Increased Efficiency with Automated Attendance Tracking

Ajman, United Arab Emirates | 4-year | Private | 5,600 students

Ajman University, a leading university in the Middle East, has been on a journey to implement interoperable solutions that eliminate the need for paper-based, siloed systems. As part of that goal, they sought to improve something that seemed simple, but was a major source of faculty frustration—attendance tracking.

Why is attendance tracking relevant? Research has shown that regular attendance and academic achievement are closely linked, and many universities find that monitoring student attendance allows them to identify students who need support at an early stage and put in place measures to help them continue their studies. The majority of HE authorities have developed regulations that require institutions to determine when a student begins attending or academically engaging. If a student never begins attending, participating, or engaging in registered courses, that student is likely not eligible for any grant or loan funds they may have received for those courses. They may also not qualify for taking related exams. Attendance tracking is therefore an important aspect of measuring overall student success.

Roll Call is a Thing of the Past

Taking attendance is a necessary part of every class, and one that professors at Ajman University found particularly cumbersome. Inas Abousharkh, director of information technology at Ajman University, says, "[Faculty] were always complaining about taking the attendance manually, and it was a big point for us to look at how we are automating things and improving, yet still doing this in very manual, basic way." While Ajman had launched Ellucian Banner and was working to make systems easier for faculty and staff, they hadn't yet addressed the simple issue of roll call.

"When we launched Banner, [roll call] was the normal process for taking attendance. Call the names, or just pass the paper to the students and then fill in the Banner Attendance Module," says Abousharkh. This took valuable time out of every class and, depending on the method, could require faculty to record attendance twice. Ajman sought to reduce this arduous, manual process to rededicate valuable class time to learning.

Reimagining Wayfinding Technology

A more efficient solution was found by making use of wayfinding technology and integrating it with Banner Student Attendance Tracking (ATTR). Traditionally, wayfinding is used at large conferences or in malls to guide users to a particular location. But, by setting up an infrastructure of Bluetooth IoT devices and Wi-Fi access points in combination with Ajman University's mobile app, Ajman University was able to use wayfinding to streamline and automate attendance tracking in Banner Student.

As wayfinding was being implemented, Ajman University has leveraged their mobile app, API, and Zoom, to have students log into their Banner account directly from their mobile device, registering their attendance quickly and easily. Now that the wayfinding infrastructure is in place, automated attendance tracking is possible via integration with Banner Student. When a student logs into the AU mobile app while physically present in one of their registered courses—using the same login they use for everything else on campus—the app matches that student to the classroom they're in and marks them as being in attendance. This is smart automation at work.

Process Adoption by Faculty and Students

The new attendance tracking process was tested by two departments at the university first, before expanding across the institution. As part of the implementation, Ajman launched a campaign to encourage all students and faculty to use the mobile app to make use of the automation available. This campaign was successful, with over 2,000 students downloading the app, and more than 80 faculty members using the automated tracking system.

In addition to the high adoption rate, the response from both faculty members and students has been overwhelmingly positive according to surveys measuring the solution's effectiveness. Faculty felt relieved to no longer take attendance manually, and students reported feeling more secure knowing their presence in class was automatically tracked.

As part of implementation, Ajman University has made student feedback a priority, enabling student involvement across various committees aimed at digital transformation. "[Students] have different points of view that we don't see, so we are always keen to listen to them," says Dr. Karim Seghir, chancellor at Ajman University.

Increased Efficiency and Greater Engagement

Overall, the implementation of automated attendance tracking at Ajman University has been a success, resulting in increased efficiency and greater engagement from both students and faculty members by leveraging existing technology and successfully integrating it with new technology. Going forward, Ajman is looking to expand the capabilities of their higher ed solutions even further, allowing them to provide a better experience for all and prepare students for their future career.

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