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## At One University, Matching Students With Scholarships Just Got a Little Easier

by Becky Supiano, *Chronicle of Higher Education*  
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In her job as a senior business officer in the **University of Michigan's** College of Engineering, Shelly Crundwell manages the budget, capital-construction funding, and endowment distributions. She was also given an additional task: helping match students with scholarship funds.

"I was asked to work with the scholarship office because the process was so laborious," Ms. Crundwell says.

When Ms. Crundwell came to the college 12 years ago, matching individual students with endowed scholarships took two or three people about a month. The entire process, from filling out donor-intent forms to students applying, was done on paper.

All that recently changed. Michigan has begun rolling out a new system that automates much of the matching process, saving time and reducing headaches.

At Michigan, the procedure for awarding scholarships is decentralized. Each college has its own process, which may be run by someone in admissions, student services, or fiscal services.

The College of Engineering, for example, selects some freshman applicants to receive certain amounts of scholarship money, along with admissions offers. The college, for example, might promise an applicant \$2,000—but it wouldn't yet award her a specific scholarship. Once the student decides to attend, the college must then find endowed scholarships for which the student qualifies.

Several years ago, Ms. Crundwell designed a database that made it easier to sort through the students who would receive scholarships, but the matching process was still onerous.

### An Outdated Approach

And Ms. Crundwell wasn't the only person in the university frustrated by an arcane matching process. Over in the business school, undergraduates were still filling out paper applications, and the college of architecture still had a completely manual process.

"Multiple deans expressed their concern about their inability to adequately use all their scholarship funds," said Laura M. Patterson, associate vice president for the university's administrative information services—or MAIS, pronounced like the university's signature color.

Ms. Patterson learned about the agony of scholarship matching from a member of her staff. In 2005, MAIS began asking different colleges and schools how they matched their scholarships, and learned the need for a better method was real. So the department decided to design a program to streamline the process. Ten programmers worked on the new system for about a year and then ran a pilot program in 2006.

"Everyone has a need to get the best match of scholarship funding to student need," said Ms. Patterson. That's especially true, she said, as the country faces an economic downturn.

Information services built the new program based on PeopleSoft, a system many colleges, including Michigan, use to manage student records and other data. That platform allowed the university to use data it had already compiled in the new program.

In the new system, each scholarship is described with a formula that incorporates all of the criteria recipients must meet. Users can search for all the students who meet the criteria for a specific scholarship, or for all the scholarships for which a particular student qualifies.

The system, Ms. Crundwell said, makes the process both easier and fairer. It also helps the college bring a consistent approach to scholarships with more unusual donor requirements, like a student with "upright character" or one who is a "teetotaler."

The new program has gotten good feedback, Ms. Patterson said. It not only helps students make full use of available scholarship funds but also gives donors confidence that their gifts are being used as requested.

The system is "quick, accurate, and documentable," said Diane K. Hunt, assistant director of financial aid at the business school. Undergraduates in her school no longer have to fill out scholarship applications but are automatically considered. And, Ms. Hunt hopes, the program will eventually allow for a one-stop process in which the money can be paid to students' accounts through the same system.

Now the information-services department has begun bringing the new matching system to more parts of the university, including the Schools of Nursing and Kinesiology, the office of financial aid, and the colleges of architecture and pharmacy.

The architecture college, which awards about \$2-million in scholarships each year, plans to begin using the program for its next cycle of awards this spring. As does the College of Engineering, the architecture college awards scholarship money along with admissions offers. Janice Harvey, the college's director of annual giving, hopes the new system will free up enough time that her staff can award applicants specific scholarships from the get-go, rather than just telling them dollar amounts.

Named scholarships sound more prestigious, Ms. Harvey says, and she hopes that would tip the scales in favor of attending her college.