"Texting Students" Report to IT Council

Committee Name:

Student Communications Advisory Committee

Membership:

- Nechell Bonds, Admissions
- Steve Coffman, Computer Services (User Support)
- Brian Edmond, Computer Services (MIS)
- Rob Hornberger, Office of the Registrar (past chair)
- Theresa McCoy, Computer Services
- Kristi Oetting, Computer Services (User Support)
- Natalie Seever, Office of the Registrar
- Don Simpson, Enrollment Services
- Amie Squibb, Enrollment Services (current chair)
- Krista Webb, West Plains

Meetings:

- February 11, 2016 – Banner Communication Management webinar
- February 23, 2016
- March 17, 2016 – Mongoose texting vendor webinar
- March 31, 2016
- May 6, 2016
- May 17, 2016 – Blackboard Connect demo

Charge:

The Student Communications Advisory Committee is a preliminary, ad hoc group, appointed by IT Council, to develop a framework for a larger, more formal committee to use for determining the logistics and a recommendation regarding new methods for communicating with students. The focus is primarily the implementation of a university-wide mechanism for texting students, but other types of communication technologies may be considered as well.

Tasks:

The committee identified the following eight items to address.

1. Determine if/how we could encourage students who don't regularly use their university email accounts to use the forwarding option to send emails to their personal email account. Could we make this a part of the account creation process? What are the pros and cons?
2. Determine if/how we should use texting as a mode for communicating to students. We discussed enhancing the old BearTXT, but that it wouldn't allow for customized messages. We discussed that we would need to look into vendor solutions.

3. Review how the MSU App is currently being used and plans for future use. Could this tool be better promoted and therefore the notification center feature be used for sending messages to students?
4. Address how to collect and store cell phone numbers in the student information system. How do we distinguish between the primary/permanent and cell phone fields? How do we collect cell phone numbers so that they are stored in the appropriate field? How do we allow students to update their phone information?

SUB SYSTEM PHN	ERROR TYPE	COUNT
	Bad or no area code for phone number	15,266
	Dash in phone number	8,066
	Phone number length not 7	24,704

5. Consider other communication alternatives (e.g., Ellucian Communication Management via MSU App, social media).
6. Consider if any policies need to be revised or added (e.g., designation of university email as official communication), including any legal/liability issues.
7. Consider ways to direct students to the portal (e.g., making it the way students access Blackboard, etc.), and then use the portal to deliver targeted messages to students.
8. Recommend improvements to the portal. How can it be used more? Can it be enhanced? Who should have ownership?

Status:

- Temporarily suspended meetings while in the process of hiring a new Enrollment Services Systems Coordinator. Leadership of the committee has been transferred to Amie Squibb.
- It is clear that while texting is the priority topic for this committee we need to have a multi-faceted approach to communicating with students (e.g., texting, mobile app communications manager, portal, social media).
- This is a project that affects many areas of the University so significant coordination efforts are needed.
- We know that the Taylor Health and Wellness Center pharmacy already uses a texting service (Twilio), West Plains has used Celly in the past to text students for financial aid and other important deadlines, and there are probably other offices using their own texting tools. Before too many offices go "rogue," we think it would be good to have a centralized, vetted host of options for communicating to students.
- West Plains has an initiative from their Chancellor to send out text messages for reminding students to register for the spring 2017 semester.
- We plan to have a demo of how other schools are using their portal more effectively regarding communication to students.
- We conducted a study of our benchmark institutions (handout included). Overall, we did not find any schools with more advanced models of communication to follow.