



An updated registration system that better serves and streamlines the student experience

HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College, enhances the student experience with XE Registration for Banner® by Ellucian

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PETER CHANDA, Director of Enterprise Application Services,
HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College

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Credit enrollment:
19,121 (fall 2015)

Objective

To implement Ellucian XE registration with a user-friendly interface and more flexibility within 90 days

Solutions

- XE Registration for Banner® by Ellucian
- Ellucian Technology Management Services

Business benefits

- Enhanced student experience
- Technology infrastructure supports enrollment growth

IT benefits

More scalable architecture leading to increased efficiencies, saving time and money

Implementing the right tool for the job

Registration at any institution can be a hectic, harrying process.

There's a phenomenal amount of data that must be organized—and students have little patience for errors, delays or technical problems as they assemble schedules for the new term. Institutions large and small must rely on up-to-date and flexible technology to manage the process or risk alienating students.

HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College (HACC), is a large, comprehensive institution located in Central Pennsylvania. As the state's largest and first community college, HACC offers more than 150 career and transfer associate degree, certificate, and diploma programs to more than 25,000 credit and non-credit students. The institution is widely recognized for its educational quality and rigor, as well as its dedication to students. HACC recognized the critical importance of a smooth, trouble-free registration process and began looking for ways to enhance the experience for its students.

"A good portion of our students are Millennials," says Robert Messner, vice president of information technology and chief information officer at HACC, referring to the demographic cohort born roughly between the early 1980s and the late 1990s. This group of students has matured during an era that saw the birth of the Internet and ubiquitous mobile communications. Millennials expect instant access to information—from any location. "And we heard from students repeatedly that they wanted to be able to more easily search for courses by title, faculty, and other criteria," says Messner. "They also wanted the ability to run 'what-if' scenarios to see how a selection of courses impacted their schedule and their academic progress."

HACC realized the critical importance and value of updating to a modern and nimble XE Registration application that would provide its students with the kind of experience they expected. Further, HACC's technology team knew that a solution offering a graphically engaging, simple user interface would appeal to its tech-savvy student body. "We did our research and became excited about XE Registration for Banner and its ability to graphically display schedules and options, along with those 'what-if' scenarios," says Messner.

Peter Chanda, HACC's director of enterprise application services, agrees. "Registration is more than an administrative process," he says. "You need to give students an integrated tool that allows them to search courses or faculty and the ability to see their schedule with visuals."

HACC quickly determined that the best course of action would be to implement XE Registration—and to do so in an accelerated timeframe to be ready for the next term.

A rapid rollout with a strategic partnership

HACC only had 90 days to plan for and implement the new registration system. With so little time, everything had to run like clockwork. "Normally with something like this," says Chanda, "you take a lot of time for planning, seeking approvals, and acquiring the hardware. In this case, we didn't have that kind of time." Fortunately, the institution's leadership was behind the upgrade, believing strongly that it would improve the student experience, and pledged to support the IT team from the beginning.

HACC has had a trusted partnership with Ellucian Technology Management Services since 2013, with Ellucian providing project management leadership, database and systems support. With such a compressed time frame, HACC and Ellucian worked together to ensure a successful implementation. "We utilized Ellucian Technology Management Services to help the process," says Messner. "They helped us quickly come up with hardware recommendations and assisted us with getting XE up and running smoothly."

The strategic partnership with Ellucian Technology Management allowed HACC to meet its deadline—and the new registration system was up and running in time for the spring 2015 term. The implementation went off without a hitch: students logged on and were able to register for classes using XE's simple, user-friendly interface. "We left our old Banner registration system running as a backup, just in case," says Matthew Gordon, systems administrator at HACC. "Turns out we didn't need it. After one day, we shut off the older version."

Throughout the XE implementation process HACC was able to use the planning as an opportunity to examine its IT infrastructure and its ability to serve students and faculty alike. HACC also determined that the XE implementation would require minimal resources and only needed the addition of two servers.



Finding success with those who matter most: students

“There’s a misconception, I think, that XE requires major upgrades or technology investments,” says Messner. “That’s just not the case. We only had to install two new servers, which we would’ve had to do anyway, regardless of whether we installed XE. It was simply time to upgrade the equipment, and XE performed beyond our expectations.”

Naturally, any major IT implementation raises a few questions and concerns. “There was some trepidation, mostly concerns about how XE would react when we put it under load, whether it could handle many users and transactions at the same time—so there were some apprehensions about whether it would properly scale,” says Messner. “It turns out there was no need to worry. XE handled the load just fine. A lot of schools may have concerns about that, but the nice thing about the XE architecture is that it’s an easy process to handle additional loads.”

“This has been one of the most successful implementations I’ve ever seen,” says Travis Mast, applications system administrator at HACC. “The support from HACC leadership, along with the partnership between Ellucian Technology Management and HACC, really helped us make the right decisions and move things forward.”

In addition to the preparatory work with Ellucian through Technology Management Services and the XE adoption team, HACC ensured a successful rollout by preparing its own stakeholders ahead of implementation through demonstrations and a coordinated awareness campaign. That effort helped to gain significant buy-in early in the process. “On the human side of things, whenever there’s a change there’s an adaptation that must occur,” says Chanda. “Everybody worked hard to stand behind this process.”

Students, too, were part of the awareness campaign. They were informed of the changes and instructed on how to register. Because XE is so intuitive, students had no difficulty making the transition from the previous Banner registration system to the new XE registration platform.

Almost immediately after implementation, it became clear that the new registration system was an enormous success. “Social media among students was certainly abuzz,” says Messner. “Students are not afraid to speak their minds, and what we saw on social media regarding XE was positive.”

And for mobile users—representing a sizable chunk of those registering for classes—the experience was equally smooth. XE is designed to be visually appealing and simple to use on multiple platforms. “I really like the look and feel of XE,” says Gordon. “It’s mobile-friendly, which is important, since most students register on cell phones and tablets. They may not have a computer, but they all have cell phones, and that kind of flexible, updated user interface is important to today’s students.”

A smooth transition

For HACC, the implementation of XE Registration for Banner was a resounding success, with no disruptions to the normal registration process. “The whole transition didn’t involve any downtime beyond routine maintenance,” says Gordon.

Messner credits the enduring relationship between HACC and Ellucian Technology Management with the successful roll out, and notes that the success of XE Registration for Banner is leading the institution toward examining other XE applications. “Our close working partnership with Ellucian made this possible,” he says. “We couldn’t have done this without them. Our investment in XE has been returned tenfold in the success we’ve had with the students, and we are now looking at the possibility of rolling out other XE applications like Student Advising Profile.”

Messner also urges other institutions to consider adopting XE, and cautions that falling behind the technological curve can pose a PR risk for colleges and universities. “If I could give any other institution advice about XE, it would be this: Don’t put off implementation,” he says. “It serves your students well, and the learning curve is not as steep as most products like this. You can’t afford to be on outdated registration architecture, because students will have the impression that your institution just isn’t modern.”

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ROBERT MESSNER, Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, HACC, Central Pennsylvania’s Community College

Customer solution at a glance:

XE Registration for Banner® by Ellucian

Ellucian Technology Management Services

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