



Florida Community College Software Consortium

Strategic Plan

November 2003



Member Schools – Broward Community College, Florida Community College at Jacksonville, Indian River Community College, Miami-Dade College, Okaloosa-Walton Community College, Palm Beach Community College, Mercer County Community College (Associate Member), Louisiana State University at Shreveport (Associate Member)

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1.0 Introduction

This Strategic Plan has been prepared as the result of a charge by the Florida Community College Software Consortium (FCCSC) Executive Committee to the Executive Director to develop a strategic vision and corresponding plan for assisting the consortium in moving forward on a new track with new technologies.

The plan will be reviewed by the Executive Committee, modified and adjusted according to management direction and ever-changing conditions of the technology market, and will adhere to the general vision set forth in the Strategic Planning Vision document shared with and approved by the FCCSC Executive Committee at the July 17, 2003 Executive Committee meeting at Hutchinson Island, Florida.

The plan is a bold document that charts out a new course for the consortium along several major tracks, primarily technology, functionality and business models. The intention of the plan is to both revitalize the consortium and provide direction for further progress and leveraging of investments already made in the consortium by the member institutions. The ultimate goal of the plan is to bolster a technology and business operating environment that provides added value and new benefits for students, faculty, and administrators across the member institutions, and at a cost that is significantly less than the total costs of the current technology operating environments across our consortium.

The initial and primary audience for the Strategic Plan includes college presidents, business officers, and chief information officers. However, the plan will only become reality when it is embraced by and acted upon by the excellent faculty and staff who make up the member institutions, and who have made the previous efforts of the consortium an outstanding success.

2.0 Mission of the FCCSC

“To provide technology leadership and cost-effective management of resources allocated by the FCCSC members for the greater good of all participating institutions. This is achieved with solid project plans, effective contract management, delivery of world-class ERP functionality, maintaining a leading position with higher-education technology, and a high degree of responsiveness to member institutional needs.”

3.0 Vision of the FCCSC

“The FCCSC strives to be the premier higher-education technology consortium, a place where professional excellence and public service thrive. Superior project management, quality assurance, and system implementation; the highest ethical and professional standards; teamwork; commitment to collaboration; and a devotion to open source solutions will make the FCCSC the higher-education technology consortium of choice.”

4.0 Guiding Principles of the FCCSC

- ◆ Collaboration has value
- ◆ We are more alike than we are different (sharing common beliefs)
- ◆ There is a best practice among the consortia schools, and we should adopt these wherever possible
- ◆ We value institutional uniqueness
- ◆ Focus should be on the business practices, not the technology
- ◆ We know our business better than a “canned software” provider
- ◆ We believe in the quality of the product, not solely the bottom line
- ◆ We believe in the efficient use of public funds

5.0 Executive Summary / Strategic Objectives

The FCCSC stands at a crossroads in its history. Technology has continued to advance, and the FCCSC product must respond to these changes in order to remain competitive and to meet user expectations. In addition, the organizational models that are currently in place must be adjusted in order to better leverage the efforts of the consortium and to realize an improved ROI for the member institutions.

The consortium expended considerable effort over the past ten years building a feature-rich community college integrated administrative information system. While this effort was valid and impressive, and has delivered significant benefits for the participants, Internet-based and open source technology has rapidly advanced well beyond the proprietary mainframe-based / SoftwareAG technology environment of the mid 1990s that drives the current consortium product. In order to remain competitive and attractive to our member institutions it is essential that the consortium address technology change now so that:

1. **The consortium product can survive, thus preserving and prolonging the investments that were made to develop an integrated product uniquely suited to the consortium members;**
2. **We retain current members who may be tempted to move away from the mainframe product towards seemingly attractive, but generic, commercial package software options that use server-based and open-source technology;**
3. **We attract future partners / members who are interested in open source solutions, and who will not be inclined to consider the current product given the existing mix of proprietary mainframe-based hardware and software.**

In addition, there are organizational and process issues that we should explore with the goal of improving our operational environment. The consortium schools, while they support in theory the concept of a centralized development group that is responsive to their needs, have not fully committed to the “insourcing model” that the consortium represents. In other

words, there are redundant IT applications development operations that compete with the consortium for scarce technical resources (including staffing). At the same time these individualized operations sometimes interfere with the efforts to deliver a common code base for all the colleges. We realize that this is a sensitive topic, since it implies changing roles for the institutions' IT departments, as well as an expanded role for the FCCSC. It can be summarized as a need to focus on core competencies at the institutions and in the FCCSC central office. We envision that the institutions will provide implementation support and business analysis expertise, while the central FCCSC office provides enhanced development, training/support, and strategic planning (as related to the FCCSC product) expertise. One interesting corollary of this situation is that, no matter what direction the member institutions ultimately go (e.g., stay with the consortium or purchase a vended package), the roles of the institutional IT departments will of necessity have to change towards an implementation support/business analysis focus, and move away from individualized applications development support.

Strategic Objectives

The following **strategic objectives** will drive the strategic planning effort. As previously mentioned in the Strategic Vision Document shared with the Executive Committee in July 2003, this strategic planning effort will follow an approach of creating interrelated **strategic tracks** that reinforce the **strategic objectives** by laying out clear goals for the consortium in the areas of technology, functionality, and the overarching business model.

Strategic Objective 1 – Fiscal Stabilization of the FCCSC

Just as venture capital provides the initial impetus and financial stability to a new enterprise, the colleges in effect serve as venture capitalists for the consortium. Without some assurance of necessary financial resources, it will be difficult to accomplish the operational, functional, organizational, and technical strategies that are the heart of the strategic plan. We absolutely need to create a sustainable model for funding the consortium – development of an appropriate funding model may be as important to its long-range success as the quality of the implementation itself.¹

Our expectation is that the FCCSC member institutions will continue to support the FCCSC as further development of the strategic plan reveals enhanced ROI and positioning of the product technologically that will keep the FCCSC solution set the most viable and attractive option for the members.

We plan to accomplish this objective through careful analysis of the cost/benefit of evolving to new technology and new organizational models, as well as an enhanced business model / marketing plan for leveraging the product both within and without the consortium. We expect that the Executive Committee will frequently review progress and new information to determine the value of the overall effort to their institution, and to use this information to build further support for the consortium across the membership.

One desirable outcome is a new set of by-laws and MOUs that further clarifies and defines the relationship of the member institutions to the consortium, the formal nature of the consortium itself, the funding sources for the consortium effort, and articulation of the value that the consortium provides to the member institutions. It will be very helpful for the

¹ *Organizing and Managing Information Resources on Your Campus*, “Getting Beyond Budget Dust to Sustainable Models for Funding Information Technology”, David L. Smallen, Jack McCredie, 2003

FCCSC to be able to move forward with a reinforced and somewhat more formalized base of fiscal and institutional support.

Key phrase: *“With funding and commitment all things are possible.”*

Strategic Objective 2 – Change the Technology

The mainframe / SoftwareAG technology that the FCCSC has used to develop and implement Integrow must change. We are proposing an evolutionary change that moves away from a mainframe platform to server-based architectures. We are proposing a change from proprietary code (i.e., Natural) to open source solutions (i.e., Java, PHP). The benefit of moving in this direction is the elimination of dependence upon one or two large and costly technology vendors, replacing this dependence with a partnership with the higher education/open source community as a whole (e.g., JA-SIG).

We must expand rapidly into the areas of web-based IT systems. The “green screen” appearance of the current system needs to be replaced with an easy-to-use / easy-to-understand web interface that provides more functionality in terms of presenting data in a variety of ways.

We must implement portal technology across our member institutions. Portals have the potential to create a seamless environment between academic and administrative systems as well as provide a single-point-of-entry for all technology and information resources for our members and their constituents (parents, students, faculty, administrators).

The mainframe-era support models that the FCCSC member colleges and the FCCSC central office retain must also change in order to fully leverage the adoption of new technology. The new support model will, among other things, result in shortened delivery cycles to meet the rapidly changing and diverse needs of the customer base. We should consider providing a centralized help desk/technical support operation managed by the FCCSC for all our member institutions. In terms of the product itself, the goal will be to deliver a relatively easy method of distributing changes/updates, and to perform testing and quality assurance activities.

The FCCSC will need to address staffing and training requirements to meet these challenges, adding new staff who are “Internet-savvy”, evolving mainframe technologists who are capable of making the switch to the Internet technologies, and replacing those who cannot with others who are familiar with the new technology environment. The goal is for the FCCSC to develop a core competency second to none with the knowledge and experience of multi-tier, Internet-driven architectures that it will ultimately implement and support. At the same time, support for the legacy environment must be maintained so that schools can be assured of solid operations and minimal disruption while new technologies are being implemented.

Additional resources will need to be tapped in order to help the organization rapidly absorb and transform itself from a mainframe / legacy knowledge base to an Internet / open source knowledge base.

As we continue to develop our strategic effort, expected issues of organizational readiness across all of our institutions and within the FCCSC itself must be acknowledged, addressed, and resolved.

Mainframe Technology & Staffing Resources

The current SoftwareAG/Natural technology is simply not a viable or attractive option for continuing to build upon indefinitely. The skills are increasingly rare and costly to obtain (the current technology “down market” aberration notwithstanding). This is an accelerating trend, and has been building since at least the mid 1990s. On the other hand, open source/Java and Microsoft DotNet technologists are much more widely available, both in the US and globally, and generally at a lower cost than the workforce/skill-base for SoftwareAG/Natural technology.

Migrating away from mainframe-based technology will allow the institutions to further focus, standardize, and modernize their information technology architectures, while at the same time reducing their dependence upon expensive mainframe/legacy technology and the increasingly rare skills to support it.

Benefits

Attainment of this objective has a benefit of enabling the consortium product to compete in the higher-education ERP marketplace (both private/external and public/Florida), with the potential to attract additional and possibly significant revenue streams from a renewed interest in the consortium’s open source solutions by other institutions as an alternative to expensive vended ERP solutions.²

Changing technology has the potential to save the institutions hundreds of thousands of dollars annually (if not millions) from their collective mainframe technology budgets.

Key Phrase: *“In the Internet Age, if you do not master change then surely change will master you.”*

Strategic Objective 3 – Develop Service Functionality

The FCCSC has a tremendous opportunity to build upon its existing strengths in providing deep and rich functionality to its user base by expanding this concept into a **service functionality model**. What this means in essence is that the colleges and the FCCSC central office together will develop new processes, agree upon best practices and appropriate roles, but also consider new and innovative solutions to existing business problems. One highly desirable outcome would be sharing of business practices and elimination of redundancy / conflicting business practices at the participating institutions. Another highly desirable outcome is the implementation of a **knowledge management** process so that we can ensure that, not only are best practices and technology solutions being adopted, but that innovation and continuous improvement is occurring based on an ever-expanding base of user expertise and creativity.

The **service functionality model** implies a focus on delivering service-based applications to all constituents of the colleges, in an easy-to-use, intuitive, web-based format wherever possible. These constituents include, in order of priority – students, faculty, and administrators. Business intelligence and portal technologies help enable the service functionality model by further leveraging the power of the Integrow ERP and the information it contains by making it readily available and supported in common by the FCCSC for the member institutions.

² *Web Portals & Higher Education*, “E-Business in Higher Education”, Robert B. Kravik, 2002

The FCCSC needs to reinforce and support the primary mission of the institutions, by delivering stellar services through its applications to the teaching and learning mission as they relate to administrative systems. The FCCSC needs to develop and implement processes that will result in shorter delivery cycles and improved quality assurance for its member institutions. This is essential in order to deliver the services that the institutions are dependent on to meet the expectations of their ever-more-demanding customer base.

Creating a Service Functionality Model at the institutions will allow the institutions to focus on core competencies in order to better serve students, faculty, and administrators, resulting in the reduction of effort for non-strategic activities. This will enable the institutions to expend additional energies on the core mission of the institutions – providing teaching and learning to a variety of audiences.³

Key Phrase: *“When customer expectations are high, the only rational choice is to meet them or watch your business go elsewhere”*

Strategic Objective 4 – Change the Business Model

The FCCSC and its member institutions must address many interrelated business and process issues as it embarks upon the road towards new technology and new organizational models.

Image

For example, the issue of overall image should be addressed – the FCCSC must bolster its image as a well-known, well-respected, well-liked, and well-supported organization with an unquestionable reputation for excellence. It must change perceptions by some that it is a bureaucratic, heavy-handed, and somewhat mysterious organization known only to a handful of contacts at each member institution. Simple marketing devices (e.g., newsletter, quarterly letter to member institution presidents, annual “kiosk” at member institutions, annual user conference, improved appearance of FCCSC printed and signage material) will go a long way towards sending the message to all that the FCCSC is a viable, responsive, and valuable organization that provides visible and meaningful benefits to its members.

Funding

The issues surrounding funding need to be addressed – it will be difficult for the FCCSC to implement significant and necessary changes without a reasonably assured revenue stream for a predictable period of time. It is almost certain that the funding needed at the central organization will increase in order to carry out a major technology change, but equally certain that it will be offset by the savings generated for the institutions as mainframe technology and associated high costs of support are shed. The strategic planning effort will contain steps to identify the current budgets and investments at the member institutions, and an estimated budget and investment for evolving to new technology – this will serve as a basis for further discussion about funding, reallocation of resources, and identification of significant cost savings for the institutions.

Marketing

The issue of marketing to external and internal customers should be discussed. If new technology is successfully implemented, there will be a tremendous potential for the

³ *Information Alchemy – the Art and Science of Knowledge Management*, “Knowledge Management in Higher Education”, Blaise Cronin, Elisabeth Davenport, 2001

FCCSC to market itself to attract new members to the consortium, which in turn will generate additional revenue streams and strengthen the ROI equation.

Governance

The issue of governance should be examined – is the current structure of and representation by the member institutions adequate? The Executive Committee should explore the question of whether resources and costs are fairly allocated, and in harmony with individual college influence/control of the consortium. It will be key that the Executive Committee continues to include representatives that have the authority to commit institutional resources for their college in order to rapidly address decisions that inevitably will need to be made as the strategic technology evolution unfolds.

While the representation topic has been of recent interest, there are also other potential opportunities in the area of governance that can strengthen the FCCSC. For example, there is an opportunity for the FCCSC member institutions to open up interactions from a relative few individuals at each institution to a larger, broader, and more representative community of participants, including faculty and students.

Institutional IT Resources

If the institutions are willing to support the concept of the FCCSC office providing a focused development effort, and are also supportive of the need for their own IT departments to provide implementation and business analysis expertise to the effort, it follows that the IT resources at the institutions will need to be reallocated and redirected at the institutional level. In some cases this may result in redeployment to the FCCSC central office, in particular for those individuals who show potential for development vs. implementation/business analysis support. Going forward, we believe that IT expertise at the institutions should be consciously repositioned towards conducting the vital tasks of business analysis, implementation of common solutions, innovation, and identification of best practices. (As we have stated previously, this is an organizational model that will be required in any case if the institution either stays with the FCCSC product or moves to another product such as SCT or Peoplesoft. It is a significant component of addressing the need for organizational readiness within our member institutions, and within the FCCSC itself.)

FCCSC Organizational Readiness

The FCCSC central office needs to ramp up and develop new technical capabilities and expertise in order to carry out development on a variety of platforms. It needs to bolster and emphasize its capabilities to provide facilitation/coordination of services to the institutions. Technology standardization must be discussed, agreed upon, selected, and implemented in partnership with our member institutions with a goal of eliminating unique configurations across the member institutions. A data center concept should be explored with a goal of providing a professionally managed server farm, and an accompanying central support facility that will benefit all member institutions equally.

These efforts at expanding visibility/involvement, resolving governance concerns, consolidation of IT technologies, process engineering, and outsourcing/reallocation of IT resources will result in improved efficiencies, standardization, and the potential to significantly reduce costs across our member institutions.⁴

Key Phrase: *“Consolidation and commonality will enable organizations to prosper in times of reduced budgets”*

⁴ *Technology Everywhere*, “Recruiting, Retaining, and Reskilling Campus IT Workers”, Allison F. Dolan, 2002

Conclusion

We are asking the consortium members and senior leadership to consider bold and far-reaching changes with this strategic plan. We are asking the members to commit resources and, to some extent, stake their institutional reputations on the success of this consortium initiative. We are asking the members to commit to a consortium-wide effort to implement the changes proposed in this strategic plan, and **to plan for a rough timeframe of three years** to accomplish this change.

It is understandable that making multi-year institutional commitments and supporting changes to this degree (in particular in the current budget climate) can be unnerving. **However, the one thing we can all be certain of is that technology and business changes will happen, and it is far preferable for the consortium members to drive the change before someone or something else drives it for us.**

The reality is that, in today's technology environment, it has become increasingly difficult for individual higher education institutions in general to continue to support current legacy environments, or to evolve towards the "brave new world of the Internet" alone. This is because the new IT world is becoming increasingly complex and crosses many organizational boundaries. One viable approach to managing this complexity in a cost-effective manner is for organizations in higher education to band together in a collaborative effort. Fortunately, the FCCSC represents a collaboration already in place, and it is now prepared to address significant change that will help its members wisely use institutional resources to address the core missions of their individual institutions.

This change will not come without cost, both in dollars and in some loss of perceived control of unique processes at institutions. However, we expect that the gradual realization that the institutions have gained equity in real dollar savings as well as the freeing of institutional resources to devote to critical educational missions will compensate for the temporary increased costs of achieving the change.

At the end of the day, our vision is that the FCCSC will stand on new ground – with new technology, innovative processes, common standards, and improved services to its members and constituents. Individual institutional budgets will have increased resources resulting from technology savings and consolidation of technology that can be redeployed to perform their core mission. The FCCSC itself will be a well-funded, stable, and proactive organization that is continually evolving and helping its members stay current with technology solutions in the delivery of essential services in order to remain competitive in a dynamic and rapidly evolving educational marketplace.