



## About Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College is a century-old venerated institution serving the state's Jackson, George, Harrison, and Stone counties. In addition to being one of the Top 100 associate degree-producing community colleges in the nation, the college offers partner degrees and continuing education/workforce development programs.

### Objective

Create a technology infrastructure capable of effectively serving students and the community in the coming decade

### Solution

Ellucian Technology Management Services

### Business Outcomes

- Significant cost savings and greater value on existing investments
- Superior student experience with mobile app, improved wifi, and tech support
- Improved technology, with more aligned strategy, across counties and campuses
- Greater access to data and timely, reliable reports

## Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College is building a modern campus on advanced technology

How Ellucian Technology Management Services is helping one of the nation's top community colleges achieve its vision

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) has been recognized by the Aspen Institute as one of the top ten community colleges in the nation and by its peers as a leader in education for more than 100 years.

When Dr. Mary Graham became President in 2011, she guided stakeholders through development of an ambitious, visionary strategic plan—one that would ensure the institution's ability to effectively serve students and the community in the coming decade.

The plan reflects a keen understanding of how student, faculty, staff, and community needs will rapidly evolve and change. And it provides a roadmap for stewardship and innovation that positions technology as central to meeting these needs over time.

When launching the plan, the college faced an outdated IT infrastructure and recognized the need to expand and enhance its technology initiatives.

"Basically, we needed everything—IT leadership, management, security, bandwidth, hardware, software, and a far superior user experience for students, faculty, and staff," said Dr. Michael J. Heindl, vice president, administration and finance. "Partnering with Ellucian allowed

us to ramp up in a manner that was (1) timely, (2) cost-effective, and (3) strategic. We could not have achieved all three on our own.”

The partnership launched in 2013. Ellucian began strengthening infrastructure and management right out of the gate. At the same time, it conducted a comprehensive assessment of current capacity against long-term needs.

The result: technology initiatives are now aligned with the college’s strategic plan. And they are designed to realistically and cost-effectively support the institution’s top priorities—instructional excellence and student success.

What follows is a look at the main technology initiatives and achievements to date.

### Securing high quality IT leadership and management

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College has IT staff spread across three main campuses, including its district office. For some time, staff oversight, as well as IT representation in leadership-level decision-making, has been hampered by limited resources.

A highly-experienced CIO from Ellucian is now dedicated solely to supporting the college’s priorities. He manages the entire IT team, including both Ellucian and college employees.

From a management standpoint, the college’s first priority was to build capacity and align the team around common goals. Benefits to date:

- Daily IT activity directly supports institutional goals
- College IT staff are working alongside Ellucian experts to build skills and learn industry best practices
- IT’s constituent-focused work and strategic value are more transparent to other departments

From a leadership standpoint, the first priorities were assessment, planning, and governance. Ellucian conducted an extensive evaluation of current state technology and then created a vision and implementation plan for the future.

The plan outlined how Ellucian would contribute specialized expertise and knowledge of industry trends, so that academic and administrative leaders at the college could focus on their own specialties.

Dr. Jason Pugh, vice president, teaching & learning and community campus, explained how the IT function has evolved. “In the past, I would tell IT what we needed after decisions had been made, leaving them little opportunity to provide input and little time to plan and deliver,” he said. “Now, Ellucian is at the table every day helping to shape decisions. IT has become a strategic partner, and technology is well-positioned to become one of our most effective long term assets.”

### Strengthening IT operations

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College was operating with limited bandwidth, security, and network capacity even before the strategic plan raised the stakes.

The board and executive leadership calculated that well-placed technology investments would yield exponential returns, both financial and strategic, over the duration of the plan’s execution.

Ellucian’s expertise maximizing investments for thousands of schools, as well as its negotiating power with vendors and suppliers, were key drivers in MGCCC’s decision to source support in this area.

Savings in the first six months alone was \$740,000.

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**DR. JASON PUGH**

vice president, teaching & learning and community campus



A sample of total savings within the first two years:

- Discontinued \$102,000 worth of unnecessary service agreements
- Saved \$122,000 in new vendor contracts
- Saved \$500,000 on estimated costs for new projects
- Saved \$180,000 by using Ellucian's remote network and administrative support

Main operational improvements

- Installed new modern and reliable servers to house the college's ERP system, which was previously running on ten-year-old equipment
- Enabled file-sharing across campuses to improve employee collaboration
- Upgraded network, including completion of an existing wireless expansion project, providing a 30% increase in wireless coverage (particularly in common academic areas and residential halls)
- Installed new centralized backup and storage systems, improving reliability and disaster recovery capabilities
- Instituted 24/7 monitoring of critical systems, along with alerts that enable IT to address service disruptions before they impact offices and classrooms

In addition to infrastructure improvements, Ellucian now provides remote Banner database administration (DBA) and system administration support.

One of the most visible achievements has been implementation of a mobile application, which provides students with 24/7 access to the information they need most.

## Getting more out of existing technology investments

While MGCCC has used Ellucian Banner as its ERP since 1999, it was only taking advantage of ~20% of its capacity. Ellucian is working with system administrators and users campus-wide to realize far greater potential from this existing asset.

Ellucian has collaborated with each department to implement new features that meet their most pressing needs. It is also revamping corresponding business processes—starting with financial aid, finance, and human resources and progressing to areas with the most impact on students, including recruiting, admissions, records, registration, and onboarding.

Another focus has been eliminating many of the cumbersome technology work-arounds and customizations created as stopgaps over the previous decade.

## Providing a superior user experience

### *For students*

In order to meet student expectations for information on demand, 24/7, Ellucian made one of its first priorities deploying a mobile application. The MGCCC mobile app went live and received thousands of downloads within the first four months.

The Ellucian Mobile application provides easy access to course schedules, grades, student email, faculty and staff directories, campus maps, and upcoming events.



Student users have given this new mobile, one-stop information shop an 80% satisfaction rating.

In discussions between Ellucian and students, which the college encouraged from day one, the need for a more reliable wireless network emerged as a high priority. MGCCC secured the necessary capital funds and the IT team was able to deploy a solid wireless solution on time and under budget. There is now 40% more wireless coverage on each of the upgraded campuses, especially in the residence halls. Students have been very vocal in expressing their appreciation for the quick response.

Dr. Heindl describes the college's general approach to serving student needs. "As a community college, we have an incredibly diverse student population. We will never achieve a one-size-fits-all technology solution. But, we also have limited resources and must use them wisely. Ellucian has helped us figure out when it's appropriate to invest in state of the art technology and when it's just as effective to make less costly upgrades to existing systems and tools."

#### ***For faculty and staff***

A dedicated phone line provides MGCCC students, faculty, and staff with 24/7 help desk support. In 2014, Ellucian technicians handled more than 5,000 calls for assistance with an average speed to answer of 50 seconds. More than half of these calls were resolved without need for escalation. And in a subsequent satisfaction survey, respondents ranked the service an average of 4.8 on a 5-point scale.

The college has made it a priority to improve communications between IT and the rest of the institution. It has tasked the CIO with serving as an ambassador to other departments across multiple campuses—listening to user needs and concerns, communicating steps being

taken in response, and using tools such as newsletters to keep staff informed about IT activities.

#### **Building a data-driven organization**

Given that students, faculty, and staff are dispersed across counties and campuses, accessing integrated, up-to-date information and reports has been a challenge. This impacts not only effective management but ability to keep up with accountability requirements.

Ellucian has already provided the institutional research team with much-needed training on report writing and data management using the institution's Argos solution. The IT team has also created new and updated reports at the institutional level based on the data decision-makers need most, including enrollment, financials, student success, and more.

Better data is also playing a crucial role in the accreditation process, as well as in meeting federal and state reporting mandates.

#### **Conclusion**

In developing its strategic plan, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College realized that IT needs to be more than a service department. IT must be a strategic partner, whose goal is to ensure that technology supports institutional priorities, enables innovation, and removes roadblocks to student and instructional success.

"Ellucian offers the resources and expertise needed to effect change on multiple fronts simultaneously without jeopardizing our timeline, said Dr. Mary Graham, president. This is a capacity the college would not have been able to build on its own in a timely or cost-effective manner. They are the best in their field and that's enabling us to rise to the top of our own."

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# ellucian

## **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).**