




President of the
Faculty Senate

TO: Nathan Nolen, Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief Information Officer (CIO)

FROM: Andrew Wright, President of the Faculty Senate 

SUBJECT: Request for Determination of Feasibility of Digital Signatures

DATE: September 23, 2014

Cc: Kevin Cates (Chair of the Academic Technology and Computing Committee), Dan Shisler (Director of the Department of Digital Strategy)

Per our conversation yesterday, I want to formally request on behalf of the Academic Technology and Computing Committee, that Information Technology Services determine the feasibility of using the “workflow” module in Banner to implement a Curriculum Change Form signature pathway similar to the ePAF process.

Curriculum Change Forms are originated at the department level by an individual faculty member, approved at the department level and reviewed by the department chair, recommended at the college curriculum committee level, reviewed by the college dean, recommended by the undergraduate council, recommended by the provost, and approved by the chancellor.

At present, this represents seven signatures (faculty member, department chair, college curriculum committee chair, college dean, undergraduate council chair, provost, and chancellor). None of those signatures are legally required to be entered with paper and pen, so this process represents an enormous waste of manpower as a paper form has to be generated, signed, copied, transported, and disposed of. (I would say it should be folded, spindled, and mutilated, but that might date me.)

When complete, the destination of these changes is a degree audit in Banner and documentation in the undergraduate catalog. It seems reasonable that the paper steps that are made necessary by a lack of digital signature infrastructure could be eliminated and a form could be prepared (under boss?) that could be integrated into the degree audit and which could use T# authentication in lieu of a physical signature.

If the system could autofill the signer's contact information and date onto the form, that would eliminate a further step that is prone to error. As an added bonus, it would be nice to extract undergraduate catalog copy from the degree audit, which seems to be a simple step of using database fields and content to autofill a standard curricular shell and deliver to a PDF, Word, HTML, or other electronic document.

So, the questions are:

Can this be done?

How much effort would it take?

How much added expense in additional software would it take?

If it looks feasible, then we can undertake to allocate resources to make this happen.

Another item which grew out of our discussion was the concept of finding out what signatures on campus are legally required. This seems to be an item of discussion among the Chancellor, Provost, and Assembly President. If it is possible to determine where signatures are required by law and where T# authentication would be adequate, all the forms on campus (e.g., key card, yellow card, PAR, governance documents) could be simplified to a process that uses authentication in lieu of signature until the step where a legal signature must be applied to a form.

If a digital signature software would allow the paper form at this last step to be replaced by a digital form, this might result in further savings to offset the cost of the software.

The third item which arose in our discussion was the difficulty of authentication of applicants to the university. If it would be possible to create a limited access login credential for an applicant after some validation (digital signature, notarized signature on a signature card, ...) then it might be possible to remove barriers in the application process.

For instance, if there are legal requirements associated with financial aid, could these barriers be removed with a digital signature? Could a system be instituted which had a chat window between the applicant and a financial aid specialist that allows the applicant to arrange his/her financial aid without making a trip to campus or waiting in a vestibule until a financial aid specialist is free to work with the applicant? Could 24/7 financial aid support be delivered via internet? Could initial advisement and registration be delivered 24/7 via internet?

Once the applicant has been authenticated and admitted, the next step would be to convert the temporary credential to a permanent T#.

If the basic question, digital authentication using T# on forms can be resolved, it seems that these other steps are enabled with limited additional resources. Therefore, this would be a high priority feasibility study.