Potsdam
1816
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Tracking Student Achievement within Flexible Liberal Arts Program

Profile:
- Potsdam, NY
- Undergraduate Enrollment: 3,670
- www.potsdam.edu

Challenge:
- Track fulfillment of degree requirements while maintaining flexibility in program offerings

Solution:
- Ellucian Degree Works™

Results:
- Track student achievement against degree requirements

- Foster rapid acceptance through ease-of-use

- Assist university goal to increase retention through more meaningful advising support

The State University of New York (SUNY) Potsdam prides itself on offering many choices and paths for students to earn their liberal arts degrees. Ellucian Degree Works™ is helping the institution remain flexible and true to its mission.

"A strong part of our mission since the beginning has been to offer choices within our liberal arts programs," emphasized Ramona Ralston, registrar. "But managing all those choices has been a challenge for us."

SUNY Potsdam offers very few programs that are considered lockstep. Students can choose from multiple majors and minors. In addition, the requirements for general education and the number of hours required outside the major are fairly complicated. Requirements

for the music program are especially complex, varying by instrument and whether a student is working toward a double major.

"It is difficult for both the advisor and student to keep track of how many requirements have been fulfilled, and which substitutions have been approved," explained Ralston. "The logic in Degree Works is built to reflect the way that registrars think in terms of setting up requirements. The output is clear and information is readily available through the web. It is also easy to show exceptions and substitutions. The solution is a good match for what we needed." Janet van Weringh, senior application specialist, added, "The School of Education had templates on paper showing which courses students had to

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take, and it varied by their teaching specialization. They asked me to help them track courses that students had taken and still needed to take. I tried several different approaches and was not satisfied with any of them. I believe the Planner in Degree Works will solve this issue for them."

Ellucian Degree Works is a comprehensive academic advising, transfer articulation, and degree audit solution that helps students and their advisors successfully negotiate an institution's curriculum requirements. Students are less likely to take courses they don't need and more likely to stay on a direct path to graduation. Available as a fully integrated complement to Ellucian's Banner student information system, Degree Works can also be easily integrated with any other vendor or homegrown student information system. SUNY Potsdam is integrating the solution with its Banner administrative system.

Currently, SUNY Potsdam is live with the basic audit function of Degree Works. This function allows users to check a student's academic history for compliance with the degree program(s), detailing what they have accomplished and what still needs to be done. Throughout the next few registration periods, the university will roll out the Student Planner, "What If" and GPA calculator functions. The Planner is a tool that allows students to create a personalized semester-by-semester academic plan, or to use a template-based plan provided by their department. "What If" is a powerful tool that allows students and advisors to understand the impact of every academic option. User-friendly GPA calculators keep students on track, eliminating tedious manual calculations.

SUNY Potsdam chose to go live in phases in order to elicit feedback as they roll out new functionality, and to give users time to learn the existing modules. After preparing data, defining degree rules, and addressing technical challenges, the staff conducted a workshop for functional users and then went live with department chairs in summer 2009, followed by advisors in fall 2009 and then students in February 2010.

"Going live in phases really made sense to us," said Ralston. "We could let individual groups, like department chairs, vet the functionality and give their feedback. It also allowed us to move forward without every aspect of it being 100 percent in order to give everyone an earlier look at the system."

Faculty, Staff and Students Readily See Value of Solution

Faculty and staff had several ideas for how to market the new solution, but the tactics proved unnecessary because of the enthusiastic reception for the program. "A few advisors showed the software to students, and they told their friends and soon we had students calling and asking how they could access it," said Ralston. "It's very user friendly. The day after we sent an email announcing it was available, we had 1,300 students log in (out of a student body of 4,300). We received emails from people thanking us, which almost never happens when we introduce a new procedure."

Part of the appeal of the solution is its user friendliness and the ability to access the information 24/7. "The output is easy to read and understand," said Ralston. "Even administrators, like our provost, who do not look at audits regularly, can easily interpret the information. Also the web-based functionality makes it possible for advisors, deans, administrative staff and students to access information from on or off campus."

Degree Works is also making it possible for faculty to have more meaningful advising sessions with students. The solution provides powerful academic planning tools and realtime counseling capabilities. Students receive the academic advice they need to succeed, and advisors gain new capabilities to help them counsel their students more successfully. Advisor note capabilities help advising staff clearly articulate their advice to students and these notes follow students from advisor to advisor.

"Degree Works is proving very beneficial for our faculty," said Ralston. "Our faculty have many obligations in addition to advising. Having a system that simplifies the mechanical and tracking aspects of advising frees up faculty to have more meaningful conversations with students about internships, grad school, and academic performance."

Degree Works also is alleviating the workload of functional staff. For example, staff at the Crane School of Music normally take about two weeks to clear graduates. Because the process is automated within Degree Works, the procedure now takes only three to four days Degree Works also has totally eliminated the need to send students junior and senior audits, which previously had to be prepared by hand. Now the audit information is readily available online. "This has saved us considerable time and money for staffing," said Ralston.

In the future, the University will leverage the aggregated data provided by Degree Works to help guide planning. Degree Works captures invaluable aggregate information, providing senior administrators important metrics for planning future term course offerings, streamlining processes for more efficient cost management, and keeping pace with new national and global higher education standards.

"The college has a standing goal to increase retention. Improving advising is one important component of increasing retention, and Degree Works has contributed to this effort. The solution assists faculty and staff in becoming better advisors, and gives students self-help tools they can use to stay on track," said Andy Harradine, assistant vice president for IT at SUNY Potsdam.

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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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