Examining a Best Practice: West Georgia's Experience with Higher One for Refund Management

Jerry Mock, AVP – Business and Auxiliary Services, University of West Georgia
Josh Foskey, Director of Student Accounts, Middle Georgia College
Walter Hinckfoot, Vice President, Higher One
Agenda...

- Higher One
- University of West Georgia
- Middle Georgia College
- Self run ACH
- “Keys to Success”
- Q&A
About Higher One…

- Refund disbursement industry leader
- Only financial service provider dedicated to higher education
- Offer “end to end” full service refund disbursement administration…not merely ACH
- 55 clients nationwide (13 in Georgia)
- Servicing over 640,000 students
- Disbursed over $1.6B
Higher One in Georgia...

Preferred disbursement service provider for the State of Georgia (USG and DTAE)

U of West Georgia    Kennesaw State U    Columbus State U
Gordon College       Dalton State College  Macon State College
Savannah State U     Fort Valley State U   Middle Georgia College
N. GA College and State U    Georgia Perimeter College

DTAE System: Atlanta Technical College

Also Morehouse College
Higher One in Georgia (cont’d)...

- 2004 “Best Practices Award” to Kennesaw State and U of West Georgia
- OneEvent held at Kennesaw State spring 2005
- Participate GA CBO meetings – (this Friday DTAE – VPA’s)
- Many campuses present at conferences across the nation, highlighted in higher education publications, Higher One (PAC) Product Advisory Committee, speak with prospective clients

Results across Georgia:
- Eliminated 215,939 checks
- Disbursed >$230,000,000
- 84% electronic receipt
- More campuses that sign up, lower disbursement cost...those who do not sign up actually cost your campus money
University of West Georgia...

- Located in Carrollton, GA – enrollment >10,000
- Celebrating centennial anniversary
- Refunds were very manual, 2 day process and had long lines
- Campus security used to monitor lines
- Key personnel diverted to assist
- Program statistics
  - 31,936 refund disbursements eliminated
  - $48,000,000 disbursed
  - 83% receive electronically (17% paper check and Higher One handles)
  - 93% of inquiries handled via EasyHelp web site
- Check reconciliation drastically reduced
University of West Georgia...

Financial Aid Loans Disbursed

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University of West Georgia...
UWG - things learned...

- Building a cross functional team essential
- Correct data in Banner
- Email blasts to update student data
- All student touch points discuss electronic receipt
- Campus marketing alongside Higher One’s
- Customer service, who to call
- Going back to issuing checks is not an option
Middle Georgia College...

- Located in Cochran, GA – established 1884
- 2 year institution; approx 3000 students
- Refunds used to be a manual task, 100% paper checks
- Took 2-3 days to process refunds
- Spoke to current Higher One clients in Georgia
- Chose Higher One to increase efficiency of internal operations and increase speed that students receive financial aid refund
Middle Georgia College...

- Higher One completely eliminated the manual process
- No longer write paper checks
- Students receive their money faster
- Higher One’s implementation team was super
- Launched early summer, 87% electronic in first 2 weeks
Self run ACH...

- Collection of student data time consuming
- Students constantly change bank accounts
- Marketing??
- Dual processes to manage, must ask students if paper check or ACH
- Signup results? – years to get solid acceptance vs >80% electronic in 45 days without doing the work
- Data liability shift
Departmental “Keys to Success”

- Information Technology
- Finance/Business Office
- Student Affairs
Information Technology department...

- SCT Banner documentation
- Periodically send student data
- Send refund data when ready to disburse

- 6-8 weeks to launch (IT engaged 10-12 hours)
Finance/ Business Office...

- Student refunds eliminated (can still produce individual checks if needed)
- Cashiers time returned since not passing out or mailing checks
- Returned check/ACH administration removed
- Reconciliation drastically reduced
- Customer service calls reduced – more time to spend with the ones you need to
- Payroll and travel vouchers
Student Affairs...

- Involve from the start; key to acceptance and reduced inquiries once launch
- Engage Student Government
- Student Liaison Program...budget for campus programs
- Participate with summer orientations
- Marketing
- 94% electronic receipt
Contact information...

- Jerry Mock, AVP Business and Auxiliary Services
  University of West Georgia
  jmock@westga.edu
  (678)839-5075

- Josh Foskey, Director of Student Accounts, Middle Georgia College
  jfoskey@mgc.edu
  (478)934-3447

- Walter Hinckfoot, Vice President Sales, Higher One
  whinckfoot@higherone.com
  281-744-1376