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University of Utah Olympic Planning Gets Help from DegreeVerifySM Program



The Rockies form the backdrop for the University of Utah campus.

In February 2002, the world's most important sporting event and the world's greatest athletes will descend upon Salt Lake City, Utah. The 2002 Winter Olympics are expected to host 3,500 athletes from eighty nations, with millions of spectators entertained throughout 17 days of Olympic competition. Few people get to observe this famous event in person, and fewer still will ever live in a host city. In February, students, faculty, and staff at the University of Utah will become part of this elite group, as they welcome the world to the opening and closing ceremonies and Olympic Village.

With more than one hundred thousand Olympians, spectators, and media expected to converge upon this campus of 26,000 graduate and undergraduate students, the planning associated with this event is very detailed indeed. Even the registrar's office is affected.

"We will continue as a full-service facility, before, during, and after the Olympics," said Ralph Boren, registrar with the University of Utah. "Classes will be cancelled during the Olympics in February, so we've extended the semester and cancelled the traditional spring break. Our office will be closed for a couple of days as well, during the opening ceremonies.

However, we expect business to be normal in terms of verifications, so we have to be prepared to accommodate requestors."

The decision to participate in the Clearinghouse's DegreeVerify program fit nicely into the University of Utah's Olympic planning. With more than twenty degree verification call interruptions daily, the registrar's office at the University of Utah was a busy one. "We've had a successful partnership with the Clearinghouse for a number of years. The 24/7 on-line DegreeVerify program will not only help us out while our office is closed during the Olympics, since requestors will continue to be able to obtain verifications via the Clearinghouse website, but I also anticipate that once the Olympics are over this program will save us one-half of an FTE (full-time equivalent)," said Boren.

Preparations in the university's registrar's office for the Olympics go beyond the day-to-day activities. The office was responsible for redefining the academic calendar during the three weeks of the Olympics and creating and managing the calendar of special events scheduled through the University of Utah Olympic Coordination Office. And, according to Boren,

the school anticipates that some of the greatest challenges will be the things that everyone normally takes for granted, such as access to the campus and parking, especially while school is still in session in the weeks immediately before and after the event.

Everyone on campus welcomes the excitement. There will be plenty of Olympic-related campus events and numerous volunteer opportunities. According to Boren, much of the training that staff, students, and faculty have received relates to preparing everyone to be good hosts to campus visitors. And, based on the expert planning and attention the university has given to these Olympics to date, there is no doubt that the University of Utah will succeed in this goal.

Did You Know...

Clearinghouse participants include over 2,500 colleges and universities, representing 86% of the nation's total enrollment.

DegreeVerify Factoids

- One year into the DegreeVerify service, schools granting more than 10% of the nation's degrees already participate in the program. This pace is expected to double over the next twelve months.
- A school's monthly degree verification volume is usually equal to a little more than 1% of total school enrollment.
- The largest school participating in DegreeVerify has 70,000 enrolled students. The smallest has 1,000.
- Sixty-five percent of requests are for confirmation of degrees granted within the last ten years; 23% of the requests are for degrees granted from ten to twenty years ago, and 12% are for degrees granted more than twenty years ago.
- Five thousand degree verifications were provided by the Clearinghouse last month – almost double what it was just two months ago. This is expected to double again by year-end.
- Five hundred background search firms and employers have agreed to route all of their degree verifications for participating schools through the Clearinghouse, rather than calling the schools directly.

Putting DegreeVerify to Work for You

DegreeVerify attracts 200 schools that grant 10% of the nation's degrees.

In the beginning of the academic year, with increasing enrollments and decreasing budgets, the last thing anyone needs is the constant influx of daily phone call interruptions.

More than 100 colleges and universities have discovered the secret to alleviating this burden of daily interruptions by outsourcing their degree verification workload to the Clearinghouse. Another 95 schools have signed agreements and anticipate becoming active DegreeVerify participants shortly. By outsourcing degree verifications to the Clearinghouse, these schools have streamlined their office procedures and reduced workloads and costs – in some cases, saving as much as one and a half FTEs (full-time equivalents).

Because few registrar offices have the time or resources to manage a complicated implementation process, the Clearinghouse has developed a DegreeVerify activation process that is simple and hassle-free.

According to Donna Knauff, assistant vice president at the Clearinghouse, DegreeVerify programming is very simple compared to the requirements for enrollment compliance reporting associated with the student status confirmation process. "The programming efforts required by colleges and universities to fulfill enrollment status reporting has many complex layers. However, the programming efforts required to enable degree verifications via the Clearinghouse is very straightforward and simple." She emphasizes that the needs of

the clients are foremost in the minds of the staff at the Clearinghouse. "The one thing registrars don't need is to be overburdened with a complicated DegreeVerify activation process. That is why we've developed detailed programming and testing guides and special software interfaces. In fact, our activation process has become so streamlined that recently we had a school with over 22,000 degree records go 'live' in less than one day."

Following are a few tips for schools that want to implement DegreeVerify quickly and easily:

- Review the programming and testing guide ahead of time with a representative from the IT department.
- Conduct a 'start-up' conversation with the Clearinghouse School Relations staff to set schedules and answer questions.
- Implement a staff script for re-routing calls to the Clearinghouse and change voice mail and website messages to direct verification inquiries to the Clearinghouse.
- Send the Clearinghouse as much historical data as possible, in an electronic format, to minimize the number of pending requests on degrees that may pre-date the schools electronic files.

For those with questions or suggestions about the start-up process, please feel free to contact Donna Knauff at 703-742-4205.

Clearinghouse Appoints NASFAA Board Member to Regional Director Position

With more than 20 years of experience in student financial aid management, Pam Gilligan brings excellent experience and credentials to her position as northeast regional director. Pam joined the Clearinghouse in September and is responsible for providing services and solutions to academic managers at colleges and universities in the northeast region, a 14-state area from Maine to Washington, D.C. Pam will help facilitate college and university participation in Clearinghouse services DegreeVerify, EnrollmentVerify, and EnrollmentSearch. Ken Ostberg, the former northeast regional director, will now serve as the Clearinghouse's director of business development.



Prior to joining the National Student Clearinghouse, Pam served as director of financial aid for the Berklee College of Music in Massachusetts, as associate director of financial aid with Boston College, and as the director of financial aid with both Regis and Mount Ida Colleges in Massachusetts. Pam is the immediate past-president of EASFAA (Eastern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators) and currently serves on NASFAA's (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators) board of directors through October 2001.

Pam may be reached at the National Student Clearinghouse, Northeast Regional Office, 46 North Street, Norfolk, MA 02056-1647, (508) 541-8057, gilligan@studentclearinghouse.org.

Clearinghouse Presenting Key Session at Upcoming ED-EAC Conferences

In an effort to boost college and university participation in the Clearinghouse and to encourage post-secondary institutions to expand their use of Clearinghouse services, this November and December the Department of Education (ED) has invited the Clearinghouse to be one of the key session presenters at the highly-acclaimed Electronic Access Conferences (EAC).

Implemented in 1997 to better inform the nation's financial aid community on Title IV program and system updates, the conference has grown to include a variety of sessions and modules on 21st century financial aid technology. Most senior level aid administrators consider these meetings to be one of the best ways to learn of the Department's upcoming initiatives.

This year, in the conference host cities Reno, Baltimore, and Chicago, the Clearinghouse will present a session entitled *Maximizing the Value of Your Clearinghouse Participation*. The session will focus on using Clearinghouse services to better enhance the performance of key financial aid office duties, such as lowering cohort default rates, obtaining instant electronic Perkins Loan deferments, maintaining compliance with enrollment reporting regulations, and improving enrollment management efforts. Session highlights will also focus on using the LoanLocator/Meteor on-line service to access students' current outstanding indebtedness directly from servicers' real-time databases.

Over the years, as a contractor for the Department of Education, the Clearinghouse has greatly assisted in the overall improvement in the level of customer service that ED has extended to direct loan borrowers. "The Clearinghouse has really helped us reduce 'technical defaults.' Its efforts, along with many other initiatives undertaken by the Department and the FFEL community, have contributed to the lowest student loan default rate since the beginning of the student loan program," said Keith Jepsen, special assistant to Greg Woods, the COO for ED's Office of Student Financial Assistance Programs. Jepsen adds, "The Department of Education would like to see 100% of the nation's schools participating in the Clearinghouse, and inclusion of the Clearinghouse in the Electronic Access Conferences is indicative of the desire to make that happen."

Former NASFAA board member and current Clearinghouse northeast regional director, Pam Gilligan believes that financial aid directors may be overlooking the advantages of working with the Clearinghouse. "Many financial aid directors may not know a lot about the Clearinghouse since enrollment reporting is usually the registrar's responsibility. Our focus will be on showing financial aid directors how the Clearinghouse can help them develop better controls over their institutional financial aid programs and ultimately improve services to students."

For more information on the 2001 EAC program or the Clearinghouse special session, please visit the EAC website at: <http://edeworkshop.ncspearson.com>.

Social Security Numbers and FERPA

Social security numbers (SSNs) appear to be on everyone's minds these days, along with heightened concern about personal privacy surrounding Internet use and information sharing practices. The Clearinghouse takes privacy regulations very seriously. Following is a brief overview of Federal regulations that relate to or affect the use of social security numbers.

Academic administrative managers frequently cite section 7 of the Federal Privacy Act of 1974 regarding whether they have the right to collect social security numbers. To clarify, the Federal Privacy Act of 1974 applies only to Federal, State or local government agencies. Essentially, agencies subject to the Privacy Act may not refuse to provide services or otherwise discriminate against anyone who declines to disclose their SSN unless the disclosure is 1) required by Federal statute, or 2) the disclosure was legally required by State or local law before January 1, 1975, for purposes of verifying identity. The Privacy Act does not address the confidentiality of SSNs or govern their disclosure. It should be noted that while many public educational institutions may be subject to the Privacy Act, private individuals, companies, and organizations are not.

The critical component in the Privacy Act of 1974, specifically as it relates to schools, is exception #1 as mentioned above, which allows agencies to require an individual to disclose a social security number if it is required by a Federal statute. In this instance, there are two Federal statutes that apply: Title IV of the Higher Education Act and the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 (TRA). In particular, the TRA compels schools to collect and use all student SSNs to report tuition payments to the Internal Revenue Service, (unlike Title IV, which only requires collection of social security numbers of student borrowers.) It is important to note, however, that schools collecting SSNs under the auspices of TRA are still required to comply with specific Privacy Act requirements, including specifying whether

disclosure is mandatory or voluntary, the legal authority under which the number is requested, and how the number will be used.

Use of social security numbers by the Clearinghouse is governed by the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). While this act does not govern the collection of SSNs by schools, it does govern their dissemination by the Clearinghouse as personally identifiable, non-directory information. In 1993, the Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) determined that FERPA allows schools to appoint the Clearinghouse as their agent and release the SSNs and other information from the education records of all enrolled students, not just borrowers, without their consent, in order to meet schools' enrollment reporting requirements under the Federal student loan programs. (FPCO's letter is available at www.ed.gov/offices/OM/fpco/ferpaonline.)

FPCO has acknowledged this and has stated in subsequent letters that FERPA allows schools to share information from education records when they contract for administrative and professional services that they would otherwise provide in-house. For example, on this basis FPCO advised Vermont Law School in 1996 that its Alumni Office could disclose student SSNs to a contractor hired to search for current addresses of former students without their prior written consent. Similarly, FERPA allows schools to outsource their non-loan verification responsibilities and release pertinent student information, including SSNs, to the Clearinghouse under our EnrollmentSearch, EnrollmentVerify, and DegreeVerify services.

Notably, some States have recently enacted laws restricting an educational institution's ability to use SSNs as student identification numbers or for posting grades. In some instances, State law merely reiterates FERPA requirements governing the release of any personally identifying information. Our compliance efforts as a national organization necessarily remain focused on

Federal requirements. Therefore, you should consult with local counsel regarding State or local requirements that may apply to your institution's use and display of student SSNs.

It is a common, if not universal practice, for postsecondary institutions to allow or require employers and other inquirers to submit a student's SSN when contacting the registrar's office or using the school's website to verify degrees and enrollment. Many institutions even confirm the accuracy of the student's SSN when providing this information. As noted earlier, the Privacy Act does not govern a private party's voluntary collection and use of SSNs, and FPCO has never advised or ruled that this practice violates FERPA. However, the Clearinghouse does not confirm or release SSNs in its verification services and does not rely on a single identifier for matching purposes in any of its services. We encourage schools to consider whether using just an individual's SSN for identification purposes is adequate protection for personal privacy.

In conclusion, the Clearinghouse recognizes that laws regarding SSNs and privacy are subject to change and we monitor these matters carefully. For example, late last year, Congress enacted the Social Security Number Confidentiality Act of 2000 to prohibit the appearance of SSNs on or through unopened mailing of checks issued by the Federal Treasury. Right now there are more than 20 bills in Congress concerning display, use, sale and other protections of SSNs and related privacy issues. Changes at the State and local levels are also under consideration, and use of SSNs for identification and tracking students remains an abiding issue with the U.S. Department of Education. We want to assure you that we are very aware of these concerns and reconfirm our ongoing commitment to stay informed and maintain compliance with all applicable requirements in Clearinghouse operations. We will communicate with you promptly if changes may impact operations.

Students and Registrars' Offices Benefit from New EnrollmentVerifySM Website

With the start of the academic year comes a plethora of enrollment verifications – everything from the local apartment complex wanting to verify the matriculation of their new renters to health insurance companies wishing to confirm that a student is enrolled to ensure continued coverage on their parents' health plans. And, there is nothing more frustrating to the staff in the registrar's office than the constant stream of verification paper work and phone call interruptions during one of the busiest times of the year.

To help alleviate the workload, the Clearinghouse is pleased to announce the opening of the FERPA-compliant EnrollmentVerify public website. Rather than calling the school, health insurance companies, student housing organizations, and credit card corporations, can now

obtain instantaneous on-line verification of student enrollment via the Clearinghouse website.

"The Clearinghouse's EnrollmentVerify program was exactly what we needed. Prior to signing up for the service, we received over 12,000 verification requests annually, most of which were either health insurers or credit card companies. We just didn't have the staff to dedicate one person to the phone all day long. Now we're referring all requests to the Clearinghouse. We've also put a message on our voice mail system. In just a few short weeks of using this service, my staff has observed a noticeable decline in our overall verification call volume," said Jill Allgier, registrar, Eastern Kentucky University.

There is no charge for schools to participate in the EnrollmentVerify service. Verification

requestors, such as credit card companies or health care organizations, pay a small fee of \$2.50 per verification to confirm a student's enrollment status. An additional surcharge can be added to this fee by the school, if the school wishes to receive a rebate.

Although the Clearinghouse is already managing student loan enrollment information, enrollment verifications for non-loan related requests cannot be performed on a school's behalf, unless the school has signed the EnrollmentVerify authorization form. For more information or for a copy of the authorization form, please go to the Clearinghouse website at www.studentclearinghouse.org and click on the EnrollmentVerify link in the Colleges & Universities section. Or call the National Student Clearinghouse at 703-742-7791.

A Special Message from the President

My wife teaches first grade at Bailey's Crossroads Elementary School, a Northern Virginia public school. The parents of this year's students escaped oppression, war, and poverty in Syria, Iran, Columbia, El Salvador, Thailand, China, India, and Somalia so their children could live the American Dream. When these children go off to our nation's colleges and universities, you will help them fulfill that dream. Let us hope that while we "smoke out terrorists" we do not extinguish the torch of freedom that draws people from around the world to the American educational system.

The staff at the National Student Clearinghouse send their thoughts for healing and peace to all American and international students, faculty and staff who live, learn, and work in one of our nation's greatest legacies to freedom and democracy—the United States higher education system.



Mrs. Dolores Enriquez-Boehmer's 2001-2002 first grade class, Bailey's Crossroads Elementary School, Fairfax, Virginia, USA

Daniel R. Boehmer, President
National Student Clearinghouse

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