

HOWARD SHANKEN, REGISTRAR, GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Effective technology makes students feel valued

“We may not be the brains of the institutions but we should be the hearts. We need to lead the call for students to be cared about and valued,” said **Howard Shanken**, registrar at **Grand Rapids Community College**.

But what are the best ways for registrars to help students feel valued? Effectively harnessing technology without compromising student privacy improves their experiences with your office, Shanken said. It also helps registrars accomplish more with less.



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“Taking students from waiting in line to being online has been part of my mission and vision,” he said.

Finding the solutions that work best for students is an ongoing process. Shanken’s first big success was creating a touch tone phone system for registration in 1996.

That system was unplugged in 2004 as part of Shanken’s second big success — implementing online registration.

Other innovations have also streamlined processes. GRCC was one of the first institutions to have PeopleSoft running smoothly. It was also one of the first to send transcripts electronically.

As president-elect of the **Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officials**, Shanken is part of a collaborative effort to create a statewide transfer database. Students will be able to look in one place to find out how credits from their institution will transfer to other institutions in the state.

Shanken’s confidence that technology can be used

Academic, technical knowledge guide decisions

To make good decisions, registrars need to understand their institution’s educational goals and the technology behind its systems, said **Howard Shanken**, registrar at **Grand Rapids Community College**.

Before becoming registrar 12 years ago, Shanken taught social science courses including psychology and sociology. That background helps him understand the faculty and the students.

But institutions have spent millions of dollars on technology that does not serve them well, he said. To avoid such mistakes, Shanken includes technical-functional positions in his staff.

Those staff members help him understand technology better in a shorter amount of time. They also help him with a task critical to every registrar — communicating with the IT department. ■

without compromising student privacy has been bolstered by serving on the advisory board of the **National Student Clearinghouse**.

After Hurricane Katrina, thoughtful discussions about student privacy took place at the Clearinghouse before any decisions were made about releasing information on displaced students, Shanken said.

Discussions are now underway for the Clearinghouse to help the defense department verify veterans’ enrollment status. While those discussions are in their early stages, it is impressive that a third-party agency is seen as trustworthy enough for them to take place, Shanken said.

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Dream about future to prepare for its challenges

“We’re true leaders when we dream and imagine what this will be like 10 years from now,” said **Howard Shanken**, registrar at **Grand Rapids Community College**.

“Dreaming means asking the question early,” he added. Being prepared allows registrars to offer solutions rather than reacting, say when budget cuts hit.

Shanken predicts that in 10 years, registrars will:

- Have an office culture tied closely to the information technology department. The registrar will be more occupied with managing systems than with managing people.
- Participate in a discussion about the gap between credit and noncredit courses. Some post-degree professional development training could lead to certification.

- See their institutions face competition from large film and network companies. If a Nobel Prize winner could create a learning opportunity available anywhere, anytime, that could have huge implications for higher education, Shanken said.

- Be challenged by identity management issues. How will the identity of a student taking a test at a remote location be verified?

- Learn to cope with a barrage of e-mails and other information. “To learn to keep our spirits fresh and our minds calm — that will be one of our challenges with this wave of information that continues to splash to shore every hour,” Shanken said. ■