

IT Software Projects at Mt. SAC

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Introduction

The Mission of the Information Technology (IT) Team is to provide service and support to the students, faculty, and staff of Mt. San Antonio College by providing leadership in the implementation, integration, application, delivery, and support of information and instructional technologies.ⁱ

Enterprise Application Systems (EAS) is one part of the Mt. SAC IT team. EAS consists of 20 people under the direction of Bob Hughes. This group includes five staff members on the web and portal team, nine staff members on the programming and applications team, five members on the systems and operations team, and one training and applications specialist.

IT Requests

In order to provide friendly service to the Mt. SAC community, EAS staff welcomes IT requests through a variety of different methods:

1. **Help Desk Tickets** – If users are experiencing an IT problem of any sort, they can request service through our online system at <http://help.mtsac.edu>, by calling our help desk at x4357, or by sending an e-mail to helpdesk@mtsac.edu. Team members at the help desk will determine the general nature of the problem and route it to the appropriate group. Supervisors are copied on the issue and will assign the ticket to the programmer or other team member with the most expertise on the issue. Help Desk Tickets are the preferred method of receiving IT requests. This allows us to track and identify potential trends, assign tasks to the appropriate resource in the event of illness or vacations, and ensure quick action and resolution. The Help Desk system also allows us to communicate easily with end users when a ticket is closed or resolved.
2. **Project Request Forms / Datablock Request Forms** – Users are welcome to complete a Project Request Form to request an enhancement to a form, process, report or even request a new database system. Datablock Request Forms are used to request new Argos reports. Both forms are available at http://www.mtsac.edu/it/resources/it_forms.htm. Help Desk Tickets that end up becoming projects are typically added to the project list by EAS staff members.
3. **Direct Contact** – Most of our team members have long working relationships with staff and managers within the various units on campus for which they provide support. For example, Joanna Yin is the programmer with the most expertise in the Financial Aid module, and staff members within Financial Aid call or e-mail her directly instead of going through the help desk. A verbal request at a departmental meeting or at the monthly Administrative Systems Advisory Group (ASAG) meeting can also generate an incident or project. The programmers make a sincere attempt to log these incidents for the staff member into the help desk system for them,

or will create a project request for tracking and follow-up. Often times, “quick fixes” – those issues that take less than an hour to resolve – are simply handled without being logged.

4. **Internal Projects** – IT management and staff is in regular contact with our various software vendors, and keep apprised of new regulatory requirements, patches, fixes, software end of life, etc. When these releases are delivered (especially for Banner), we schedule time to install them into a non-production database, apply any locally-developed modifications and enhancements, arrange for user testing, and schedule installation into Production. These initiatives can sometimes take several weeks and, depending on the programming resources needed and critical nature of the release, take precedence over other software projects. We also use our annual retreat to identify other new or improved technologies that will keep us current and meet anticipated needs.

Setting Priorities

All of the team members in EAS are professionals and understand the priorities for the multiple tasks they may encounter during the day. Supervisors and Managers will guide priorities as well, if necessary. Projects, incidents and tasks generally fall into the following categories

1. **Critical – Urgent:** these incidents generally come via direct contact or through the help desk, and indicate a serious system issue. Examples include the inability of students to register; web pages down; e-mail down; financial transactions not processing, error messages, etc. Team members will immediately stop working on other projects to resolve these situations.
2. **Regular production issues or minor enhancements:** these incidents generally come via direct contact or through the help desk, but may affect a relatively small number of students or are isolated to a single report, web page or user. Team members prioritize these issues over other long-term projects.
3. **Regulatory or Fiscal Impact:** these issues and tasks, if not handled promptly, will result in significant negative repercussions to the college. Other projects in this category represent opportunities to recognize significant fiscal savings. Examples include the quarterly MIS submission (which will absorb several weeks of a programmer’s time), calendar year-end regulatory updates for Fiscal Services (such as the new payroll tax tables, IRS forms, etc.), implementation of a new payment processor, and quarterly Financial Aid updates. Team members prioritize these over other long-term projects.
4. **Enhancements to Business Processes:** these requests typically come from a Project Request or Datablock Request form, and generally take several weeks or months to complete, depending on the number of incidents received in items 1 – 3 above. Projects may be released in phases. Examples of these include the emails to managers of past-due evaluations, the Decision Support System, the Associates Degree in Nursing application, the Cal Works database, and the Professional and Organizational Development Calendar.

Other considerations for priority include the following:

1. **How many people are impacted by the change?** Projects that improve things for the entire student body will take precedence over those that might impact just a handful of students.
2. **What is the timing of the change?** Projects that require significant user testing and involvement may be delayed until the affected staff members can participate fully. An example of this is the Mountie Academic Plan. We tend to avoid major changes to this system during peak processing periods in counseling and evaluations.
3. **How urgent is this from the perspective of the requester?** Sometimes we get project or report request that represents an enhancement that would be “nice to have”, but may not be a critical need. If we have trouble getting users to participate in the development process by testing or approving changes, we consider the project to fall into this category.
4. **How feasible is a ‘work-around’?** Given the backlog of project requests, sometimes it is more fiscally-responsible to have a student worker or clerical staff member manually work through a list to correct an issue instead of having a programmer (at a significantly higher hourly rate) spend several hours or days developing, testing, and placing into production an automated process to correct the data.

Keeping Customers Informed

The Administrative Systems Advisory Group is the primary method by which EAS communicates with campus management the status of current projects, any unexpected issues that have caused delays, and reasoning behind our project prioritization. This group has a listserve (AdminSystems@listserv.mtsac.edu) that is used throughout the month to alert of scheduled downtime and planned upgrades. The group, which consists of representatives from every major administrative area, meets at 2 pm on the third Tuesday of every month in the Ragan room. The Director of Enterprise Application Systems chairs this group, and the monthly agenda includes a list of completed projects and tasks. The ASAG meeting is not only an information sharing group, but is an important forum for discussing and adjusting project priorities among all enterprise system users.

EAS has recently begun using an innovative, simple to use task and project management system called SmartSheet (<http://www.smartsheet.com>). This cloud-based system allows everyone in IT to communicate the status of their projects on an on-going basis, and allows managers to easily request updates to keep informed.

This new tool allows us to share, in real time, the status of all our projects with the campus community. Links to the list of Completed Projects, Projects in Progress, and Projects Pending can easily be viewed from the Mt. SAC IT Web Page (<http://www.mtsac.edu/it/>).

ⁱ <http://www.mtsac.edu/it/about-us/TMP.PDF>