

Aeda Ghandour

CUSTOMER CLOSEUP

Recently Aeda Ghandour, Manager of Student Loan/Credit and Collection for Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU), visited our offices, and while she was here, graciously agreed to be interviewed for this quarter's "Customer Closeup."

Fairleigh Dickinson University, a customer for 35 years, is a unique university with an international flair. The school, which has campuses in Teaneck and Madison, NJ also has an overseas campus, Wroxton College in Oxfordshire, UK. Over 10,000 graduate and undergraduate students are enrolled at the two New Jersey campuses, which offer over 100 degrees in business, civics, communication arts, computer technology, education, health and medicine, language, psychology, and science.

Aeda feels the school's emphasis on global education sets it apart from other schools. FDU attracts students from 50 countries, and all students are encouraged to study abroad. Incoming first year students are required to take long distance learning courses taught by the school's Global Virtual Faculty. The school's mission statement dedicates the university to global education and the school has a long-term relationship with the United Nations.

In order for any institution to carry out its educational mission, a solid infrastructure must be in place. Buildings must be maintained, records must be kept, tuition must be paid, and loan payments must be collected. That's why people like Aeda are so valuable to the schools where they are employed. In her role as Manager of Student Loan/Credit

and Collection, Aeda makes sure Perkins loans are repaid so the school can continue to loan money to other students. Each year the school loans its students between \$1,500,000 and \$1,900,000 so it is absolutely critical that these loans are repaid. To accomplish this task, Aeda has a staff of five in her department and oversees the efforts of seven collection agencies.

One of her department's most important tasks is managing its cohort default rate. To assure their cohort rate remains low, Aeda dedicates a staff member to call delinquent borrowers every two weeks from October to March and also mails letters to delinquent borrowers urging them to pay their bills. She reviews all her collection agencies annually to monitor their effectiveness and rotates accounts after this review.

Everyday she responds to at least 20-30 e-mails, resolves emerging problems or issues, and faces constant interruptions. As the end of the fiscal year approaches, the pace quickens even more as her whole team scrambles to close their books. Fortunately, Aeda says she receives "excellent customer service" from AMS Servicing Group and can rely on us to be an active partner in managing her loan portfolio. The work AMS has done to help with loan consolidation is also helping her in securing the repayment of loans.

Aeda has a bachelor's degree in business with a concentration in accounting. After receiving her degree, Aeda looked at the private sector for employment, but made a conscious decision to seek a position on a college campus. Before coming to FDU, she worked in accounts receivable at Passaic County Community College.

She felt and still feels that "life is better" in the academic world, and thoroughly enjoys working at Fairleigh Dickinson. While at FDU, Aeda has earned a M.B.A in finance from the university.

She credits her manager, Hania Ferrara, Associate Vice President of Finance, for helping her on the job. "She trusts the way that we do things and has a hands-off leadership style. At the same time, she responds quickly to our office needs."

Aeda says she is "happy to wake up every morning" to go to a job that she loves and finds so fulfilling. "I think that women need to work for their own well-being and to establish their independence." At the same time, she takes her role as mother to her six year old daughter, Noel, very seriously. She is grateful that she is able to work a flexible schedule that allows her to be involved in her daughter's afternoon hours. This summer she has been busy with piano and swimming classes. She reserves late evening hours for continuing her office work when she can get a great deal of work accomplished without interruptions.

Aeda came to New Jersey from Syria in 1984 along with her parents and siblings. After immigrating, she faced many cultural changes that really "worked" for her. She has been married to her husband, Khamis, for 10 years. Although her job and family life take up most of her time, Aeda also has a passion for poetry. She particularly likes the imagery found in Arabic poetry, which produces a different effect than reading translations of the verses.