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SUPPORTING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN OMAN

The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) has an ambitious vision: to become the leading university of technology in the region and to define the highest standards in teaching and research. Already, it has established itself as the first private university in the Sultanate of Oman with international accreditation. GUtech opened its doors in 2007 and currently enrols about 400 students.

However, competition for students in the area is increasing. Over the last 30 years, Oman has invested heavily in higher education to educate its large youth population: 50 percent of the population is currently below age 18. In addition to GUtech, there are five other private universities, numerous colleges and one governmental university and plans are under way for additional institutions to open their doors over the next five years.

"We are facing increased competition," said Dr. Barbara Stäuble, deputy rector for academic affairs, German University of Technology in Oman. "We want to achieve as much growth in the shortest time possible before other universities establish themselves, while still maintaining our high standards in teaching and research."

GUtech
RWTHAACHEN
German University of Technology in Oman

PROFILE:
- Sultanate of Oman
- Enrolment: 400
- www.en.gutech.edu.om

CHALLENGES:
- Market opened to increased competition
- Data was segregated and difficult to access
- Students need experience using online functionality

SOLUTIONS:
- PowerCampus™ by Ellucian

RESULTS:
- Access to data and reports enables staff to better meet students' academic needs
- Integrated data and self-service functionality increased efficiencies of administrative departments
- Students gain experience with technology that will be needed in workplace

"EVERY STUDENT COUNTS"

To help make internal processes more efficient to keep pace with growing enrolment as well as to provide students with quality support services, GUtech is implementing Ellucian's PowerCampus™ Digital Campus, a complete ERP solution for small and mid-sized schools. PowerCampus is built on Microsoft technologies and integrated with Microsoft Dynamics GP to also provide functionality for finance and human resources. By automating core processes and improving interactions for constituents across the campus community, the solution will help GUtech deliver the kind of learning experience necessary to produce qualified graduates with a strong sense of responsibility for business and industry.

"Every student counts, every student is important and every student is different," emphasised Dr. Stäuble. "We need a system like PowerCampus to help us track all our different students who come to us with varying backgrounds and identify each student's needs so that we can provide them with the right support."

With the help of Information Management Solutions (IMS), an experienced implementer of software solutions, GUtech is deploying PowerCampus and Microsoft's Dynamics GP solutions in a multi-phase project. The first phase is providing faculty and staff with a solid base of administrative functionality by automating creation and maintenance of records, tracking and managing registration and monitoring academic progress.

Through PowerCampus GUtech faculty and staff can easily access statistics related to students, staff, enrolment, retention, finances, spending and other data that impact the day-to-day operations of the university. The ability to share data between the academic staff and student affairs provides them with a more complete picture of a student.

For example, at the end of every semester, professors meet to discuss the academic progress of individual students. Reports generated through PowerCampus detail a student's grades and performance in a particular course as well as overall performance and help the professors make decisions that are in the best interest of that particular student.

"Before we had PowerCampus, all this information was extremely difficult to access," recalled Dr. Stäuble. "The data within the system and our ability to access it really supports decision making."

> "We need a system like PowerCampus to help us track all our different students who come to us with varying backgrounds and identify each student's needs so that we can provide them with the right support."

Dr. Stäuble

The data within PowerCampus and access to it through available reporting tools also helps GUtech make more informed decisions about academic progammes. For example, if administrators see a pattern of students performing well in their engineering courses but poorly in language ones, they might offer additional tutoring and support in this area.

COMMON DATA AND PROCESSES MAKE OPERATIONS MORE EFFICIENT

The reporting capabilities of PowerCampus also help GUtech meet ministry regulations and reporting requirements which are changing frequently and rapidly, as well as provide a host of internal reports, such as monthly financial reports that help departments stay within their operating budgets. Before implementing the solution, staff were using manual and segregated tools like Excel, Word and other apps.

"The data integrity provided by PowerCampus is very important to all our reporting," said Dr. Stäuble. "Whether someone is in student affairs, finance or is a professor, we are all working from the same set of data now."

In addition, the framework provides a common set of processes for everyone to follow. This ensures smooth transitions when someone moves to another position or a new staff member joins the university. "This is quite important as we continue to grow," said Dr. Stäuble. "Now we have a system and processes that are independent of individual persons."

The automation of processes also has increased efficiencies for administrative staff. Also, routine communications to students are automatically generated.

SELF-SERVICE FUNCTIONALITY PROVIDES FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE WITH TECHNOLOGY

Faculty, staff and students access much of the data housed in PowerCampus through the PowerCampus Portal. Based on Microsoft Sharepoint technologies, the portal provides users with personalised, role-based, single sign-on access to campus information and services. Using self-service functionality, students can register online and have online access to grades, financial aid information, automated scheduling, attendance and online degree audits. In addition to providing students with convenient access, the self-service functionality gives them the opportunity to become familiar with online technology.

"There is a very big gradient in technical proficiency among our students," explained Dr. Stäuble. "Many of them lack basic IT skills."

Dr. Stäuble illustrated this point with a recent experience. Staff introduced first-year students to the portal and had them pre-register for classes using PowerCampus. Many students were confused about the process; some forgot their passwords, others did not realise they had 'caps lock' on, among other issues. The students were asked to practice logging in again at home and to check their timetables. The next day, none of the students arrived for class.

"For a time, we were concerned that they were boycotting us and that we would have to return to paper registration" said Dr. Stäuble. "But they spent that day playing with the system and then came in the next day with questions. Then we were able to have our first paperless start of a semester."

Students who have used PowerCampus longer and understand how to navigate online appreciate the accessibility and transparency they gain through the self service functionality. Other resources available through the portal include links to the library IT and infrastructure support. Users also can review University policies online. GUtech is in the process of finalising integration between PowerCampus and Microsoft's Dynamics GP. When the integration is completed, GUtech will have one of the most integrated administrative systems for higher education in the Middle East.

"The portal brings everything together in one place," said Dr. Stäuble. "Students and staff do not talk in terms of 'self-service' or 'PowerCampus'; they talk about 'the portal.' Everyone understands that it is the place to go to access the resources they need."

GUtech is committed to providing a higher education environment that is consistent with world-class standards and best practices and believes the PowerCampus Digital Campus will help it deliver on its strategic objectives.

"The entire PowerCampus solution really supports every aspect of our quality assurance process. Every single step of that quality cycle is supported by the solution; it is quite comprehensive," said Dr. Stäuble.

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ABOUT ELLUCIAN

Ellucian is the world's leading provider of software and services higher education institutions need to help students succeed. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries rely on Ellucian to help enable the mission of higher education for over 18 million students.

To learn more, please visit www.ellucian.com/emea-ap