



U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student
Aid (FSA), Free Application for Federal Student Aid
(FAFSA) on the Web

*Redesigning a Critical Business Process
to Enable E-Filing*



Case Study

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Redesigning a Critical Business Process to Enable E-Filing

The Challenge

Each year, more than 13 million students apply for over \$70 billion in federal student aid by completing and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. Prior to 1997, the FAFSA was a complex, paper-based form that took considerable time to complete, and required a costly, labor-intensive data collection system to process. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) desired to provide better service and greater convenience for financial aid applicants, while also reducing processing costs and improving turnaround. In addition, FSA wished to reduce the number of FAFSAs requiring corrections due to errors submitted on the form.

The Solution

Vangent designed, developed, and deployed FAFSA on the Web to allow students to apply for federal student aid via a secure, easy-to-use Web site available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. FAFSA on the Web securely transmits data directly from an applicant's PC to FSA's Central Processing System (also developed and operated by Vangent), which calculates the applicant's eligibility for federal student aid within 72 hours of receiving the application.

Vangent's FAFSA on the Web design includes numerous features to facilitate the financial aid application process. "Skip logic," which presents only those sections of the application that are determined applicable based on answers to previous questions, speeds completion of the form. Verification of data and security of private information are also built into the design. FAFSA on the Web also serves as a central online reference site for the FAFSA, including electronic signatures for the FAFSA, an application status checking feature, a federal school code search, help text, and frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Beginning with the 1998-99 financial aid cycle, Vangent implemented Renewal FAFSA on the Web, allowing students to update only the sections of their applications that have changed or require new information. In 1999, we implemented Corrections on the Web, allowing students to view their

application data online and submit corrections or updates via the Web. In 2000, we developed and deployed a Spanish version of FAFSA on the Web. Access to Renewal FAFSA and Corrections data is obtained through the use of a PIN. Vangent developed and operates FSA's PIN Registration site, where students request a PIN that may be used on multiple Department of Education sites.

Contact Information

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The Results

Vangent's redesign of this critical business process on behalf of FSA has increased end-user satisfaction with FSA's services and greatly reduced unit costs for FSA. End-user satisfaction has been evidenced by a dramatic increase in the number of electronic applications submitted each year, now accounting for more than 90 percent of all applications submitted. The dramatic reduction in the number of paper applications submitted has decreased FSA's processing and printing costs.

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is a uniform and independent measure of customer experience. FAFSA on the Web received a 2003 ACSI rating of 86, higher than all sites measured in the E-Gov index (the Federal E-Gov average was 71). Measured against the private sector, FAFSA on the Web was surpassed only by Amazon.com (88), and surpassed such e-business leaders as Yahoo! (78), E-trade (69), and AOL (65).

Since its inception in 1997, FAFSA on the Web has received the following industry awards and recognition:

- Excellence.gov Top 5 Award, 2005
- E-Gov Pioneer Award, 2004
- E-Gov Explorer Award, 2001
- E-Gov Pioneer Award, 2000
- Federal Computer Week's "10 Sites to Watch," 2000
- Government Executive Magazine's Top 15 Best Federal Web Sites 1998
- Industry Advisory Council's Government Award, 1998
- Lycos Top 5% Award, 1997