



Academic Financial Planning Optimization (AFPO)

The need for integrated financial planning has evolved over time. For many years, considerable enrollment growth, a healthy economy, and various system implementations led to a variety of approaches to unit financial planning. Capacity was built in different areas – through additional platforms, the evolution of existing platforms, and specific analytics competencies in certain units. Then came the pandemic economy, changes in the enrollment marketplace, and a budgeting model that required a different level of analysis and decision making within units – all contributing to a change in user demand for financial planning information.

In response, several key areas in administration currently produce and manage their own data reporting systems. Unit leaders are excited to learn about these new resources, but with this increase in platforms in different areas, it has become increasingly challenging to make sense of what is available and where to go for certain data. In some cases, there appears to be overlap and duplication, with two or more platforms providing the same or similar information.

Academic units, central to the institution's resources, require precise data on tuition, enrollment, faculty, and more. Streamlining access to accurate information and maintaining confidence in the data are crucial for effective decision-making.

Current platforms included are Anaplan, Carolina Analytics, EAB Academic Performance Solutions, PeopleSoft Finance, PeopleSoft HCM, Finance Intranet, Cognos Data Warehouse, and Banner.

A project team was established, representing the major areas involved in providing academic financial planning information (Budget Office, Bursar's Office, Controller's Office, Division of IT, Office of Institutional Research Assessment and Analytics, Office of the Provost). This team assessed current state (discovery phase), generated possible improvements (possibility phase), and refined improvement ideas into an action plan (action planning phase). A leadership review group of these key areas was also created to ensure leadership alignment with collective plans moving forward.

PHASE I: Discovery

Facilitated by the Office of Organizational Excellence, the project team conducted end-user feedback sessions to enable stakeholders to share valuable insights, needs, and suggestions. Ten user feedback sessions were conducted with more than 25 deans and academic financial managers, representing 13 colleges and schools.

The team also determined that a better understanding of the full capabilities of each system or platform was critical to making meaningful future state recommendations. The project team observed a series of demonstrations of the current platforms to evaluate the platforms' functionality and potential benefits as they correspond to the intended outcomes and end-user needs.

Intended Project Outcomes

- Use platforms that are best at meeting specific reporting needs
- Consolidate platforms to an optimal minimum
- Enable people who need data to find it easily and quickly
- Allow for user-friendly scenario analysis and easy report generation at the local level
- Make it easier to think and plan strategically
- Provide data that leaders and planners have confidence in
- Be known and understood by everyone who is involved in academic financial planning
- Result in sustainable coordination of financial report development over time

End User Feedback Themes

- Centralized Hub
- User-friendly format
- Clearly defined data
- Consistency and standardization
- More HR and Payroll data visibility
- Clarity of reporting metrics
- Forecasting, Modeling, and “What-if” analysis reporting capabilities

PHASE II: Possibility

During this phase, the leadership review group was engaged to determine a collective desired future state. These areas of focus served as a guide for the collaborative development of improvement ideas: Data Driven Culture, Data Hub, Data Accuracy, Standard Reporting, Forecasting, and Training.

The group also assessed each platform’s features, functionality, and total cost of ownership as important context before generating improvement ideas.

Then the group collectively generated improvement ideas, refined those ideas, and developed a set of action items.

PHASE III: Action Planning

The following improvement actions were segmented into immediate, short-term (3-6 months), and long-term (more than 6 months). More detailed timeframes are available on the action register located in the addendum.

Develop one central gateway that organizes reporting into user-friendly sections, links to platforms, and includes descriptions of what academic financial planning information exists with each platform.

- Identify institutional owner for gateway and what committee or governance structure will advise
 - **Team Lead:** AFPO Sponsors
 - **Group/Team:** Provost, CFO, CIO
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate

- Define gateway scope and functionality desired
 - **Team Lead:** Kelly Epting
 - **Group/Team:** OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate, beginning Jan. 1, 2023

- Inventory existing reports and uses across all reporting tools
 - **Team Lead:** Tom Vrana
 - **Group/Team:** Sub-Committee: OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate, beginning Jan. 1, 2023

- Determine core reporting needed and begin to standardize
 - **Team Lead:** Shannon Means, Donald Miles
 - **Group/Team:** Sub-Committee: OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate, beginning Feb. 1, 2024

- Define Carolina Analytics
 - **Team Lead:** Shannon Means, Donald Miles
 - **Group/Team:** Sub-Committee: OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Short-Term, beginning Jan. 1, 2023

- Identify gaps between existing reports and core reporting needed and develop new reports to fill gaps
 - **Team Lead:** Shannon Means, Donald Miles
 - **Group/Team:** Sub-Committee: OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Short-Term, beginning Mar. 16, 2024

- Provide training and documentation for users on what standard reporting exists
 - **Team Lead:** Mandy Kibler
 - **Group/Team:** Sub-Committee: OIRAA, Provost's Office, Budget Office, Controller's Office, Bursar's Office, HR, Enrollment Management, 2 College/School Academic Financial Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Long-Term, beginning Apr. 1, 2024

Conduct assessment of IT enterprise architecture to address present and future reporting needs

- Determine data store solution to address present and future reporting needs
 - **Team Lead:** Tom Vrana
 - **Group/Team:** OIRAA, Finance, HR, Enrollment Management, DoIT
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate

Conduct Cognos Data Warehouse report clean-up to maintain necessary reports

- Collaborate with report owners and stakeholders to identify relevant and actively used reports and develop criteria for determining relevance and active use
- Review and assess each report against the criteria to archive or retire reports that are no longer relevant or in use
 - **Team Lead:** Phillip Chester
 - **Group/Team:** Bursar, Registrar, Budget Office, Financial Aid, DoIT, 2 Business Managers, Other USC Campus Representatives
 - **Timeframe:** Short-Term, beginning Feb. 1, 2024

Expand Anaplan reporting capabilities for forecasting and scenario analysis

- Pursue the addition of PeopleSoft HCM data to tie general ledger budgeting with workforce planning and budgeting
 - **Team Lead:** Kevin Russell
 - **Group/Team:** Budget Office, System Financial Officers, HR, Payroll, Controller's Office, DoIT
 - **Timeframe:** Long-Term, beginning Jan. 1, 2023
- Expand forecasting model where scenario planning can be used at unit and central levels
 - **Team Lead:** Kevin Russell
 - **Group/Team:** Budget Office, System Financial Officers
 - **Timeframe:** Immediate, beginning Jan. 1, 2023
- Explore other forecasting capabilities such as sponsored awards workforce planning
 - **Team Lead:** Kevin Russell
 - **Group/Team:** TBD – based on VPR sponsored awards vendor solution
 - **Timeframe:** Long-Term

Develop integrated academic program planning and evaluation resources

- Discontinue EAB-APS at contract end (June 2025) and recommend non-renewal of research membership as it relates to academic financial planning
 - **Team Lead:** Kelly Epting, Shannon Means
 - **Timeframe:** Long-Term

- Within our data infrastructure and other existing partnerships, build data analytics resources improve integrated academic program planning and evaluation to help colleges: a) Monitor academic program enrollment and completion trends; b) Optimize instructional resources; c) Evaluate ROI; d) Build a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.
 - **Team Lead:** Shannon Means
 - **Group/Team:** Deans, College Academic Financial Managers, APLs, OIRAA, Budget Office, DoIT
 - **Timeframe:** Long-Term, beginning February 1, 2024

Savings

Direct Cost Savings

Direct cost savings of **\$298,500** will be realized by the discontinuation of the EAB research membership agreement as of June 2025.

Direct cost savings from discontinuing the EAB-APS contract in June 2025 will be counterbalanced by the cost of a replacement academic planning and evaluation tool. However, the new tool will be integrated into existing infrastructure and will leverage current partnerships, leading to longer-term savings in maintaining a unified infrastructure, data confidence among users, and simplification of the reporting ecosystem to save users time (see below).

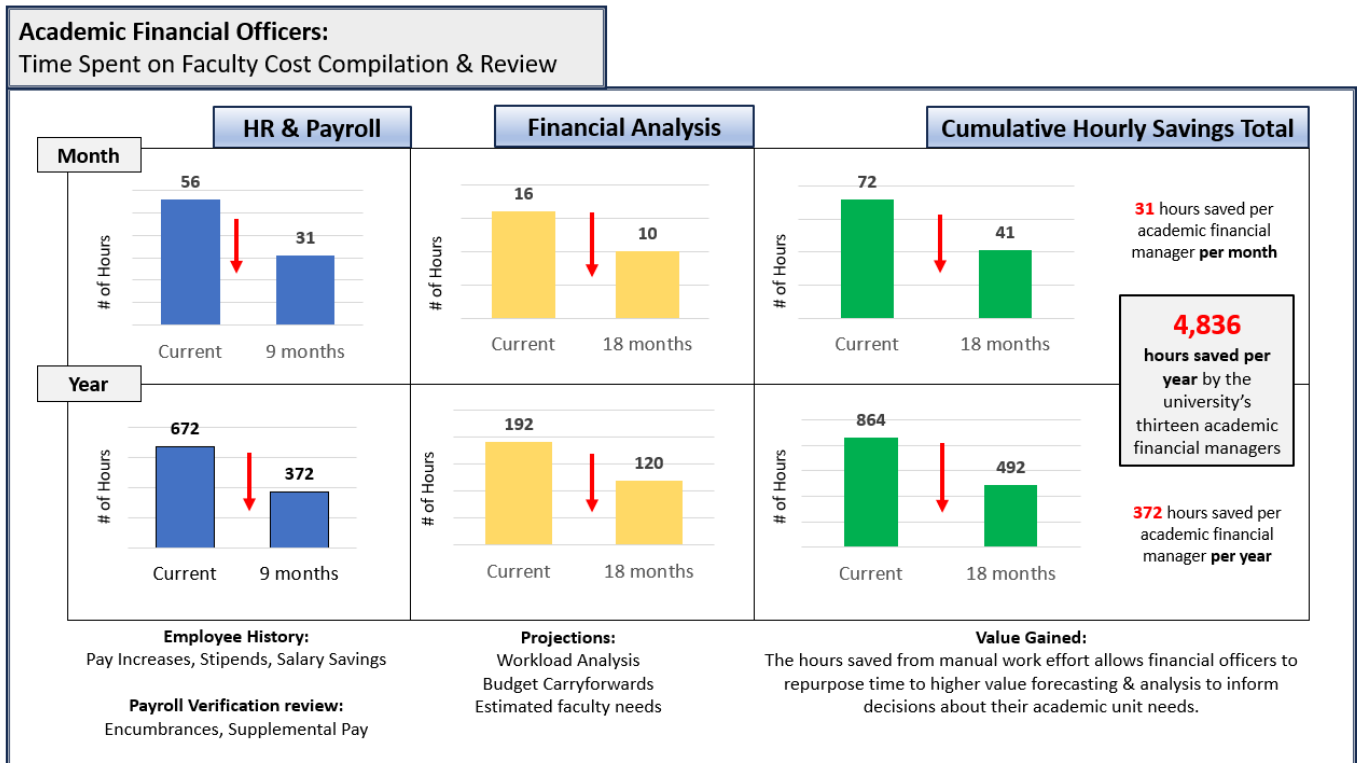
Time Savings

Given that faculty costs represent the largest portion of overall program costs, HR/payroll reporting and forecasting is an important component of the work that's done by our academic financial managers. But doing this work takes a considerable amount of time on the front end – because the financial managers are navigating so many platforms, systems, and reports to locate and pull together all the needed information. In fact, academic financial managers estimate that they are spending approximately 56 hours per month just to source, compile, and verify reports capturing HR/payroll costs and only 16 hours per month to analyze and forecast those costs, some of which involves manual compilation also.

With the improvements outlined above, it is estimated that in **9 months**, the front-end work of **manual sourcing, compiling and verifying reports associated with faculty costs will take 25 fewer hours per month**. In **18 months**, with additional phased-in improvements that lead to a more integrated approach to planning and analysis, another **6 hours per month of manual work will be saved**. The **total time savings of 31 hours per month** adds up to **372 hours per year** – a significant amount of time that each academic financial manager can repurpose for analysis to inform future plans and decision making. The total time savings represents a **repurposing of 19%** of an academic financial manager's **annual work hours** (1,950 hours) that will be available for value-added work.

Collectively, USC's **13 academic financial managers will save 4,836 work hours**. In addition, there will be time savings for non-academic financial managers, since easily accessible, standardized, and better integrated reporting will reduce the manual preparation work for all financial managers.

Time Savings Summary



Additional Project Information

Sponsors:

- Ed Walton, Executive Vice President for Administration and Chief Financial Officer
- Donna Arnett, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Team Members:

- Kelly Epting, Associate VP for Finance and Budget, University Budget Office
- Mary Alexander, Vice Provost for Academic Administration and Chief of Staff, Office of the Provost
- Lindsay Crawford, Assistant Controller
- Jonathan Poon, Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Analytics, OIRAA
- Phillip Chester, Bursar’s Office
- Harrison Pressley, Columbia Budget Director, University Budget Office
- Caroline Maulana, Business Intelligence Director, Division of Information Technology

Facilitators: Office of Organizational Excellence

- Stacey Bradley, University Organizational Excellence Officer, Office of Organizational Excellence
- Jacobi Bowman, Senior Associate, Office of Organizational Excellence

Leadership Review Group:

- Kelly Epting, Associate VP for Finance and Budget, University Budget Office
- Mary Alexander, Vice Provost for Academic Administration and Chief of Staff, Office of the Provost
- Beth Brigdon, Interim VP for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer
- Mandy Kibler, Associate VP for Finance and University Controller
- Stacy Lee, Manager, Division of Human Resources
- Donald Miles, Executive Director and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison, OIRAA
- Belinda Ogorek, Assistant VP, Division of Human Resources
- Nicole Pressley, Associate VP for Finance and University Bursar
- Kevin Russell, University Budget Director
- Shannon Means, Vice Provost for Strategy and Innovation
- Mike Kelly, Executive Director and Chief Data Officer, Division of Information Technology
- Tom Vrana, Executive Director of Enterprise Applications, Division of Information Technology