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Don't Worry, B-Buy: E-Procurement at Bucknell

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by Bud Hiller, Manager of Technology Desk

B-buy, Bucknell's new one-stop purchasing system, formalizes the way the University approves, analyzes, and organizes its departmental purchases. For much of the university, this is a huge change in day-to-day operations, but going into the future, the aggregate advantages of B-buy will quickly justify the investment.

A core team from Finance, Procurement and Library and IT began the process of implementing and piloting B-buy in mid-2011. In January of this year, Procurement and Library and IT entered phase one, utilizing the system for its purchases and test-driving B-buy for the rest of campus. Phase two will see a progressive roll-out to various departments across campus throughout the rest of the year, with the goal of having the entire university on-line by the end of the fall semester 2012.

Don Krech, Director of Procurement Services, says that one of the prime advantages of B-buy is the consolidation of accurate purchasing history within a single database. In addition, Krech notes that "B-buy has a single sign-on for multiple vendors. You can place individual orders for Office Max, CDW-G and Dell without ever having to leave the B-buy site."

B-buy also looks to improve operating efficiency within the University by streamlining the entire process. By introducing various roles, as well as well-defined and easily accessible documentation, B-buy transforms a widely divergent set of procedures across campus into a coherent mechanism that offers a clear timeline between the initial request and the final approval. For Shoppers, who will make up the majority of B-buy users, the system will answer the all-important question of "What is the status of my order?" with a couple of clicks on the B-buy pages within *my*Bucknell.

Other roles in the system include Requester and Approver at various levels. Email notifications will inform people in these roles of shopping carts that need action, including reminders if the necessary action hasn't yet occurred, and once the cart has been approved or rejected, the shopper will also receive an email update. Shoppers can easily check the status of their requests online, but for Requesters and Approvers, B-buy provides a quick summary of purchases and expenditures both for their own departments and across campus.

For Heather Williams, Library and IT Technology Project Manager, who is overseeing the implementation of eProcurement at Bucknell, B-buy offers a benefit that everyone at the University will immediately recognize. She appreciates the Bucknell discounts and special pricing we've been able to negotiate and leverage through the site, saying "We've already received some better pricing through Office Max and only expect that to continue there and with other vendors as we roll out to the remainder of campus and increase usage in phase two."

B-buy aggregates University-wide volume discounts by preferred vendors and utilizes our University-negotiated contract pricing. Currently, these vendors include OfficeMax, Dell, CDW-G, Fisher Scientific, SHI International, McMaster Carr, Sigma Aldrich, GovConnection, Grainger, and VWR Scientific. Phase two will see additional suppliers, but in Library and IT's experience during the first months of implementation, several of the current vendors have provided outstanding pricing on some frequently used items.

Over the years, the manner in which departments purchased supplies depended in large part upon stand-alone systems, suppliers from across the internet, and personal knowledge that existed in the heads of long-time employees. With the development of eProcurement, Bucknell can save money, operate more efficiently, and access more and better data about what is bought, and from whom. The collaboration between Finance, Procurement and Library and IT has produced a winning combination of long term benefits for the University.

"What is the status of my order?"