



Building a strategic talent management program

How Alamo Colleges is using technology to change the way it recruits and retains top talent

Supporting The Alamo Way

Alamo Colleges has defined three unifying institutional goals—**student success, principle-centered leadership, and performance excellence**. It calls this “The Alamo Way.”

The Board and executives at Alamo Colleges know the key to achieving these goals is recruiting and retaining top talent at all levels, across all functions. They have committed to evolving their traditional human resources department into a sophisticated talent management system.

Industry expert Josh Bersin defines talent management as the integration of recruiting, staffing, onboarding, compensation, performance management, coaching, training, leadership development, succession management, career management, and talent mobility. These various HR processes, said Bersin, should “fit together like tightly woven puzzle pieces.”

Bersin’s research, which is used by thousands of companies worldwide, has shown that when companies succeed at integration, they actually make more money, their employees are more aligned, quality goes up, customer service is higher, and leadership executes more consistently.

ellucian

About Alamo Colleges

Consisting of five member institutions established between 1898 and 1995, Alamo Colleges serves Bexar County, TX—the 17th most populous county in the U.S. It offers associate degrees, certificates, and licensures in occupational programs, as well as arts and science courses that transfer to four-year schools.

Enrollment: 64,336

Objectives

- Align talent management to institutional priorities
- Attract and retain quality employees in competitive market
- Provide training that directly supports performance and advancement goals

Solution

Ellucian Talent Management Suite

Business benefits

- Greater transparency means functions and colleges now aligned on talent management
- Better reporting has improved decision-making and resource allocation
- Performance dashboards help supervisors identify opportunities for employee improvement/ advancement and provide relevant training

Taking a cue from experts like Bersin, and following best practices from the private sector, Alamo Colleges launched its own strategic talent management program.

The program's success hinges on strong collaboration across colleges and departments and the ability to track and demonstrate results. Its backbone is an enterprise-wide technology solution, Ellucian Talent Management Suite, that makes both of these things possible.

Ellucian Talent Management Suite integrates with Alamo Colleges' existing ERP and is a user-friendly platform for employees at all levels.

As they roll out both their talent management program and the technology behind it, Alamo is focused on three main goals:

- I. Offer professional development opportunities that increase employee advancement and retention**
- II. Ensure talent management goals support institutional priorities**
- III. Plan initiatives and measure results across functions**

I. Offer professional development opportunities that increase employee advancement and retention

Staff training and professional development are key to many institutional objectives, including employee satisfaction and growth; identifying and retaining top performers; organizational reputation; and ultimately student success.

Historically, Alamo Colleges has faced challenges in this area. The institution consists of five different colleges with a collective mission, but not always collective platforms for managing key functions such as training. This causes redundancies and missed opportunities to leverage resources across colleges.

An even more basic challenge: the institution, specifically the main district office, has had little to no visibility into training activity. Each college had devised its own system for administering and tracking programs, often in Excel and based on incomplete information.

When Alamo Colleges' leadership began assessing its professional development program, the only thing clear was that activities across all five colleges were inconsistent and often not aligned with Alamo's top priorities.

In general, the colleges focused primarily on mandatory compliance training rather than higher

“The market for top talent in higher education is more competitive than ever. We can't simply let HR hire new employees and then leave it at that. We need a proactive strategy to develop and retain our best employees.”

LINDA BOYER-OWENS, associate vice chancellor, HR and organizational development

value offerings, including leadership development and performance excellence. When the district office began to dig in, it found that even required training such as computer security and sexual harassment was not being completed, putting the institution at risk.

The central learning management system used to administer these courses had historically engendered frustration and distrust among users. Lead administrators at each college perceived no value and created their own workaround courses and tracking systems. Overcoming this distrust was a key challenge when rolling out the new learning module of Ellucian's Talent Management Suite.

What's changed with the new system

Alamo Colleges has committed to building a culture of learning, tying training and professional development to career advancement and institutional performance.

The investment in a comprehensive talent management system has sent a clear message that learning is now a top priority.

When exploring technology solutions, the learning module of Ellucian's Talent Management Suite was a key selling point with Alamo Colleges' Board and executive leadership.

"The ability to foster collaboration and share training resources in the cloud, along with user-friendly tools for tracking and measuring results across colleges, were key to our decision to go with Ellucian," said Dr. Bruce Leslie, chancellor.

In order to build a state-of-the-art learning platform, Ellucian has partnered with industry leader Cornerstone. Cornerstone's talent management solutions are used by 15 million users in 190 countries. Ellucian combines its intimate knowledge of higher education needs with the most sophisticated technology available.

Top features driving results for Alamo Colleges

- **Customizable dashboards:** Alamo finally has the data its needs to "learn about learning" across the institution—a holistic picture of what's taking place and what's not. Department heads can pull progress reports at the touch of a button to identify problem areas and improve allocation of resources.
- **Tools for tying learning to performance plans:** Alamo needs to change a pervasive mindset that learning equals compliance training. Ellucian's Talent Management Suite offers mapping tools that help employees understand how learning ties to performance plans and career advancement. For example, leadership development courses are



now visible and could be the key necessary to prepare for possible promotion.

- **User-friendly system:** Alamo Colleges has heavily promoted and built trust in the new learning management system. They have started to see increases in employee adoption.
 - » In 2012, 12% of employees were registered in the system for online courses. By 2014, registrations increased by 146%.
 - » In the first year with the new system, course completion increased by 230%.
- **Easier access to compliance training:** The new system removes barriers that used to discourage employees from completing training. This is changing. *For example:*
 - » In 2012: 5% of new employees completed sexual harassment training. The number of cases reported and resolved stayed the same between 2012 and 2013.
 - » In 2013: 2,830 (FTE) employees completed training. The number of cases reported and resolved in 2014 dropped by more than 35%.
 - » Alamo can now identify where compliance is at risk, set up automatic reminders, and ultimately reduce time lost to non-compliant employee suspensions.

- **Customizable courses:** With the new cloud-based system, the central learning manager at the district office can create courses relevant to all colleges and make them available online. By creating several customized courses to replace content previously licensed from outside vendors, the institution saved more than \$100,000 in the first year alone.

Greater buy-in and collaboration between learning administrators

Learning managers from each college appreciate the new system for its flexibility, easy-to-generate reports, tools for advertising courses, and improved ability to address employee concerns, a key to improving their reputation as a customer service-oriented function. Learning managers can also use the new system to collaborate with peers across colleges through user groups.

Because of this buy-in, Alamo Colleges is building a true learning management team across the institution.



II. Ensure talent management goals support institutional priorities

Ellucian Talent Management Suite allows Alamo Colleges to align recruiting, training, and performance management with the priorities that matter most to the institution, particularly with regard to the following two pillars of The Alamo Way:

Principle-centered leadership

Alamo Colleges strives to foster leadership qualities in employees at every level, specifically those on track for significant career growth.

Alamo has adopted Stephen R. Covey's framework for leadership development, including his "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," integrating its principles into performance plans and training.

Ellucian Talent Management Suite has the flexibility to align data, reporting, planning, and evaluation with Covey's framework. This will allow Alamo Colleges to better manage its Covey investment and more effectively address leadership development challenges. For example, the institution can:

- identify skills gaps and develop relevant tools for improvement
- assess leadership growth at the individual, departmental, or college level

- set clear expectations for employees about the definition of leadership at different levels and the path to reaching them

Alamo can also improve how it manages and monitors leadership training. A comprehensive leadership development program is currently a learning priority for the institution. With the ability to manage large-scale training programs, Alamo can make programs available to a wider group, as well as track completions and note high-performing employees for future recruiting or promotion.

Performance excellence

Ellucian Talent Management Suite allows supervisors to set clear performance expectations that tie directly to institutional objectives. This helps employees understand how they contribute to the broader mission, as well as create and follow a more purposeful work plan.

Alamo Colleges is currently using the new system to manage and pilot faculty evaluations. Faculty leaders were the first group to use the data tracking and reporting features to assess performance.

The system has already created a greater level of transparency, strengthening the dialogue between department chairs and faculty, as well as enabling peer-to-peer reviews.

Meeting high standards of prestigious Baldrige Award

In 2007, one of Alamo's five colleges, Northwest Vista, won the prestigious Texas Award for Performance Excellence. This is the state level Baldrige Award. The Baldrige Award is the nation's only Presidential award for performance excellence across all industries. Alamo Colleges has begun using Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as its own self-assessment framework, setting a high bar.

Ellucian Talent Management Suite will improve Alamo's ability to institute and adhere to these standards going forward.



In addition to making the review process easier, supervisors will soon have easy-to-access, standardized data for use in comparing progress from year to year.

Instead of waiting on a single end-of-year review, supervisors can also pull reports each semester or at more frequent intervals to make sure employees are on track to meet goals.

The performance module of Talent Management Suite also provides faculty and staff with a tool for career planning. Taking into account an employee's goals and the institution's needs, supervisors can identify, document, and align coaching with the skills and results employees need in order to advance over time.

At the executive level, easy to use dashboards, offering timely, relevant information are elevating the dialogue about data and performance results.

"We chose Ellucian Talent Management Suite because of its capacity to align performance metrics from the top down," said Boyer-Owens. "And, more importantly, we needed the ability to ask not just 'How are we performing?', but 'How are our recruiting and training efforts affecting that performance, and what can we improve?' "

III. Plan initiatives and measure results across functions

Increasing transparency

One of the challenges for any institution implementing a new system is culture change. People are naturally resistant to new processes and tools and, to be fair, already have a lot on their plates.

But widespread adoption of Talent Management Suite is critical to turning its powerful functionality into meaningful insights.

As user adoption grows, and the system is populated with larger amounts and higher quality of data, Alamo Colleges is finally getting a window into the current state of talent management across colleges.

The "peek under the hood" is enabling leadership to reign in one-off projects that don't align with institutional priorities; eliminate redundancies; and address ineffective allocation of resources.

Each college is in a different stage of fully using the Talent Management Suite. Those further along are demonstrating the benefits of integrating information across seemingly separate functions such as recruiting, training, and performance. "Once people see, for example, an instance of training directly affecting career growth, they start to understand where we're headed," said Hope Galvan-Mccall, director of learning and talent management.

"Simply having a window into the amount and quality of work taking place is a game changer," Galvan-Mccall continued. "While we're currently in the early stages of implementation, I can already envision the ability to shift focus from day to day issues to thinking strategically about how my goals are being served by my team, their skill sets, and their performance."

Supervisors are also learning the value of transparency and data. "As leaders enforce the use of progress reports from Talent Management Suite during weekly meetings, people are learning if their data is not in the system, their work might as well not exist," said Galvan-Mccall.

Integrating key functions that serve talent management

Prior to implementing Talent Management Suite, Alamo Colleges had eight different software tools across colleges for tracking learning and performance (usually excel), and widely varying methods for analyzing information.

As adoption of the new centralized system grows, so does the use of standardized workflows based on best practices. The institution can now begin to align plans and budgets for each college around common talent management goals.

Most importantly, Alamo Colleges can start realizing the true potential of having an integrated approach to talent management.



For example, Alamo has implemented the Application Tracking System in the recruiting module of Ellucian Talent Management Suite. Soon, it will be able to cross reference data between the recruiting and learning modules to identify internal applicants with relevant training for new positions.

“Ultimately, the goal is to be able to cross reference data on employee performance, training completed, skills, background, education, biographical information, and more to ensure we are identifying internal candidates for promotion. We want to be able to identify employees with specific skills and match them to positions for which they’re best suited, as well as find new ways to improve career growth and satisfaction,” said Galvan-Mccall.

“This is the ultimate promise of Talent Management Suite,” Galvan-Mccall continued. “As we populate more data, and we do have a way to go, recruiting, training, and performance information will come out of silos and into a central arena where both employees and the institution benefit long term.”

Integrating with Banner

In addition to integrating functions, Alamo Colleges needed a product that integrated with its enterprise ERP, Banner by Ellucian.

Banner houses all employee records and thus provides a central repository for the performance data now being tracked online. This becomes particularly useful to recruiters, who want to cross-reference performance with biographical information to identify internal candidates for new positions or leadership development tracks.

Banner also contains student records. This also makes it viable to include recent graduates as potential candidates for open positions.

Managing talent in the cloud

Talent Management Suite is a SaaS solution, with all software and data housed in Ellucian’s secure cloud. Upgrades and fixes are delivered via the Web, so the institution is always working with current functionality and not waiting for service calls. Alamo’s in-house IT team can spend far less time troubleshooting and more on helping lead the charge for data integration.

Looking to the future

In its original search, Alamo Colleges wanted talent management technology it could grow into as its program matures. It chose Ellucian Talent Management Suite because the product offered user-friendly tools the institution could put into practice quickly, as well as sophisticated functionality to accommodate its long-term goals and needs.

“While we are at the beginning stages of building a comprehensive talent management program, we are already seeing the impact of this technology on several fronts,” said Galvan-Mccall. “This includes goal alignment, increased participation in compliance and soft skills training, awareness among faculty and staff of what it takes to advance, and greater economies of scale across our member colleges.”

Alamo is somewhat of a pioneer in this area among community colleges. “While many colleges recognize the need to change how they manage talent in order to remain competitive, most have not yet taken action,” said Boyer-Owens. “Our approach was to look to the private sector, draw on best practices so as not to reinvent the wheel, and adapt them to meet the unique needs of higher education.”

“Technology is not the complete answer to talent management,” she continues. “But it is essential to success. Implementing a new system will often force you to re-examine processes and re-engineer the way you do business, and that’s how you grow. And this is where we are right now with Ellucian Talent Management Suite—growing toward success.”



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