Hobsons has been a great project and initiative, collaboratively developed and deployed between the Graduate Division and C&C. This year is the first year of deployment with a pilot group of 13 programs. The pilot programs have increased applications a collective 10% and SIRS by 22% over the prior year. The programs have been greatly benefitted, by being able to manage their communications and more importantly provide data and feedback on their communications. This aspect will provide cost savings in the long run, by being able to target recruitment and communications in the future.

--- Kennett Lai, Assistant Dean & CFAO, Graduate Division
Campus Impact

UC Riverside’s implementation of the Hobsons Connect CRM solution and the integration of this system with Grad SIS, UCR’s comprehensive home-grown graduate admissions system, have provided the campus with customized, targeted and automated messaging capabilities to personalize and enhance the graduate recruitment experience, while freeing up campus staff from time consuming manual management & tracking of prospective applicants. In addition, the integration between the two systems has allowed UCR to utilize Hobsons’ impressive suite of reporting & dashboard functionality to enhance programs’ abilities to measure the effectiveness of their recruiting efforts and to intelligently reallocate resources. Leveraging these commodity services through Hobsons, while still providing a seamless experience for the applicant, has allowed UCR to increase graduate applications and enrollment quickly and at a minimal cost, supporting both the campus’ emphasis on administrative efficiency as well as one of its core strategic goals.

Business Need

UCR 2020, UC Riverside’s campus strategic plan, identifies four strategic goals for the campus in its pursuit of national excellence and Association of American Universities (AAU) membership. One of these four goals specifically charges the campus with substantially increasing both the number and quality of its graduate students. In pursuit of this goal UCR is actively engaged in strategies that enhance the effectiveness of its graduate admissions process.

Grad SIS, UCR’s custom-developed graduate admissions system, has been deployed to the campus since 2009 and provides a comprehensive system from the point of application through admissions decision and enrollment, including routed application review, customized financial support modeling and online admissions and post-admissions processing. However, Grad SIS has only limited functionality in support of graduate recruitment prior to the application process. In addition, while Grad SIS includes a robust data query tool for campus users, it lacks significant operational reporting and dashboards for graduate admissions staff & faculty.

In evaluating the options to overcome these limitations, the campus Steering Committee overseeing Grad SIS determined that 1.5 – 2 years of development work would be required to implement a full-featured solution on these fronts. The Graduate Dean and campus CIO jointly proposed Hobsons Connect (which was currently in use as CRM in UCR’s Graduate School of Business) as a possible solution to shorten/eliminate this development window for a reasonable cost. Steering Committee approval was obtained, and a contract was entered into with Hobsons in late 2011. Significant emphasis was placed on tight integration between the two systems, both to...
take full advantage of Hobsons’ key features throughout the admissions process, as well as to provide a uniform and compelling experience for applicants.

**Highlights**

- Overall 10% increase in graduate applications and 22% increase in graduate Statements of Intent to Register (SIRs) in the first year of implementation.
- Individual pilot program increases in applications as high as 37% (Materials Science Engineering graduate program).
- Individual pilot program increases in SIRs as high as 333% (Bioengineering graduate program).
- 13,000+ prospect contacts loaded into Hobsons connect, including all 2,800 Grad SIS applicants from pilot programs.
- Distributed administrative structure, all pilot programs manage their own custom communications plan and prospect records within Hobsons Connect.

**The Process: Technology and Implementation**

**Technical Highlights:**

Hobsons Connect and Grad SIS are integrated through three main avenues: (1) the configuration of the Connect database based on the Grad SIS data architecture, (2) a suite of secure SOAP-compliant web services that update key data elements at specific milestones in the admissions process, and (3) a nightly batch job that refreshes all applicant and application review information in Hobsons based on the current state of Grad SIS data.

The configuration of the Connect database was achieved despite the fact that Connect utilizes a flat rather than a relationship database architecture and has significant limitations on the configurability of database primary keys. Customized logic has been implemented within Grad SIS to account for the fact that applicants can apply to multiple programs (either simultaneously or across multiple terms). The data structures developed in Hobsons allow a single prospect/applicant record to reflect up to three Grad SIS applications, while preserving a core of uniform applicant data which is shared across applications. The transmission logic within Grad SIS constantly updates the records throughout the admissions process, preserving and promoting the most successful and relevant applicant records.

The Grad SIS – Hobsons web services utilize Hobsons’ delivered APIs to maintain a single set of user credentials between each system, regardless of where the prospect enters the process. These communications also provide real-time updates to Hobsons of key Grad SIS data elements, such as admissions status and admissions decision, which are used to drive automated communications within Connect.
The nightly batch job provides regular updates within Hobsons to nearly all Grad SIS applicant and application review data elements. This data is provided at a significant level of granularity, allowing programs to develop automated communications indicating the status of specific sections of the applicant’s application or application review process (Transcripts, Test Scores, Scholastic Information, etc.). These communications represent the largest single percentage of inquiries from applicants previously received by most graduate programs.

Grad SIS – Hobsons Integration Technical Overview
Testimonials

This past year UCR deployed a CRM (customer relations software) by Hobsons for our graduate programs. The intention was to automate communications with prospective graduate program applicants. We also wanted to be sure that while prospects were filling out their information in the CRM, that this information was being written to an electronic application in our own system, so that when they actually did decide to apply, the would find that much of their application had already been completed. This was no easy task as the Hobson’s product and our own system were not really intended to work together. Nevertheless, with the aid of Computing and Communications and their dedication to making this integration work and despite a late start on the part of the campus, we were able to deploy the Hobsons CRM in one-third of our 50 graduate programs in time for this season’s recruiting, while training and implementing the project for the rest of the graduate programs during the year. In September of of 2013, all of our graduate programs will be fully deployed and we expect to have a huge increase in both the number and quality of our graduate applications. This year alone we saw an increase in applications of over 12%, the program using the CRM accounting for the huge preponderance of that increase. The ease of the integration and the efficacy of the training are primarily due to the technical support we received from Computing and Communications, and the coding they did to insure the smooth operation of these systems in tandem. This has been a huge success for the campus, and as I say, we anticipate even greater things to come. Most importantly, the increase in the quality and number of our graduate population stands directly at the core of our UCR’s strategic plan for 2020, so this contribution reaches into every aspect of the University’s goals for the future.

--- Joseph Childers, Graduate Division Dean and Professor of English

The Hobsons Connect-Grad SIS integration technology has allowed the graduate programs to automate their entire communications process in order to effectively target unique, prospective populations and better address application and graduate information as students move through the application process in real-time. Graduate program staff are now able to focus on creating messaging that is focused on a variety of student populations to increase recruitment efforts, developing brand recognition through directed messaging and marketing, and effective tracking recruitment return on investment. After only one year of pilot programming deployment, this integration has yielded positive results towards the campus’ graduate recruitment goals, and even greater benefits are expected once full deployment has been reached.

--- Iselda Salgado, Graduate Student Affairs Officer
Timeline

December 2011  
Purchase of Hobsons Connect service, project initiation

March – Sept. 2013  
Configuration of Hobsons environment, development of integration functionality

March – Sept. 2013  
Training of pilot programs

October 2012  
Production pilot with thirteen graduate programs

May 2013  
Pilot expanded to thirteen additional departments

October 2013  
Deployment of remaining twenty graduate programs

On the Web

Production site:

Hobsons UCR Site:

Grad SIS Admissions System (applicant entrance):
https://gradsis.ucr.edu/gradsis/GSIS_LOGIN.Login_student

Support site:

Grad SIS Support Site:
http://cnc.ucr.edu/gradsis

Team Members

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Brett Livaudais, Application Developer
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