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## Membership meeting scheduled

PESC's next Membership meeting is scheduled for Tuesday May 6, 2003 from 4pm to 5pm and will be held at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town located at 1767 King Street, Alexandria, VA. The Membership meeting is open to Members and Affiliates. The tentative agenda includes:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Financial Report
- Elections for the Board of Directors
- Executive Director Update
- XML Forum Update
- Workgroup Update
- Membership Feedback

As elections for the Board of Directors will be held during this meeting, please note that while members and affiliates are eligible to nominate, only member organizations are eligible to serve on the Board of Directors and only member organizations are eligible to vote.

Proxy ballots will be issued Monday, April 28, 2003. You can submit your proxy any time up until noon on the day of the Membership meeting. Once at the meeting, if you are satisfied with your proxy, you would not need to do anything else as we will count your proxy as your official vote. If you are not satisfied with your proxy, at the meeting you can pull it and recast your vote. OR you can disregard the proxy and vote in person at the meeting.

The meeting will be followed immediately by an open reception, sponsored by EFC, at the hotel. We hope you are able to attend both the Membership meeting and the reception. Please contact Ane al-Sayyed with your RSVP to both events and with questions or concerns. Ane can be reached at 202-263-0296 or alSayyed@StandardsCouncil.org.

Looking forward to seeing you in May!



# XML Forum Update

Over the past several months the XML Forum has been working on a number of tasks supporting the further refinement of the PESC data dictionary, and the methodology and specifications which will be followed in developing schemas in support of that dictionary.

At our meeting last October in Spokane, Forum members agreed to a revision of structure within the PESC schema hierarchy (Core, Sector, and instance document schemas). In the ensuing months the Technology Workgroup carefully reviewed the XML Forum's Technical Specifications making changes as necessary to support the revised hierarchy.

In November, preparations began for development of schemas for the National Council of Higher Education Loan Program's next release of CommonLine. Holly Hyland from the Department of Education was appointed project manager for this effort. With assistance from PESC workgroup chairs and NCHELP members, a project plan shell was created and presented to project stakeholders for review. Once approved, it was fleshed out through the work of volunteers with expertise appropriate to each area of the plan.

A PESC Core schema had been created during development of the initial draft of the Transcript schema. Based on the Spokane decision to re-do the schema architecture, and the need to begin work on the Financial Aid Sector schemas, much of the February XML Forum meeting was spent in group design work.

This work specifically addressed the revised design of the Core schema, and its corresponding effect on the design of the Financial Aid Sector schema. While not the type of work best suited for a large group of people, it gave those present a clear idea of what the schema design and development work, and accompanying issues, are like.

While this schema development work benefited from the expertise of many reviewers, actual development work was limited to a small group of individuals. This was due to the complexity of the work combined with the law of diminishing returns – this was not the type of effort that could be shortened or improved by increasing the number of resources.

In conjunction with the Core schema, a Financial Aid Sector schema was created, aiming to meet the need of both CommonLine and the Department of Education's Common Origination and Disbursement process. The first drafts of the Core and Sector schemas were delivered to NCHELP in March.

In conjunction with schema development and work on documentation by NCHELP to support the next release of CommonLine, many revisions have been made to the PESC data dictionary. These updates refine and sharpen the accuracy of the information captured in the dictionary, enhancing its value to postsecondary data exchange. The Forum continues to assist NCHELP as their overall development process proceeds.

*—By Steve Margenau, Software Specialist, Great Lakes Education Loans Services, Inc.*



# Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Do you have what it takes to bring a new industry standard into existence? Birthing an industry standard takes leadership, negotiation, business knowledge, technical knowledge, and a great sense of perseverance. It is not for the faint of heart, but provides great satisfaction when it's done properly.

I am pleased to say that we have a core group of people that consistently display that mettle in working with the XML Forum and other PESC workgroups. I'm also sorry to say, it is the same core group of people that consistently display that mettle in working with the XML Forum and other PESC workgroups.

While we all want to benefit from the outputs of our workgroups, and some of us hang out on the edges to keep an eye on the progress, there seems to be just a diligent few who actively participate in making progress towards the goal.

Since you believe in industry standards (I'm sure that you don't just read this letter because of my witty repartee), I challenge you to get your organization actively involved in PESC and in the development of industry standards. As you can surmise by the list of skills detailed in my opening paragraph, it takes many people bringing diversity to the table in order to be successful. And we need you, your skills, and your organization to reach our member-defined goals.

I look forward to seeing you in May at our annual conference. I'm excited about the lineup that our conference committee has put together, with a variety of sessions that will provide something for all of our members. I offer the committee my thanks for their hard work. In the meantime, won't you review the PESC website and/or call the PESC office and find out how you can get involved?

Sincerely,

Keith Riccitelli  
Chair  
PESC Board of Directors

## Mark Jones VP, Marketing and Business Development National Student Clearinghouse

Mr. Jones is vice president of marketing and business development for the Clearinghouse, and is responsible for expanding commercial usage of its verification services. Prior to joining the Clearinghouse, Mr. Jones held various development, marketing and product strategy roles with well-known national and international technology companies. Most recently he served as vice president of product management at Mercator Software. Prior to Mercator, Mr. Jones was responsible for the launch of the NCS Entrata product line for the education market. Entrata was the first commercial product to implement EDI/Internet based applications and transcripts. Mr. Jones is also on the board of directors for the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council.

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***What is the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)? What needs does it address and what services does it provide for the postsecondary community?***

The Clearinghouse is a non-profit organization founded by the higher education community in 1993 to streamline the student record verification process.

Our initial goal was to automate paper-based enrollment reporting between collegiate institutions and the student lending industry. It took a few years, but thanks to the cooperation and financial support of student loan guarantors and lenders, and participation from the higher education community, we now provide electronic enrollment verifications for 91 percent of the nation's enrollment, representing more than 2,700 colleges and universities.

As a result of that success, and in an effort to leverage our technical and operational infrastructure to further benefit the higher education community, our members, working through our board of directors, encouraged us to expand our services to automate other areas of student record reporting. We broadened our services to offer enrollment verifications to health insurers, housing providers and other student service providers; degree verifications to employers and background screening firms; and the ability to search our historic enrollment data to discern enrollment and graduation patterns. These services offer significant benefits to participating institutions by significantly reducing the volume of verification requests handled by their staff.

Each individual institution decides which of our services they will participate in and how their data will be used. We act as a facilitator by providing a single, secure point of access for the many organizations needing access to the data.

***What is the overall operating structure of NSC?***

The Clearinghouse is governed by a board of directors comprised of representatives from educational institutions, guarantors, lenders, and servicers. The verifying community, primarily participating guarantors, lenders and servicers, underwrite our operating costs. There is no charge

to schools for participation in the Clearinghouse's DegreeVerify or EnrollmentVerify services.

***How would you define an NSC "customer?"***

Given our evolving role as a facilitator or intermediary, we serve many different customers depending on the type of service. We're obviously very focused on serving the colleges and universities that entrust their data to us, the students they represent, and the student lending industry. However, we also serve more than 10,000 employers, screening firms, health insurers, property managers and other student service providers, not to mention state, local and federal government agencies, including the U.S. Dept. of Education.

***What are the primary interfaces NSC supports? How many different interfaces are supported?***

The Clearinghouse exchanges data with two primary audiences. The nation's colleges and universities provide us with enrollment and degree data via flat files, EDI or web services. Flat files and EDI documents are transmitted to our secure FTP server outside of Washington, DC. Web services take advantage of standard Internet/W3C protocols, like HTTPS, XML and SOAP, to provide real-time access to data that resides at the institution.

Our requestors typically submit verifications through a secured browser session, via web services for real-time application-to-application requests, or via FTP for large batches of requests that are less time sensitive.

***Does NSC process everything electronically or is there also paper processing?***

We are almost completely electronic, except for the occasional fax request or paper deferment form. Any process that requires human intervention, like researching a degree that predates electronic storage, makes use of web-based workflow tools to communicate and update the results.

***How many transactions are processed in a given year? Are there any seasonal cycles for data exchange?***

We receive current enrollment status for 91 percent of the nation's postsecondary population about every four weeks. That equates to about 13.5 million records each month or 150 million per year. We also maintain degree records for about one-third of all degrees issued in the U.S. Last year, we performed more than 100 million verifications. Fall is our busiest time of year, since most service providers need to verify student status at the beginning of the academic year.

***How do electronic standards help the NSC meet its business goals?***

There are about six million employers in the U.S.; several thousand background screening firms; and thousands of insurance companies, apartment managers and other student service providers. To provide the greatest benefits to our 3,000 participating institutions, we need to make access to their data secure, accurate, timely and inexpensive. Standards provide us with a cost-effective means of achieving those goals.

***What standards bodies does the NSC work with?***

We are working with the PESC/XML Forum to support the creation of appropriate XML documents and web services to facilitate our interactions with colleges and universities. We also try to support the SPEEDE committee as they promote EDI to higher education. About 25 percent of the enrollment data we receive is in EDI for-

mat. Our DegreeVerify service is also EDI-enabled.

We also participate in HR-XML, a non-profit consortium defining XML standards for the human resources function. Many of our verifiers use the HR-XML Background Screening schema. We worked with the appropriate committee to ensure support for the data elements commonly used in the enrollment and degree verification process.

***What is the biggest challenge NSC faces?***

Our biggest challenge is to move more of our verifiers to the web services interface. Although the benefits are significant, it takes time to communicate the availability of this option and time for each client to implement the technology. The good news is that the response has been overwhelmingly positive and the technology is surprisingly mature. One client recently implemented our DegreeVerify Web service interface in two days. They received our implementation guide on Monday and sent production transactions on Wednesday. We were amazed.

***What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the postsecondary community as whole with regard to technology and electronic standards?***

I think the biggest challenge facing all of higher education today is doing more with less. Standards don't really begin to pay off until you achieve a critical mass of participants, and building critical mass takes time and resources. In education, our challenge is to identify business processes that provide the best return on investment. We then need to focus our collective resources on creating standards and promoting participation in order to make that effort successful.

## PESC on the road

PESC staff continue to work within the community to promote and collaborate on industry issues and events. In March, PESC's Executive Director Michael Sessa addressed attendees of the Software Developers Conference (SDC), hosted by the US Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) in Kansas City, with an update on PESC activities. Mr. Sessa also partnered with representatives of FSA and NCHELP for sessions on the Common Record at FSA's Annual Spring Conference, held immediately following the SDC. In March, PESC joined other higher education associations at Datatel's User Group (DUG) Conference held in Washington DC. All associations were grouped in the vendor area, creating an "Association Alley" which provided attendees a unique opportunity to see all the major associations gathered together. March also saw partnership between Datatel, USA Funds, and PESC at ELM Resources Annual Membership Meeting for a session on the importance of standards.

In April at AACRAO's Annual Conference in

Washington D.C., PESC was discussed at several sessions related to XML and EDI and PESC sponsored a session on issues within the secondary arena. Rounding out April, Mr. Sessa addressed attendees at Nelnet's Annual Client Symposium in Orlando, FL and Citizens Bank's School Advisory Board in Uncasville, CT.

In May, Mr. Sessa will address attendees of the Education Finance Council's (EFC) Technology Conference. This year, PESC has partnered with EFC which will hold its Technology Conference at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town as well, immediately preceding PESC's conference. EFC's conference will start at on Monday May 5 at 8 AM and will conclude at 11 AM Tuesday May 6. While two separate conferences, the opportunity to partner allows those interested to spend a few days focusing on technology issues important to various areas of higher education. Separate registrations as well as a joint registration are still available.



## Conference Update

Winners of PESC's Best Practices Competition for 2002 have been selected and have been notified! But you will need to attend the conference to find out who the winners are! Awards and announcements for Best Practices will be made immediately following the keynote address on Wednesday morning. PESC Service Awards will also be awarded at the same time.

Our panels are geared up to bring you insightful and provocative analysis on The State of Electronic Standards in Higher Education, on Web Services, and

on Why Standards Are Important. With timely concurrent sessions, including the XML Postsecondary Transcript, Common Record, EDI Implementation, Meteor, Internet Services from the University of Texas at Austin, XML, and ELM - this is a conference you don't want to miss!

We look forward to seeing you in DC in May!!! Registration is still available. For questions or concerns, please contact Ane al-Sayyed, Membership Coordinator, at [alSayyed@StandardsCouncil.org](mailto:alSayyed@StandardsCouncil.org) or 202-263-0296.

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### Technology Tidbits and Standard Snippets

■ CIO magazine's "State of the CIO" survey revealed that **strategic thinking and planning is considered "pivotal"** by approximately 75 percent of respondents, up from 46 percent last year. This shift in attitude shows that **IT professionals are beginning to look beyond their department to the organization as a whole** when planning development and budget strategies. The entire article may be accessed at [www.cio.com/archive/040103/strategy.html](http://www.cio.com/archive/040103/strategy.html).

■ EWeek recently reported that **W3C's work on the Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) v. 1.2 is "almost complete."** SOAP 1.2 addresses a number of unclear areas and errors present in version 1.1. In addition, it allows SOAP server queries to be completed with simple HTTP GET commands, as opposed to limiting them to SOAP-formatted requests. SOAP 1.2's downfall is its continued reliance on separate authentication steps and point-to-point encryption techniques to protect SOAP messages, according to the article. SOAP 1.2, now in Candidate Recommendation phase, is going through final reviews and is expected to be complete by midyear.

■ EDUCAUSE and Internet2's Computer and Network Security Task Force recently announced

#### UT Austin Internet Server 'SPEEDEs' through March

- 23,048 TS130 Transcripts
- 25,498 TS131 Acknowledgements
- 7,708 TS997 Functional Acknowledgements
- 24,598 TS189 Admission Applications
- 2,856 TS138 Test Score Reports
- 90,849 Total Transactions—up 20 percent from March 2002

120 entities sent transcripts and an all-time high of 189 entities received transcripts, not including 300 Florida schools not counted as separate entities

publication of a white paper titled **"IT Security for Higher Education: A Legal Perspective."** The paper discusses current laws, regulations, and legal precedents affecting the current state of IT security at higher education institutions. The

paper is available in PDF at [www.educause.edu/asp/doclib/abstract.asp?ID=csd2746](http://www.educause.edu/asp/doclib/abstract.asp?ID=csd2746).

■ **The U.S. Department of Education's Common Origination and Disbursement system is ready to receive 2003-2004 records**, according to an April 14 release by the Department. Included in this year's updates is the availability of a MPN for Direct PLUS loans and the ability to choose the format in which data is transferred by program type. In addition, the release states that all 2003-2004 award year Common Record documents must conform to the latest Common Record XML Schema 2.0 found at [www.ifap.ed.gov](http://www.ifap.ed.gov). The entire document, which also includes an overview of Common Record XML Schema changes may be accessed at <http://ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/0414codsys0304.html>.

■ **The Liberty Alliance will announce two new draft specifications later this month, and turn over a portion of its work to the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS).** The first phase, which was renamed Identity Federation Framework (ID-FF) in March, is basically Liberty's Version 1.1 specification that outlines single sign-on and account sharing between partners with established trust relationships. **Liberty's Version 1.1 specification will become a foundation document to help create Version 2 of OASIS's Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML).** Draft specifications for Liberty's second and third phases of work, which now incorporate the WS-Security protocol for securing Web services messages, also will be introduced. The two draft specifications are not being submitted to OASIS at this time but will be opened to the usual public review.

■ An April 10 news.com article discusses **the differences between open source and open standards.** According to the article, **"Open standards are the most critical, because making a**

PESC has been working behind the scenes to redesign and improve its website. With more descriptive tabs, a more intuitive look and feel, and document storage capabilities, the website is ramping up to allow visitors a more pleasant and user-friendly experience. Stay tuned for future announcement and enhancements....

**choice today shouldn't preclude you from making a different choice tomorrow."** The article cautions readers not to assume that open source automatically holds the same advantages. "Open source simply means that the underlying software code is available for inspection and modification," according to the article. The article goes on to say, "The best open-source projects are the ones that actually amplify a standard..." The article can be accessed in its entirety at <http://news.com.com/2010-1071-995823.html>.

■ **The U.S. government's new e-government plan, officially launched on April 17, faces a \$40 million budget shortfall.** On Thursday, April 17, the E-Government Act of 2002 went into effect, creating an Office of Information within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to focus on the plan. The plan, which held a \$45 million budget request price tag from the Bush administration, received only \$5 million from Congress, which is expected to greatly slow progression of the plan.

the STANDARD

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