Creating a more connected, data-driven campus

The University of West Florida adopts Banner® by Ellucian to strengthen institutional performance

Bold goals

After decades of operating on workable but disconnected administrative applications, University of West Florida (UWF) leaders made a bold decision to overhaul their entire platform. A complete revamp was the only way to achieve ambitious institutional goals. Among those goals: improved student retention and success, better system usability, and faster admissions and financial aid response times.

The university had been running on a 30-year-old mainframe and siloed applications that IT staff built over the years in response to departmental requests. But because those applications weren't completely integrated with each other—or even the mainframe, in some cases—valuable student information went untouched by the admissions, advising, and other staff who needed it most.

"That's where we stayed for a while until all of the problems of our creaky legacy system began creeping up on us," said Michael Dieckmann, chief information officer.

And that's when the university's provost and associate vice president for enrollment management began pushing for a more modern, responsive enterprise resource planning system (ERP) that would enable more targeted, timely recruiting and enrollment efforts.

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About the University of West Florida

The University of West Florida (UWF) was founded in 1963 with undergraduate, graduate, and targeted research programs. It is based in Pensacola and has multiple locations in northwest Florida, as well as a large online presence.

Enrollment: 12,000

Objective

Replace the University of West Florida's legacy student information system with a comprehensive, integrated Banner® by Ellucian platform that is flexible enough to evolve with the institution's needs and priorities.

Solutions

UWF replaced and enhanced existing administrative systems with Banner® by Ellucian and other Ellucian applications and modules:

- Banner® Document Management
- Banner® Enterprise Data Warehouse
- Banner® Financial Aid
- Banner® Flexible Registration
- Banner® Operational Data Store
- Banner® Student
- Ellucian™ Degree Works
- Banner® Workflow
- Ellucian Implementation Services

Business outcomes:

- Speedier admissions decisions
- Faster financial aid turnarounds
- Accelerated offers to students
- Better use of IT staff time and resources

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MICHAEL DIECKMANN, Chief Information Officer, University of West Florida

"From the management reporting side, they wanted to better monitor the pipeline, the admissions funnel," Dieckmann said. "And they wanted the ability to quickly make some process and procedure changes."

Measuring and improving student success

Likewise, the university needed to track, measure, and improve student success to the extent required by the state's performance-based funding formula.

That formula allocates resources based on academic progress, graduation rates, and other indicators, so institutional leaders need accurate, reliable data to help them understand and demonstrate student progress.

With the legacy system, they couldn't gather, analyze, and report the data they needed to substantiate the state funding they rightly earned.

Relieving IT burdens

In addition to better serving students, faculty, and staff, university leaders knew an integrated ERP would relieve IT staff of what had become an unsustainable, ineffective role: ad hoc software developer.

As needs for new functionality arose, department leaders would request software modifications or new applications altogether.

"We usually had a couple year backlog, particularly on the enrollment management side of the house. They were constantly 20 requests ahead of us," Dieckmann said. "We had one developer supporting the financial aid system, and that person spent half of his year just responding to regulatory changes that had to be done. That didn't leave a lot of capacity left over to do process enhancements."

The power of integration

By 2011, these challenges bubbled up enough to justify a new campus-wide platform and software overhaul. Institutional leaders chose the Banner® by Ellucian suite largely because of the powerful potential they saw in having an integrated, campus-wide system accessible to all users. The university had already had a positive track record with Banner® Finance and Banner® Human Resources applications, both implemented in 2000. But to truly tackle institutional goals, all departments needed to be connected, not just finance and human resources.

"With the split environment, we were constantly dealing with problems in merging financial data with our student data," Dieckmann said. "We wanted to do the type of high-level reporting that would provide a consistent view of the enterprise."

Case in point: graduate student waivers. Because graduate students often collect both financial aid and fee waivers, they go through processes specific to the financial aid and finance departments. Yet those departments couldn't easily share or compare student information, leaving each with an incomplete picture of those students.

This kind of disconnect won't be an issue anymore. Banner will anchor nearly a dozen other new Ellucian solutions—including Banner® Financial Aid, Banner® Document Management, and Ellucian Degree Works™—as well as third-party applications.

"Banner is the center of a very large universe," Dieckmann said.

Though most applications are up and running now, full implementation will be complete in 2015.

Results: Faster, better, happier

In the meantime, every corner of campus is now integrated, and already processes are faster, data is accessible, and user satisfaction is high.

"We're hearing positive things from folks who have better access to information about the students that they're trying to manage, whether that's a department dealing with its majors, or the honors program trying to track honor students," Dieckmann said. "They now have more real-time, up-to-date information about those students."

In addition, the inaugural Banner registration period (for fall 2014) went smoothly, and departments have transitioned and even accelerated workflows.

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Accelerating admissions and financial aid

Banner® Student and Banner Financial Aid have helped the university improve how it shares information, as well as its business processes and workflows to speed admissions and financial aid decisions.

Both are important goals that university leaders believe will help them stay competitive and attract students.

Simplifying document management

Banner Document Management also has accelerated workflows in the admissions and financial aid departments.

By making files electronically accessible to authorized staff, no one has to hunt through file cabinets or email colleagues to track down the records they need.

"Paper processes have been replaced with electronic or document imaging, so things are moving much faster than they used to," Dieckmann said. "If someone needs a student file, for example, we're no longer hearing, 'Who has the file for Jim Jones?' Multiple people can be looking at the Jim Jones file at the same time. It's all online."

Supporting student progress

The university implemented Ellucian Degree Works to strengthen academic advising, transfer articulation, and degree auditing—and keep students on track to graduate on time.

"We plan to do a lot of work around Degree Works to help students do a much better job of keeping track of their academic advancement," Dieckmann said.

Saving IT time and resources

Comprehensive system and software integration not only ease tasks for students and functional staff, but IT staff as well.

"The consultants have been really fabulous for us—top-notch. They took as much ownership of problems and answers and were just as committed to late-night hours and weekend hours. It's been a real joy to have a true partnership. It's been unlike any kind of implementation I've had in the past."

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Instead of managing upgrades and modifying applications to meet user needs, IT staff can focus on customer service and more strategic initiatives that help advance institutional performance.

"We get updates quickly through new versions," Dieckmann said. "Now, my people can work on more high-value stuff—integration, analytics—and plug in the third-party solutions we surround Banner with."

Partnering with Ellucian

Ellucian Implementation Services consultants have helped the institution throughout the Banner migration, a massive undertaking that touches virtually every department. Ellucian consultants became part of the team—even working late nights and weekends—to work through challenges and ensure a smooth implementation, Dieckmann said.

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Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world. We deliver a broad portfolio of technology solutions, developed in collaboration with a global education community, and provide strategic guidance to help education institutions of all kinds navigate change, achieve greater transparency, and drive efficiencies. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries around the world look to Ellucian for the ideas and insights that will move education forward, helping people everywhere discover their futures through learning.

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