

THE PATRAC.ORG E-PORTAL STORY

“I have been able to spend some time in the evenings with AcademyOne and, what is now, PATRAC. What you have today is a remarkable tool on many levels.”

*Dr. Bob Smith
President, Slippery Rock University
Trustee, Butler County
Community College*



PA Transfer and Articulation Center E-Portal: Keeping Pennsylvanians on Track to a Degree

In 2006, legislation sponsored by Representative Josh Shapiro was passed not only for more seamless college transfer throughout the public higher education institutions in Pennsylvania but also to provide an “e-portal” in year two of the effort.

In year one and meeting the mandated deadline, the fourteen community colleges and fourteen Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) four-year universities, plus the state-related Lincoln University, completed the task of identifying 30 course credits from each institution which are transferable among all other participating institutions. In the months just following the deadline, all institutions went well beyond the mandated 30 credits, giving students a great deal of choice and keeping more departments on each campus inclusive of the transferable credits.

In addition to identifying and creating thousands of transfer-in course equivalencies throughout the state, a transfer credit framework was developed by the state-wide Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC). This instructive 30-credit framework helps students choose just enough, but not too many, courses in particular subject areas (social sciences, math, English composition, natural sciences, arts and humanities, and public speaking) so that the transferred courses will count towards graduation requirements rather than falling into an elective bucket. The framework prevents a student from, for example, taking five history courses and expecting all those history credits to count towards graduation requirements at the destination (the transfer to) institution.

Another hallmark of Pennsylvania’s effort is that transfer can occur in any direction, not just the traditional two-year to four-year institution path. This provides a richness and flexibility that is unique in the U.S.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) was tasked with fulfilling the legislation. The PDE selected AcademyOne to provide technology tools to enable the multi-phase work of Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee. The thousands of state-wide course equivalencies were created and displayed at the CollegeTransfer.net, AcademyOne’s national website.

NEXT UP, THE “E-PORTAL”

When efforts turned to providing the mandated “e-portal,” AcademyOne provided hosted and non-hosted proposals to the PDE. Not only did the hosted model require no equipment or IT personnel investment from PDE, it was less expensive to create and run than a non-hosted model. The less expensive, outsourcing option was a win/win.

In order to anticipate and exceed expectations for the Pennsylvania transfer e-portal, concerted efforts were made to involve numerous stakeholders. Two focus groups were scheduled and conducted with all institutions invited, one in Eastern Pennsylvania and one in Western Pennsylvania, to introduce the e-portal idea and extensively demonstrate capabilities of CollegeTransfer.net. During those focus groups small breakout groups got the chance to suggest desired features and functionality for what would be customized e-portal.

Using the many suggestions, a set of requirements was developed for the Pennsylvania e-portal. AcademyOne developed a customized website based on the requirements. The domain name www.patrac.org was chosen. PATRAC stands for Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center and also alludes to students being able to find their transfer track from one institution to another, keeping on track to a degree. Over several months, PDE and AcademyOne refined the custom e-portal.

REVIEW AND REFINEMENT

Feedback was again sought with members of TAOC and additional representatives from the participating institutions in actually using the e-portal to accomplish various tasks that students were likely to do on the e-portal. Reviewers were asked to note the amount of time it took to accomplish each task and also to rate the degree of difficulty, in addition to jotting down the “answer.”

Results of this effort were essential to learning how to improve the e-portal. The reviews and answers were analyzed to locate areas for improvement and/or correction.

PDE and AcademyOne continued to refine the e-portal, at times using small group feedback.

THE E-PORTAL MEETS THE MAIN AUDIENCE

Several student focus groups were conducted at a few of the participating institutions to learn how students went about using the e-portal. Results of the student focus groups were analyzed and refinements continued to be made to the e-portal.

Throughout the creation and refinement process, PDE continued to supply content for the many areas available on www.patrac.org. Tabs were created for students, faculty and staff and administrators. In addition to numerous search capabilities whereby a student can learn what courses are transferable from any combination of schools they choose, FAQs, lists and links of participating institutions, simple instructions and additional information became part of the e-portal.

“With PATRAC... students from across the Commonwealth will be able to plan their pathways to a college degree, knowing that the courses that they take at any of the thirty-two participating institutions will transfer to another participating institution seamlessly.”

*Dr. Kathleen Shaw,
Deputy Secretary for Postsecondary and Higher Education,
Pennsylvania Department of Education*

READY FOR PRIME TIME

On a beautiful day in May 2008, www.patrac.org was introduced via a press conference from Pennsylvania’s capital building in Harrisburg. Remarks were provided by Representative Josh Shapiro, PDE’s Deputy Secretary for Postsecondary and Higher Education Dr. Kate Shaw, Montgomery Community College President Karen Shout and Slippery Rock University President Dr. bob Smith. A demonstration of the www.patrac.org e-portal by PDE’s Julie Rutledge from the Office of Access Initiatives rounded out the announcement.

The seamless transfer of the courses within the transfer credit framework applies to all students who are matriculated beginning in the Fall of 2008 semester. Legislative mandates were met and exceeded. The customized e-portal for Pennsylvania was created within seven months, including all the focus groups, reviews and refinements. The e-portal, www.patrac.org, will help inform and guide thousands of college transfer students now and in the future.

ABOUT ACADEMYONE

AcademyOne is an innovative technology and services company providing college transfer solutions. The company focuses on serving students, institutions, agencies and governments addressing the challenges of an increasingly mobile student population. AcademyOne’s team of professionals has a diverse array of academic, operational and technology experience. The company has engineered a suite of applications and built a comprehensive database storing over 3.5 million courses from across over 4,000 degree-granting institutions.

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