



Wired Campus

Home > News? Technology > The Wired Campus

March 1, 2010, 03:00 PM ET

Florida State U. Pulls Out of Quali Open-Source Software Project

By Marc Parry

A major university-led effort to produce freely available open-source student-administration software suffered a financial setback Friday, when Florida State University announced that it will pull out of the project because of budget cuts.

Florida State had signed on in 2007 as a founding member of the venture, one of several higher-education software collaborations that fall under the umbrella of the nonprofit Quali Foundation. It joined seven other institutions—including the University of California at Berkeley, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Maryland at College Park—committed to investing at least \$1-million a year to develop software for managing student admission, registration and other tasks.

In an announcement Friday, Florida State said that "massive funding cuts" had forced the university to "focus our scarce resources on sustaining the operational base of our university's information systems" and eliminated its ability to continue contributing to the project. But the university praised the "vision" of the project, Quali Student, adding that it might adopt the software in the future.

Richard Spencer, executive director of information technology at the University of British Columbia, acknowledged that the Florida State move leaves a shortfall but stressed that a large number of institutions are still involved with the venture.

"The impact is significant, but it's not going to derail or threaten the project," he said Monday.

The Florida State pullout follows January's announcement that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has invested more than \$6.5-million in Quali Foundation projects, is closing as a stand-alone entity a grant program that had supported a range of high-profile higher-education software projects. That news drew reassurances of sustainability from officials with Quali; with Sakai, a course-management system; and with Zotero, a program for managing research sources.

Open-source software ventures aren't the only ones under financial pressure. Some colleges, fed up with high support fees, have recently ditched big commercial vendors like Oracle and taken the risky step of turning to cheaper third-party companies to support their software for accounting, human resources, and student enrollment.
