

Houston Community College System Leaves its Legacy Behind with Implementation of PeopleSoft Financials 7.5

BACKGROUND

Houston Community College System (HCCS) is an educational complex serving the Houston, Texas area. With five area colleges and an extensive distance education program, HCCS serves over 55,000 students each year. Since its inception in 1971, the college system has touched the lives of more than a million individuals in the Houston metropolitan area. In 1995, HCCS purchased PeopleSoft Financials software, part of a plan to replace an outdated legacy system. After several false starts, implementation of the software was put on hold for lack of a proper IT infrastructure, HCCS technical resources and full functionality for the school's needs.

CHALLENGES

Nonetheless, the challenges to HCCS endured: increased financial and student processing volumes and little in documentation of the cumbersome, customized legacy system. In addition, HCCS had no automated purchasing system and struggled with manually prepared orders. Among many IT goals, the college wanted a Windows environment. With the release of PeopleSoft 7.5 and the accumulation of PeopleSoft Best Practices that helped address the school's processing needs, HCCS opted for a new implementation in January 2000. The goal was to get off of the existing legacy systems by the new fiscal year starting September 1, 2000. To meet an aggressive schedule, the software was to be implemented on an Oracle database platform as a "vanilla" system, with minimal modifications to PeopleSoft functionality, data formats, or field lengths.

After a competitive evaluation, Sierra-Cedar was chosen as implementation provider for its extensive experience in higher education, as well as its full range of consulting skills and commitment to knowledge transfer.

SOLUTION

Shortly after the school had independently installed HR/Payroll applications, Sierra-Cedar and HCCS launched the implementation project on February 14, 2000. "The team was excellent from the start, and Sierra-Cedar and HCCS worked very well together," notes Tazeen Khan, Sierra-Cedar's Project Manager. "Sierra-Cedar provided project leads for each major PeopleSoft 7.5 Financials module: General Ledger/Budgetary Control, Purchasing, Accounts Payable, and Asset Management. HCCS provided dedicated technical resources, both full and part time."



Industry	Higher Education
Services	Implementation
Application & Modules	PeopleSoft Financials 7.5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Ledger/Budgetary Control • Purchasing • Accounts Payable • Asset Management
Client Since	2000

Well planned from the outset, with overall and individual software module plan documents, Sierra-Cedar's "Bullet Track" implementation set and met an aggressive schedule. Interactive Design/Prototyping™ (IDP), system design and adaptation, interface development, testing, conversion, and systems migration—all were completed on schedule. User acceptance testing was done in August, to meet the September 2000 fiscal year cutover. Full team meetings were held weekly and, later, shortened to on-demand discussions as the "go live" date approached. The project faced significant challenges from the start, including HCCS reorganizations and major management changes in mid-stream. Moving from manual to online purchasing presented an ongoing challenge in change management. "Despite the pressures and long hours, the team remained totally cooperative and dedicated throughout," comments Ms. Khan. "We took every step we could to keep the project on target. For example, we tested and validated from the very start, creating setups during the IDP phase for entry into an acceptance database and completing a design document for each PeopleSoft module. We asked for user signoffs on every basic functionality."

RESULTS/BENEFITS

With a successful cutover in September 2000, HCCS met its goals for the 2001 fiscal year. Some 3,000 HCCS employees are gaining access to the system, including at least 600 purchasing staff users. Advantages to HCCS include the following:

We were most impressed with the straightforwardness of the Sierra-Cedar professionals. They were knowledgeable, at ease, not pushy—and clear on the many project and quality controls they could apply to assure success.

Celia Gee
Director of Finance

- **Fast, Complete Information Retrieval and Reporting** – The new client/server system provides immediate, useful data to end users. The outgoing legacy system retained only two months of data, with anything older stored on microfiche. For purchasing, only the chart field and amount were entered. Now all current data is stored and available for online access and timely management, state, grant and HCCS Board reporting. Users need not rely on technical staff to gather and download data for a full range of reports.
- **Ability to Request Materials Online from the Field** – Purchasing staff can now request materials as needed from 47 separate HCCS locations. Users can inquire on purchasing transactions as needed.
- **A Technology Platform for the Future** – HCCS now has an IT base and infrastructure to which they can add other software application modules as needed. They are able to create web interfaces for data access by students, vendors and suppliers. The PeopleSoft 7.5 Financials project has helped position HCCS for the new millennium.

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