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New York client wins landmark Title III grant

Posted: 7/25/2008



With planning, development and writing support from SunGard Higher Education's Grants Process Business Services, Polytechnic University has been awarded a Title III grant by the Department of Education that will provide the New York institution \$1.9 million over the next five years. Funding of the grant will begin Oct. 1.

"The university has an Office of Sponsored Research that helps faculty apply for research grants," said general manager Rich Yankosky. "But this is the first time they have applied for and been granted an award that will help advance the university in general and its infrastructure."

A private, co-educational institution serving more than 3,000 students, Polytechnic has a distinguished history in electrical engineering, polymer chemistry and aerospace and microwave engineering. With its main campus located in Brooklyn, New York, it is a leader in telecommunications, information science and technology management. The university also is known for its outstanding research centers as well as its outreach programs to encourage math and science education in New York elementary and high schools.

Title III grants are designed to help eligible institutions expand their capacity to serve low-income students by strengthening their academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability. Before an institution can apply for a grant, however, they must first be declared eligible by the DOE.

Polytechnic was initially determined to be ineligible for the grant. Although more than 50 percent of its students receive some federal financial aid, it was determined its endowment and operating budget were too large to be in need of the funds. A large number of Title III grants are awarded to community colleges because they tend to have smaller operating budgets and endowments than four-year institutions.

Last year, SunGard's Grants Business Services staff asked the DOE for a waiver on behalf of Polytechnic, claiming that its location in the more expensive metro New York City area should be taken into consideration. Earlier this year, the DOE accepted the waiver, thereby clearing the way for the university to make application for the grant.

The university's proposed grant application, "Increasing Student Enrollment and Retention through Faculty Development and the Infusion of Technology into the Classroom and the Curriculum," addresses enrollment and retention problems at the institution by infusing best practices in technology-mediated educational tools into the classroom and the curriculum. The application stated that if the grant were awarded, the money would be used to: (1) Establish a Faculty Innovations in Teaching and Learning (FITL) Center; (2) Assess and implement a single university-wide course management system; (3) Provide technology teaching tools in 40 classrooms and SMART classrooms; (4) Provide professional development to 100 full-time faculty in the use of educational technology to enhance teaching and learning; (5) Provide 100 faculty with updated laptop computers to enable incorporation of educational technology into curriculum; (6) Modify 50 courses to incorporate best practices in educational technology; and (7) Upgrade the wireless infrastructure to support student wireless computing program and increase student access to technology-mediated curricular components.

As a result of these enhancements, Polytechnic anticipates a 7 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment during the next five years as well as the same level of increase in its full-time student retention rate. SunGard will be assisting the university with implementation of the grant.

Winning the grant represented a number of firsts for the university, said Christi Segal. "First of all, it was the first time the university had ever applied for such a grant. And the fact that they won the grant on the first try is unusual in that most schools will receive such a grant on the second or third attempt if at all. These grants are very competitive. About 50 are awarded each year with as many as 300 institutions applying. So the fact that Polytechnic received this award on their first attempt speaks highly of the institution."

Polytechnic initially contracted with Managed Services in fall 2004 for help in managing its technology operations, including network/infrastructure, administrative applications, 24x7 help desk, and user services. Rob McLaughlin serves as SunGard's CIO at the institution. Grants Process Business Services' Tracy Hume wrote the grant application.