



## Achieving Greater IT Performance and Effectiveness

For more than a century, Abilene Christian University (ACU) has been educating students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world. ACU supports student success by making available the latest technology, including full wireless internet across campus, high-tech classrooms and computer labs, and a mobile-learning initiative.

In 2001, ACU implemented the Banner® by Ellucian administrative system. Eleven years later, IT administrators considered Ellucian Application Management Services (AMS) to help optimize the system's functionality. Ellucian's AMS technicians are now responsible for administering all software patches and upgrades in addition to constantly monitoring the databases.

"We were doing the work and things were getting done, but we always had a backlog of projects," recalled David Gibson, ACU's director of computing services. "We started watching industry trends of moving to the cloud and outsourcing. We had outsourced some smaller applications, but we had hesitations about outsourcing something as critical as our ERP."

As they took a closer look, administrators realized that contracting with Ellucian to maintain their Banner and Oracle applications would not cost any more than managing the systems in-house, and the arrangement had the potential to improve IT's effectiveness and efficiency.

"We felt comfortable with outsourcing a portion of our ERP through AMS as a way of testing the waters. It lets us try a new approach without entering into a complete commitment and that lessens our risk. And so far, the relationship has been beneficial to us," said Gibson.

**ellucian.**

### Profile:

- Abilene, Texas
- Enrollment: 4,371
- [www.acu.edu](http://www.acu.edu)

### Challenges:

- Difficulty keeping pace with new technologies
- Difficulty training and retaining skilled DBAs

### Solution:

- Ellucian Application Management Services

### Results:

- Administrative systems are operating at peak efficiency
- IT staff is freed up to focus on more mission-centric projects
- University has access to pool of DBA experts
- Established methodologies will help improve IT's effectiveness and efficiency

The arrangement addresses a challenge the university was struggling with: the ability to train and retain two skilled database administrators. "It's a unique skillset that is difficult to maintain," said Gibson. "Ellucian, as a company, has access to resources and people we can't always get here in Abilene, Texas. They can better afford to train and compensate a pool of database administrators."

### Strength in numbers

Ellucian spent the first seven months of the AMS contract helping ACU stabilize its database and applications environments, and completing some of its backlogged projects.

"One real takeaway from our experience so far is the expertise Ellucian brings, not only to Banner, but to the Oracle stack as a whole. We weren't unhappy with where we were before, but the team from Ellucian is helping us make our databases and applications run better," said Gibson.

Another advantage to using AMS, Gibson said, is scalability. "Our team could get on the internet and eventually find solutions to our questions. But Ellucian has a pool of DBAs who can get together and figure out the best ways to complete a task. There is real strength in numbers."

Gibson said perhaps the biggest adjustment to depending on Ellucian to manage its database is following a structured methodology when working with the remote DBAs. "Ellucian is a standards-based organization. They do things according to ITIL and other established methodology. They have a different process, but I think, in the end, it's going to make us a better organization. They're making us think about how we are communicating and the policies we have in place."

Going forward, Gibson believes they are now in a position to start establishing methodologies that

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**David Gibson, Director of Computing Services, Abilene Christian University**

will help improve IT's effectiveness and efficiency even more. That will enable the college's employees to focus on projects more aligned with ACU's strategic objectives.

"Our relationship with Ellucian has not always been perfect, but it is built on a strong foundation of trust and open communication," explained Gibson. "We are going to continue to look for opportunities to have the team from Ellucian manage more of our technical environment, support more of our applications, and continue to help ACU improve its technical and business processes. This is possible because of our strong relationship with Ellucian and the support they provide."

When ACU administrators began considering the AMS option, Gibson said they did not consider other providers although he is aware they are out there. "I get e-mails and phone calls from someone at least once a month saying they can run Banner cheaper than anyone else. That may be true. But I don't have an established relationship with them. That's why we will probably stay with Ellucian for a long time. We're excited about the improvements they can bring to ACU."

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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 futures through learning.

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