



# Virginia State University moves Banner to the cloud

## IT more focused on supporting students, faculty, and staff

Like many institutions, Virginia State University finds itself forced to do more with less. Its top priority is ensuring that “more” equates to activities that directly impact student success.

Recently, the university’s executive leaders assessed how IT was impacting this equation. At a time when technology needs were growing in scope and complexity, they faced several challenges:

- Attracting skilled talent and providing constant training
- Minimizing disruptions to mission critical administrative systems

- Reducing cost of technology ownership and making management sustainable
- Increasing IT security and disaster recovery capabilities
- Maintaining IT infrastructure and not supporting students, faculty, and staff

“When we looked at the long term,” said Hubert D. Harris, Chief of Staff, “we saw that a significant change to our information technology model would yield far greater return than trying to find smaller efficiencies here and there over time.”

The model that made the most sense, both financially and strategically, was moving Banner systems to Ellucian’s Cloud Application Hosting Services.



### About Virginia State University

Virginia State University is a public institution, serving a historically black population. It offers a comprehensive range of academic degrees—from certificates to doctorates.

**Enrollment:** 5,000

### Objective

Build a more sustainable, cost-effective technology model to support strategic goals and meet rapidly-changing student needs

### Solution

Moved Banner by Ellucian to Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services

### Outcomes

- Improved user experience for students, faculty, and staff
- Cost-effective transition to the cloud with minimal disruption
- State-of-the-art data security and disaster recovery services
- Improved reliability, availability, and performance of mission-critical applications
- Reduced total cost of ownership

By partnering with Ellucian, the university could access and scale world-class technology resources as needed, while lowering total costs and keeping staff focused on its core mission.

### Filling the talent gap

Virginia State University struggles to attract and retain top IT talent given its location and budget compared to bigger institutions and corporations in the region. It also lacks the resources needed to keep existing staff trained on the latest technologies, applications, and security services.

“Before we adopted Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services, our IT staff was basically playing a game of catch-up,” said Harris. “They were maintaining old hardware, worrying about data, struggling to keep up with calls for technical support, and trying to prioritize the competing needs of students, faculty, and staff. We don’t want any of our constituents having to compete for support. And we certainly don’t want our IT team putting out fires, rather than solving strategic business problems.”

The university now relies on Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services to provide the technical infrastructure and support it needs to install, operate, and maintain a modern, digital campus.

Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services not only fills the talent gap, but multiplies the university’s capacity and productivity by:

- providing uninterrupted access to top-tier data center environments, high-speed internet connectivity, technical support, performance monitoring, security, backup, and disaster recovery services

- ensuring constituents are benefiting from the latest functionality and most current version of higher education-specific applications
- managing a cost-effective transition to the cloud, as well as ongoing upgrades, with minimal disruption and downtime

“To attract and retain full-time employees with the caliber of talent available on Ellucian’s team would not only be cost-prohibitive but an unwise use of funds,” said Harris. “Our IT staff can now serve as strategic partners as we plan and launch important initiatives, knowing they have a reliable infrastructure and problem-solving team behind them.”

### Strengthening mission critical administrative systems

Virginia State University has used Banner as its ERP for more than 20 years. But it has faced several challenges in realizing a full return on this investment:

- Lack of capacity, both in IT and at the department level, to take advantage of Banner’s robust functionality
- Outdated customizations, hindering ability to adopt current best practices and streamline workflows
- Poor systems management and technical support causing frequent disruptions for users

The Ellucian technology environment streamlines key processes without sacrificing support for the university’s most important customizations and integrations. This extends the value of the institution’s investment across the board. Virginia State is also preparing to upgrade to



Ellucian XE as well as implement new software such as Ellucian Recruiter, Mobile, Degree Works, and Document Management.

Addressing all of these challenges requires a level of expertise and scale of resources that were neither practical nor cost-effective to build in-house.

The university's most important business applications are now hosted and managed in Ellucian's secure, reliable cloud. This has eliminated unexpected outages and functionality issues previously compromising user access and productivity.

### Reducing total costs, adding value

"When we made the decision to move to the Ellucian Cloud, we looked at both total cost reduction and, just as important, cost avoidance—losses due to down time, disaster recovery, and an inferior user experience for students, faculty, and staff," said Harris.

Before making this choice, Virginia State University was facing a major hardware refresh, in addition to substantial increases in labor costs to upgrade enterprise software, improve server and database administration, and test and maintain new security systems.

They knew making large capital and operational investments was not a one-time need, but rather an expense that would be required every few years. "Constant upgrades are the new reality," said Harris. "Especially if you want to meet user expectations and take advantage of new technologies with the potential to transform your business."

The university has lowered costs by transitioning hardware, software, network, and data center management to Ellucian. They now have the predictability of a fixed price model, along with the deeper expertise and flexibility that an experienced cloud team can bring to daily operations.

Virginia State University has already measured significant savings in maintenance and productivity since transitioning Banner to the cloud. Return on investment will also come from the positive impact of more reliable technology on the institution's success rates in such areas as recruiting, retention, and innovation.

"I'm already amazed at the increased effectiveness in areas that directly impact students," said Dr. Weldon Hill, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. "In the first year, we got an unprecedented 89% of current

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**DR. WELDON HILL**, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Virginia State University

students registered for the next academic year by the end of April. Financial aid packets went out a month earlier, bills are getting out faster, and compliance information is now making it into the system when we need it—all because our IT team is focused on these key business functions rather than solving infrastructure and database issues."

### Improving security and disaster recovery

"I've seen first-hand how even one security breach can impact an institution's reputation and financial health," said Harris. "Out of all the investments we needed to make in technology, getting our data security and disaster recovery systems up to an acceptable standard was one of the largest."

Ellucian's secure platform provides a dedicated environment that revolves around Virginia State's needs. State-of-the-art backup and disaster recovery services improve resiliency, while a fully redundant network ensures uninterrupted access to reliable information.

Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services provides layered security services that protect physical sites, infrastructure, and applications. Ellucian data centers are audited by independent third parties according to SSAE 16 guidelines. Security controls are based on the SANS Top 20 standards.

By transitioning its most important data and applications to the Ellucian cloud, Virginia State has achieved a high level of security at a fraction of the cost it would have incurred on its own.

## Managing transition with minimal disruption

Ellucian and Virginia State worked hand in hand to transition Banner to a hosted environment with minimal disruption. A careful planning process included assessing current state applications and data, along with making provisions to accommodate new applications and functionality already planned for future implementation, such as Ellucian Recruiter and Mobile.

After creating a detailed transition plan, a dedicated project manager from Ellucian worked with appropriate university stakeholders to oversee all aspects of implementation, including installing private circuits, setting up infrastructure and networks, security, data migration, and functional testing.

Ellucian implemented a ticketing system that allowed the university to monitor progress, as well as gain insights into what was working well and what needed to be adjusted over time. The team created a go-live plan, followed by a post go-live review to ensure all aspects of the transition were successfully executed.

“Ellucian takes responsibility for every phase and aspect of deploying Banner in the cloud, providing a single point of contact, backed by a broad base of experts,” said Harris. “I can’t overstate the value of having higher education-specific functional and technical experts that understand our systems, business processes, and unique IT requirements and who treat us like partners every step of the way.”

## Building a sustainable technology backbone

Virginia State University sees moving mission-critical applications to the Ellucian Cloud as an investment in sustainability.

“Technology will never stop changing, nor will the expectations of our end users—especially students,” said Dr. Hill. “There aren’t many universities with the resources needed to support constant, rapid change without sacrificing cost-effectiveness or strategic focus. We are making sure that technology will enable, not limit, us wherever we need to go long term.”

Data access and reliability were also key drivers in the decision to engage Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services. Virginia State finds itself accountable to an increasing number of outside entities and measures, all of which impact funding. “Data is what keeps you funded,” said Dr. Hill. “We had to get rid of all the downtime and data integrity issues that were putting the institution at risk.”

Most importantly, the university needs IT to serve as a strategic partner. Support from Ellucian has already contributed to this goal. “All of a sudden we have IT staff available to address some of our biggest business challenges, such as enrollment management, analytics, student services, and other areas that are highly visible and therefore highly important to our constituents,” said Dr. Hill. “That’s how I know this was a sound decision.”



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## ABOUT ELLUCIAN

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 potential through learning.

**To learn more, please visit [www.ellucian.com](http://www.ellucian.com).**