**Brief Synopsis of Attack of the Rampaging Stakeholders**

This is a very brief synopsis of my presentation – Attack of the Rampaging Stakeholders. Hopefully it will help make sense of the presentation.

My name is Andy Clark. I’m work as a Project Manager at the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) System Office. The VCCS is a system of 23 community colleges with 250,000 students. Each college has a great deal of independence in how they implement system policies and practices. The colleges range from very small and rural to very large and urban. There is a great deal of diversity in business processes, staffing levels and pretty much all business areas. Each of which has its own Financial Aid office, Registrars, Business Office, IT staff and President. The System Office is responsible for the maintenance of enterprise systems (amongst other things). Significant decisions on our enterprise systems involve leading these 23 colleges to consensus. Since many application decisions have cross functional applications, I potentially have huge numbers of stakeholders to work with.

I really think pretty much anyone that works in Higher Ed IT as a manager or leader faces the same problems I do. We all have to work with multiple stakeholders and it can be just is hard to work with a few stakeholders as dozens upon dozens, but in my case the problems are uniquely obvious.

Over the years the VCCS has developed a couple of tools for working with stakeholders – Workgroups and Task forces. Workgroups are standing groups whose members come from all colleges in a specific functional area. Currently I work with Student Records, Student Finance, Financial Aid, HR and Workforce (non-credit) workgroups. These workgroups regularly meet (usually on the phone) to discuss common challenges. The agenda for these meetings tend to consist of a number of issues, each of which can be reasonably discussed in a few minutes. Most items on the agendas come from the colleges.

Issues that are too involved for the workgroup format are addressed by task forces. These are drawn from the workgroups and for complex issues they are staffed by members of multiple workgroups to assure that problems are considered from multiple points of view. Task forces tend to have more in person meetings due to the complexity of their problems.

The system office tends to facilitate workgroup and task force meetings. We try to do lots of listening, but also nudge the group toward consensus and generally keep the meetings on track. This approach has worked very well for us in working through Requirements Analysis, which is one of our crucial IT challenges. Our other major area where we struggle is testing. These groups help with this, but this is an ongoing concern for us. The diversity of the college processes means that to safely move items to production we need broad college participation, but this can take time to happen and we wind up with many modifications that spend more time than is healthy under test because the testing is not really happening.