SOAR Program: Reservation and Check-In Process Improvement

A Case Study

► **Process Improved:**
SOAR Reservation and Check-in Process

► **Unit(s):**
UW-Madison Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR)

► **Customers of the Process and Their Needs:**
The primary customers of this process are parents and students, and their primary need is for a seamless, transparent process for making SOAR reservations and payments. They desire a process that can be completed quickly and in the fewest steps possible. Secondary customers include the campus offices involved in this process—SOAR, Parking, and University Housing. Their needs include improved efficiency and the need to maximize resources.

► **Problem/Opportunity Statement:**
The traditional SOAR reservation and check-in process required new students and their parents to make reservations with three offices—SOAR, Parking, and University Housing—via postal mail. Then, upon their arrival on campus, students and parents were required to stand in long lines to write three separate checks to each of these offices. These offices functioned independently from one another, which contributed to a process that was cumbersome, fragmented, and repetitious.

With the increasing availability of technology to support campus services and with the enthusiastic participation of campus partners, the SOAR office recognized an opportunity to improve this process.

► **Changes Made:**
The SOAR office, working with the Office of Quality Improvement, used the Accelerated Improvement model to improve this process. Team members included representatives from SOAR, Campus Information, Assistance, and Orientation, University Housing, Transportation Services, and DoIT. In a series of three meetings, team members documented the current process, envisioned an “ideal” process, and determined changes that would move the process as close to the ideal as possible. It was decided that the best process for students and parents would involve an e-reservation component that would reduce the number of payments made to separate offices.

Upon completion of the project, the following improvements were made: 1) students register on-line for SOAR and parking; 2) payment is made for SOAR and parking in one payment and can be done with a credit card; 3) Housing reservations are confirmed separately and students are able to find storage space for their belongings if they arrive early on their SOAR date; 4) the check-in process is now truly a “welcoming” experience.
Results to Date and Expected:
In the first year nearly 50% of all registrants utilized the on-line reservation option. Most recently it estimated that 70% of registrants are registering on-line. Anecdotal evidence from students and parents was very positive. Perhaps most importantly, there has been a change in the culture surrounding the arrival of students and parents at SOAR. Because everyone pays ahead of time, they are no longer greeted by long lines and cash registers to collect their money. Instead, their arrival is a welcoming one with a focus from the beginning on their orientation to the campus.

Lessons Learned:
First, it is essential to have the right people at the table. In this case, it was critical to have someone with technological expertise. Second, it is useful to have a facilitator so that all team members can be full participants.

Next Steps:
SOAR is constantly making improvements to the process and has utilized a “mini-version” of the AI process each year. Currently, they are in the stages of improving and refining the reporting mechanisms from the on-line system.

Contacts:
Peg Davey, Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Academic Services, 330 Armory and Gymnasium
Phone: (608) 265-5156
E-mail: pdavey@admissions.wisc.edu