed via OCR software to extract data. PDF transcripts are either printed and scanned or imported into our OCR process depending on the security embedded in the PDF.

PDF transcripts that have embedded expiration dates or limited number of views cannot be swept into the system because these security features will remove the ability to view the image when the limit is exceeded. These PDFs are printed and scanned into the system. Data is then extracted via the OCR process and loaded into our SIS and degree audit system.

EDI transcripts are received from a variety of sources and are automatically loaded into our student information system and degree audit system. With EDI transcripts, the only transcripts that are manually touched are those that have some data anomaly or an error.

How has this technology changed transcript processing?

In the last five years, we have placed an emphasis on receiving EDI and have worked with many colleges to increase the number of EDI transcripts we receive. In 2014, we reached 100 trading partners, and 70% of college transcripts were received in EDI form. We have seen a decrease in college transcript processing time from roughly eight weeks to two days. We work with all vendors on the transcript receipt side to ensure that we are getting EDI from anyone who is able to send it.

How many staff people support this process and where are they located (unit/department)?

We have a staff of approximately nine people in our Admissions Office who process incoming high school transcripts for freshman admissions. We also have a staff of five people in our Enrollment Services Support unit (which works very closely with the transfer admissions and the evaluators in our Advising Office) who process college transcripts.

How does your institution use e-transcript for admissions, transfer articulation and other processes?

With more than 80,000 applications and multiple transcripts per application, we could not process all incoming transcripts manually within the required timeframes with the limited staff available, so SDSU has automated the processing of EDI transcripts for transfer admissions and articulation of college courses. EDI transcripts are received loaded to both our student information system and our degree audit system programmatically. Instead of touching and processing every transcript that comes in, with EDI transcripts, we only “touch” transcripts that error when loading or transcripts/coursework that meet a defined “exception.” Electronic transcript processing not only allows us to get the data into our systems within a day of being sent by the sending institution, but also allows us to classify and group transcripts into workflows for more efficient processing. We use our home grown student information system and our OnBase (document imaging system) workflow capability to filter transcripts into workflows for staff to process. By filtering transcripts based on student data, transcript data or exception reports, we can quickly and accurately direct transcripts to the most appropriate person for efficient processing. For example, if the transcript is for an upper division applicant who had been admitted but has work in progress on the transcript, we can filter that into a workflow that will continue to look for a final transcript. A final transcript for an admitted student may be forwarded to an advisor for immediate evaluation. Automations such as these have a significant impact on the amount of time it takes us to process the overall volume of transcripts received.

How long did it take you to implement these processes and what resources were needed?

Receiving EDI transcripts takes a very small amount of time to set up if you have the technical resources available. Physical resources include a secure ftp server and software and internet capability, which are not difficult to set up. However, you do need an IT professional to make sure that you have set it up in accordance to general and institutional security requirements. Most student information systems have the capability to import/export EDI or have an add-on available to allow you to import/export EDI. The full automation of EDI transcript processing that SDSU has put in place using the student information system and OnBase has been a continual effort of our transcript processing staff and one IT professional for the past four years. This is by no means the sole job function for any particular individual, but is an ever-evolving process in support of ever-changing requirements and priorities for admissions as well as evaluations and graduation.

Were lessons learned that you would like to share with others thinking about implementing inbound transcripts with a homegrown SIS?

The actual implementation of inbound transcripts is not difficult. The challenge comes in evaluating your current processes and finding ways to make them not only electronic but also more effective and efficient. Receiving electronic transcripts only makes the delivery quicker; automating the processing, as well as learning to trust the automated process, takes much more time because it is a cultural change.

Outbound Transcripts

How are outbound electronic transcripts processed?

Outgoing transcripts are handled by our Registrar's Office. For the last three years we have been using our own web portal transcript ordering process in partner with Parchment to send out PDF transcripts. The process is fully automated, but we do have a daily review of orders to ensure no problems arise.

How long did it take to implement the Parchment service with your SIS and who was involved in that process?

The integration with Parchment took two months to complete. Our Registrar and one of our student information systems programmers were involved in implementing the outbound PDF transcript process with Parchment. SDSU already had an online transcript ordering system, so we just had to modify the system to have the student make the selection of hardcopy or PDF and send them to the Parchment system for the PDF order.

How many staff people support this process and where are they located (unit/department)?

We have two staff members in the Registrar's Office who handle the outgoing transcripts.

What challenges, if any, did you overcome to implement outbound transcripts?

Our biggest challenge in implementing the outbound PDF transcripts was deciding the best way to make the process as seamless as possible for the student. We wanted to make sure the process of ordering a PDF transcript was an integrated part of our current system, not an entire new system that the student would have to learn.

Outcomes and Advice

What lessons did you learn along the way that would help others thinking about implementing these processes?

Decide what portions you want to handle internally and what parts you want the vendor to handle. Find the vendor that can work most closely with your specific requirements. If you have institutions that will be receiving a large number of your transcripts, you may want to check with them to be sure they will be able to receive and process them.

Have you seen any gains in efficiencies with either inbound or outbound transcripts (e.g., time on process, human resource, fiscal?)

The inbound transcript processes have greatly decreased the amount of time spent processing transcripts and allows us to give our evaluators and admissions offices, as well as the students, a good picture of how their transfer work will articulate to their degree at SDSU. A student can see the transcript post to their student account within a day of the EDI transcript having been sent and can run a preliminary articulation report to see how transfer courses articulate to our requirements. The workflows allow us to know which transcripts need immediate attention so that we can “correct” any issue before it becomes a problem for the student and the advisor. The automation of the entire process allows us to continue to handle the ever-increasing volume of incoming transcripts in a timely manner and to provide accurate information to students.

Sending PDF transcripts has significantly decreased the need for our staff to print, stuff, and mail transcripts and has freed up the staff to work on other projects. We no longer need additional student assistants to handle the outgoing transcripts.

Would you recommend that other institutions implement the eTranscript services you have and are in the process of implementing? If so, in what order and why?

I would definitely recommend that institutions implement an eTranscript solution. Students expect instant information, and although that is not always possible, eTranscripts and automated processing allows us to send and receive accurate data in a secure manner and provide timely information to our students. Even if an institution is not ready to undertake a full automation, implementing the sending or receiving of electronic transcripts can be the first step to making transcript processing more efficient.