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Improvements will ease system growing pains

Although the OnePurdue systems released earlier this year were historic, positive steps for the University, the road has not been without a few bumps and curves.

As faculty and staff members became more familiar with the new financial applications, some OnePurdue users have expressed concerns. Some of these issues involve SRM, the purchasing component of the SAP software that is the foundation of the new systems.

“It’s requiring more staff time to use it than we had anticipated,” said Larry Pherson, director of Sponsored Programs and Purchasing Services, “but these issues are now being addressed, and we’re committed to making this system better for us.”

To solicit feedback about the new software and how it’s working at Purdue, a meeting was recently held in West Lafayette with about 20 purchasing staff, materials handling and distribution personnel and procurement expeditors in Physical Facilities, who were asked which SAP issues were having the greatest impact on their ability to do their jobs.

“We want people to know that we hear them loud and clear, and understand their concerns,” Pherson said. “Not only will this feedback help us make things better, but it also reflects what we’ve been hearing from others across the University.”

SRM

The group identified several areas that need improvement, giving priority to four:

- Workflow (SAP’s automated routing and approval product)
- Inventory Management and Contracts
- Training
- Ability to View Shopping Carts

Some issues were already going to be resolved as part of planned post-implementation system enhancements, Pherson said. “We knew we’d be doing some of this after the financial and HR systems went live anyway. For example, we will be updating the SAP software this fall. Although this will not specifically address the current SRM concerns, this system maintenance must be done first so Purdue can run year-end payroll work and produce employee W-2 forms in January. While this is being done, however, the OnePurdue production system must be temporarily “frozen” to implementing new development, including other improvements.

“We had hoped to have these SRM matters resolved before the freeze,” Pherson said, “but that’s not going to be possible.” Nevertheless, plans are underway to improve the situation for staff using SRM.

“We hope to have the Workflow issue resolved at the beginning of 2008.

“To address the inventory management and contracts problem, we’re working on restructuring about 120 contracts, which should resolve several issues that have resulted in blocked invoices, stores catalog issues and vendor relationship problems. We’re working closely with our vendors to help with this.”

Pherson said this should be resolved by mid- to late-December.

SRM training courses are being updated as well, and they will be offered to staff members to refresh their skills. “We went through a lot of this last winter, but it was all theory then. Now that we’ve actually worked with the system, it will be a lot more meaningful.”

The staff’s concerns with shopping carts primarily involve not being able to view ones created by others. “This is basically a configuration issue,” Pherson said, “and can be changed.”

“Although it was initially decided not to include this functionality, there are a variety of reasons why one might need to see someone else’s cart. So now we’re going to add it. We hope to have this wrapped up by the end of September (prior to the freeze).”

“Some of what we’re going through now is part of the normal learning process,” Pherson said. “But we also need to go back and fine-tune some things. This is all part of what will be a continuing process of enhancing and improving OnePurdue’s applications.

“We’re not going to be stagnant; we’re moving forward.”

Reports

“We knew when we went live with Release 1 in February that all the reports we wanted hadn’t yet been developed,” said University Comptroller John Shipley. “There just wasn’t enough time to create them all then.

Among the numerous reports that are needed by Business Services staff to do their jobs, about 35 have been identified as priorities, Shipley said. For example: Transaction Listing, Account Balance Listing, Detailed Payroll Data and Information on Open Purchase Orders.

“We know that some people do not have all the reports they need to conduct their day-to-day business and that things are taking too long. We also know that waiting until after the service packs are installed would put us another two months behind, and we wouldn’t get them until next year.

“That’s why we’re working with the developers at OnePurdue to accelerate the process and build these reports in parallel with the system update. Our goal is to have them by the end of November or early December (immediately after the freeze).”

In addition, the most important ones will be available through the OnePurdue portal, so users will not need access to the SAP GUI in order to get to them, Shipley said. (All SAP applications are available through the SAP GUI, for which not everyone has authorization, but only some through the portal.)

“We’re trying to get as much end-user reporting available as we can.”

Beginning Oct. 10, updated information on major system improvements will be posted every two weeks in the OnePurdue Finance folder on Purdue-Board. In addition to SRM and report issues, AIMS, DREFs, payroll and password concerns also will be addressed there.

Please send and comments and questions you may have about OnePurdue improvements to onepurdue@purdue.edu.