Lebanese American University

In 1998, the university acquired and implemented Banner™ by Ellucian, a suite of applications that extends to a number of online 'self-service' student functions. At LAU this includes Banner Student™, Banner Flexible Registration, Ellucian Mobile and Banner Performance Reporting. The latter allows for the real-time information reporting on aspects such as enrollment figures and admissions numbers.

Comments Roula Hage, Director of IT Applications and Solutions at LAU, "The full conversion of the legacy data in the first instance was extremely successful. We have since synchronised with Ellucian on new Banner releases."

Through Banner, the university can produce more than 100 reports in real-time on different aspects of its performance, says Hage. Around

800 students can register within a five-minute period, cutting down registration times and streamlining processes dramatically.

Going mobile

LAU has continued to break new grounds. In late 2012 it was one of the Middle East's first adopters of Ellucian Mobile. This allows students to enroll, then view their course schedules and grades. Through the app's map feature, students can also easily obtain walking directions to classes in terms of campus and room.

"We are already seeing extensive student usage of this app. We have conducted a survey to which we've received an extremely positive response, particularly in its user-friendliness," offers Camille Abou-Nasr, LAU's Assistant VP for IT. "The survey also shows that students would like to see Ellucian Mobile linked to other mobile apps."

Maintaining the relationship it formed with Ellucian going back to 1998, Lebanese American University (LAU) has firmly established itself as an industry leader in adopting cutting-edge educational technology. It also hosted the very first Ellucian annual Middle East Banner User Group Conference. More recently, its technology strategy has extended to the latest mobile applications.

LAU
الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية
Lebanese American University

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So far, LAU's student uptake to Ellucian Mobile has been more than 5,000, or more than half of its entire student intake. Instead of having a crowded student centre, it is easy for students to access data from anywhere on campus, explains Hage. In this way, it greatly relieves administrative pressures, and also the burden on the existing IT server. With further awareness-building, the university is confident that user levels could reach as high as 80-90%.

From a strategic perspective, LAU's adoption of mobile apps continues to provide the university with a distinct competitive advantage: first as a key way to attract students, and second through the recognition it has gained as an early adopter of cutting-edge technology.

"Our overall mission is to be a completely student-centric university," says Abou-Nasr. "Both Banner and Ellucian Mobile contribute greatly to this, and are a factor in terms of which university a student chooses."

Meeting new challenges

The constant evolution of technology means upgrading LAU's mobile applications every few months so they can be used on the very latest mobile devices. The overall aim is to integrate the apps more deeply into the student information system allowing all stakeholders, whether internal staff, students or alumni, to access mobile online services. Yet this in itself presents its own challenges in learning and adopting new technologies over a short time period.

"We are fortunate in having a team of motivated and highly-competent IT people," says Abou-Nasr. "Of-course, a new project involves a transfer of knowledge from Ellucian, and we can always depend on their valuable support. At the same time, LAU has a culture to take things on as a challenge to solve internally as far as possible." As a result, through Ellucian's clear set of documented instructions, LAU implemented its mobile applications completely independently.

Many of the capabilities LAU has built come down to its multi-tiered interface and communications structure, both with Ellucian and between the IT and functional business divisions internally. As Hage observes, the IT function has changed over the past few years from its purely technological function to being a service department for the entire organisation. Both LAU's student finance and registrar departments have dedicated Banner coordinators who work closely with IT to identify the real functional and process issues on a business level.

In addition, the university's 15 years experience working with Ellucian modules means it can adopt new and emerging technologies both swiftly and in a way that is completely relevant to the business.

"By using the right combination of Ellucian applications, we were able to support the University expansion strategy in both campuses in Lebanon and to the new Headquarters and Academic centre in New York when it opened its doors for the 2013/14 academic year," says Abou-Nasr.

Banner Student allowed LAU to extend its services from Lebanon to New York, while the Banner Flexible Registration suite enabled the university to address the needs of applicants registering for short courses. The main success factors were in the flexibility of the product, LAU's own knowledge of the software, and its confidence in managing the Ellucian applications at the new university.

As for the future, "From an IT strategy-level, LAU's objective is to release as many useful mobile apps as we can," explains Abou-Nasr. "In this way, we can bring our services to our students and stay in close touch with them to understand their needs.

"We aim to remain at the cutting-edge of technology to support LAU's mission of excellence in teaching, learning and research, while closely watching the bottom line" Says Roy Majdalani, Vice President of Human Resources and University Services.

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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 potential through learning.

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