



Strategic partnership improves performance and student success

By 2008, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) had been relying on Ellucian's Banner® Digital Campus for more than a decade. Many of the College's business processes, however, had not kept pace, and employees were beginning to question the feasibility of the college's administrative system.

"There was a perception within our community that we were not utilizing Banner to its fullest potential," says Mark Polatajko, Tri-C's vice president for administration and finance. "That prompted us to take a look at the ERP and the relationship we have with Ellucian. We quickly embarked on a strategic partnership path between Tri-C and Ellucian."

In fall 2008, Tri-C formed a 10-year strategic partnership with Ellucian, which provided several advantages such as best-in-class pricing, preferential releases, and involvement in the research and development of new and refined solutions. The agreement also called for Ellucian to provide Tri-C with ongoing business process alignment efforts. The first assessment and process review got underway in November 2008.

"We were all using different pieces of the system, but we weren't using it in an integrated fashion," says Peter Ross, Tri-C's vice president for enrollment management. "As a result, we weren't getting the maximum utility out of it because we were all using it from our own unique perspective."

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Profile

- Cleveland, Ohio
- Enrollment: 31,600 per semester
- www.tri-c.edu

Challenge

Redesign business processes in order to operate more efficiently and to more effectively use the functionality of the College's Banner® Digital Campus. Provide campus community with 24/7 help desk support in order to improve student success.

Solution

- Ellucian enterprise architects engaged in early and continuing strategic consulting, conducting a series of business process improvement and key performance indicator sessions, with transition steps and actionable initiatives for the college and its business units to implement.
- Ellucian's 24/7 Help Desk Services provided always-available technical support with data analytics integrated directly into the college's administrative system.

Results

Assessment resulted in a total of 37 business process models and nearly 300 actionable initiatives to implement across five different business units as a means of achieving the college's optimal performance.

Jerry Hourigan, Tri-C's chief information officer, described the process review as a "dig into the weeds" type of engagement. "The folks on Ellucian's team, and the folks on our team, went down to the nuts and bolts of what we do and systematically identified all the areas where gaps existed. We figured we were probably utilizing about 30 to 40 percent of our system's true functionality. We knew that we had a long way to go in order to get where we needed to be."

One of the initial concerns, Polatajko says, was that college staff would not take the project seriously. To counter that concern, Tri-C built a "BannerizeIT!" internal marketing campaign around the process, which he said has energized employees to get involved. "It's become part of our AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program) application portfolio. We use BannerizeIT! as our method for continuous improvement and change management. We have a channel dedicated to it on our Luminis® platform. We distribute a communications letter around it. And we continue to communicate it to our campuses and all our employees. BannerizeIT! has become our battle cry."

Business process modeling identifies opportunities for efficiency

The first significant service Ellucian provided Tri-C was a broad strategic assessment of the college's needs. Polatajko says that over a three-day period, about 90 employees of the college, representing a cross-section of departments and roles, from deans to business administrators to frontline staff, came together to talk about the processes they used to accomplish their respective tasks. Facilitated by Ellucian strategic consultants, the participants shared their stakeholder views on each of the business processes and helped prioritize what steps needed to be taken to improve efficiency.

"As we compared our business centers, we really had to think about how we used the system, who had access to the system, and how we could consolidate three steps into one," adds Ross. "Looking at how we could Bannerize the system made a whole world of difference in our planning process."

During much of 2009, as a result of the initial assessment, Ellucian consultants engaged with multiple business units in business process modeling (BPM) and process improvement analysis (PIA) sessions with the goal

of realigning the college's technology, people, and processes. Those sessions resulted in 37 key process re-designs and nearly 300 actionable initiatives across five of the college's business units.

"Like many institutions, we are making up for the sins of the past," adds Polatajko. "When we implemented our ERP system in 1996, we did not utilize the system's features and functionalities and use that as a platform for re-engineering our processes. And worse, as upgrades came down the pike, we would do the same things again and again. As form, feature, and functionality continued to increase with each upgrade, our utilization of those features and functions eroded over time."

Hourigan says the college has prioritized implementation of the recommendations and five major initiatives are scheduled for completion by the end of 2010. Also, key performance indicators have been identified for many of the processes so that administrators can track the success of their re-design efforts.

Hourigan says having Ellucian lead the process gave the project the objectivity needed to achieve optimal results. "I don't think we are ever critical enough of ourselves to do a good job. Having an outside partner to help us look at our processes provided validation and helped us identify where our business models needed to be improved."

"What I really appreciate from the relationship we've developed with our Ellucian management team is the responsiveness they provide. Their responsiveness, their availability, their solution orientation is fantastic."

MARK POLATAJKO

VP Administration and Finance,
Cuyahoga Community College

Involving a third party also addressed the issue of scalability, says Polatajko. "Our enrollment grew 20 percent last academic year over the previous year. This year, so far, we are already into double digits over that exponential growth. We are experiencing the highest enrollment in the 47-year history of this college. So it's sometimes more fiscally conservative and frugal to bring in someone who can do it quicker, do it at the level of expertise that you need, then leave. You don't have that sustained carrying cost going forward."

Going forward, Ross says he expects a much more efficient process that will be more focused on meeting the needs of Tri-C's students. "This has necessitated closer collaboration among our various business units. It has brought functional units together, who talked to each other in the past, but never truly looked at each other's processes to see how we could avoid redundancies. We've gotten rid of the turf wars and really started to look at a holistic process."

24/7 Help Desk Services meets increasing demands of college

Prior to 2009, Tri-C provided a five-day-a-week help desk service during business hours with a third party offering weekend and supplemental support. As the demand for technical support increased, however, the college was interested in a greater level of service, more consistency, and a data collection platform that integrated with their Banner administrative system.

"What we lacked in the old methodology was the consistency of service delivery, the availability of different delivery channels such as phone, e-mail and Web-enabled," says Hourigan. "The metrics then were okay, but not really great. We also didn't allow the previous vendor the capability of going into our system to change passwords."

After comparing the services of different vendors, Tri-C selected Ellucian to handle help desk calls after hours as well as peak demand calls. Six months later, the college gave Ellucian responsibility for operating its full 24/7 help desk services. Tri-C was one of the first to implement Ellucian's new software service application, Service Now, which integrates seamlessly with Tri-C's administrative system and provides administrators with real-time data.

"I consider Ellucian's help desk technicians an extension of my staff," he says. "The complaints and need for support never goes away, so it's even more important to communicate and to make sure those needs are being met. Every call is a touch-point for the college and its perception among the users. And colleges today are in business 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

During the first half of 2010, Ellucian answered 17,695 calls for assistance from Tri-C students, faculty, and staff. Help desk technicians answered calls in an average 65 seconds, enjoyed an 83 percent first-call resolution rate, and in a follow-up satisfaction survey, users ranked the service they received at 4.43 on a 5-point scale.



"I am very pleased with the level of service and the confidence we've experienced from the Ellucian folks to handle all of our calls," Hourigan adds. "One of the selling points to making this change is the fact that Ellucian is more scalable than we were. They can increase and decrease their staff much easier than we can."

Help Desk support critical to recruiting and retaining students

Ellucian's Help Desk Services provides support to more than 70 colleges and universities, handling more than 690,000 calls for assistance each year. Call centers are located in both Florida and New York in order to eliminate the possibility of interruption of service. Ellucian employs a scaling level of full-time experienced help desk technicians to provide support during peak seasons, particularly the beginning of fall and spring semesters when call volume increases significantly. Garland Hall, Ellucian vice president of technical services, says that in addition to its comprehensive help desk support, staff technicians also provide support for open-source administrative and learning management systems.

"Help desk service is a 'front door' through which students may view the quality of their institution and the education they are receiving," says Hall. "One of the most often-cited reasons for dropping online courses is their frustration with technology. A world-class support structure can mean the difference between a student succeeding or dropping out. And because higher education has become a 24/7 experience, having always-available technical support is critical for effective teaching and learning to take place."

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