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Central Community College Expedites Purchasing

Central Community College (CCC) in Nebraska knew its purchasing processes were no longer sustainable. As the volume of paper increased, so did the costs associated with mailing purchase-related forms and information between campuses. Additionally, the slow time between purchase requests and approvals was a pain point for the institution. The school was even still using an old dot matrix printer.

Within the context of a strategic imperative to modernize technology, they knew something needed to change. The school's vice president approached Carmen Taylor, Purchasing Manager, to begin the journey of replacing antiquated processes and modernizing the campus procurement experience.

Taylor was determined to drive procurement at the college into the 21st century. She was appointed project manager and set her focus on readying the transformation, dedicating time to it throughout the duration of research and planning activities.

Taylor and other staff had several requirements for new purchasing tools in mind already. For example, whichever solution they chose needed to tightly integrate with the Ellucian Colleague Finance system already in place on campus.

After reviewing several options, CCC chose to expand its instance of Ellucian Colleague with the addition of the Ellucian Purchase module to revolutionize its procurement department and streamline its purchasing processes.

Central
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Case Study

Main Challenge

Manual purchasing processes were expensive and time-consuming

Solutions

Ellucian Colleague
Ellucian Ethos

Results

- Ellucian Purchase eliminated need for paper
- Automation and digitization reduced costs and saved time
- Staff can track purchasing processes in greater detail

Choosing Ellucian Purchase

With a unified purchasing ecosystem, institutions not only gain better visibility and control over purchasing decisions, order approvals, and transaction processing—they can also prioritize suppliers to champion sustainability and encourage substantial cost savings.

At Central Community College, faculty demanded a convenient, consumer-like experience for the purchasing of classroom materials. Ellucian Purchase delivers that and more. Now, when faculty members identify the materials they need for an event or class activity, they can quickly place an order and receive approval in no time. They also gain greater visibility into purchases so they can better deliver on the students' expectations.

> "Central to Ellucian Purchase is a single marketplace that connects buyers across our institution with the resources they need," Taylor said.

Using Ellucian Purchase, faculty, staff, and students enjoy the intuitive, convenient shopping experience they expect. Not only can they save time by quickly finding the items they need, but they also expedite the ordering and approval processes by eliminating previously time-consuming approvals and expense report submissions.

Adapting Alongside the Pandemic

Central Community College's implementation of Purchase occurred in April and May 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began shutting schools down. The pandemic reinforced just how badly the institution's manual procurement processes had needed to change.

"Sign-off happened prior to the pandemic," Taylor said. "It was an acute situation because it just had to work—there was no other option—and it became a real win for us because, after go-live, we were completely digital. That was something that would never have been possible without procurement modernization."

Taylor said that staff took an entirely new approach to training.

"Staff at home due to COVID had more time with virtual training and easily accessible materials. It was very effective."

A survey conducted by Inside Higher Ed found that one in five CBOs feel their institutions missed a chance to make transformative changes during or after the pandemic. By implementing Purchase in 2020, CCC helped ensure it wasn't one of those schools left behind.

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Setting Users Up for Success

Taylor cited some simple guidelines CCC has created as part of users' training process, though she was also quick to credit the system itself.

> "The system walks you through it which helps staff members. It's instant: You're not having to wait a week to find out there was something not right on a paper form and to get it fixed. And users find it very efficient."

When asked about her thoughts and feelings going into implementation, Taylor said that at first, they were all "really apprehensive about the amount of change we were taking on." Additionally, there was some pushback on the college's investment in the procurement project, as it was not directly for faculty resources or student spending. A minority of staff who had been with the college for a long time were uncomfortable with the changes and voiced their concerns. Carmen turned them from critics into champions by helping them see the changes were in their best interests.

However, some changes simply need to be undertaken for the sake of the institution. "It's important to keep the train moving," she said. According to Taylor, the implementation of the purchase solution was an "astounding" success. In fact, internal stakeholders at the campus have come to rely on Ellucian Purchase so much so that it sometimes acts as an icebreaker within Central Community College's user groups.

Reaping the Benefits of Purchase

Since day one, CCC has seen dramatic changes for the better—changes which are now integral to their college functions. The software is more user-friendly than previous manual processes and the staff gave great feedback post-implementation. One of the most radical changes realized was staff members' greater visibility into a transaction's status within a process. CCC has come a long way in just one year, leaving their old processes and dot matrix printer in the past.
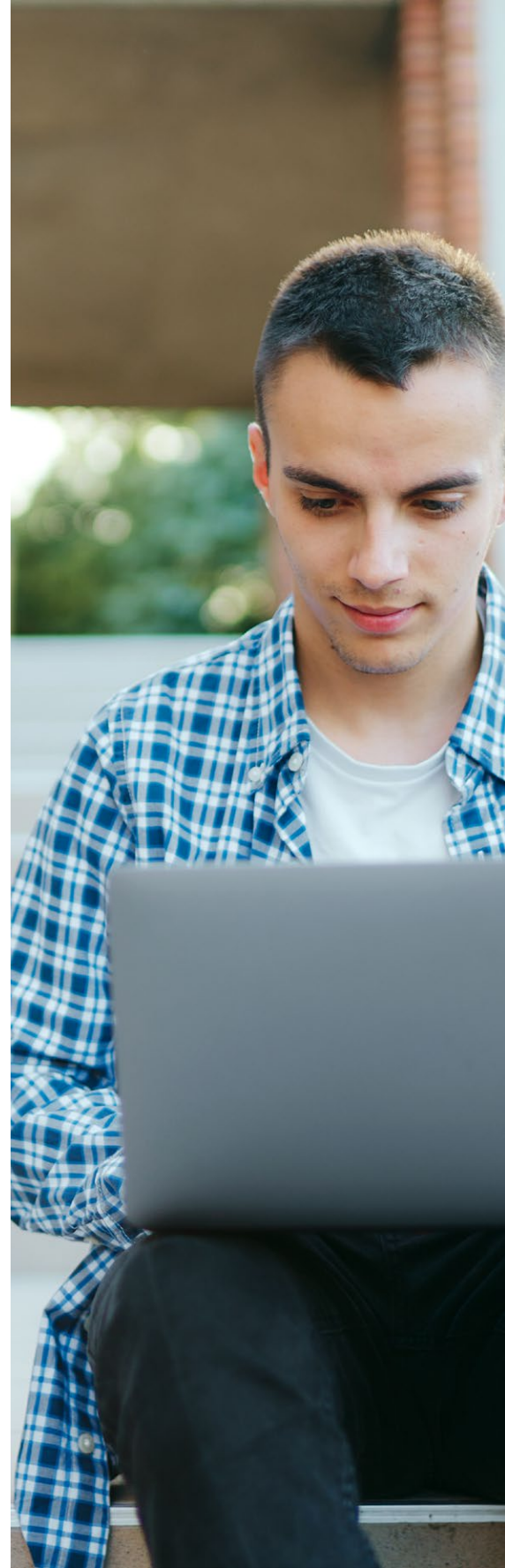
CCC's IT team is already benefitting from the implementation. They now have a general list of items that are automatically approved for purchasing, such as IT accessories like PC mice and cables. This list helps users know they can easily purchase certain products within built-in budget constraints.

Spend visibility is helping staff to keep track of expenses by themselves, without having to request a report for it. Taylor said that she produces a purchasing report for the board of governors monthly. Previously, she had to call someone to run the reports and rearrange and present the data manually, which took two to three days.

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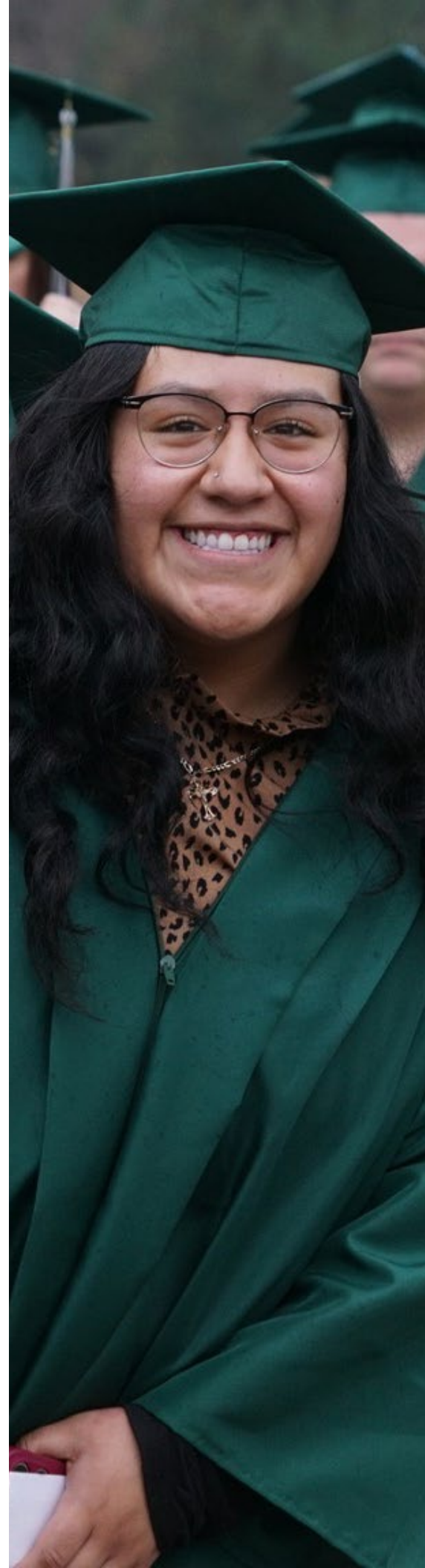
Now, starting from an automated custom report within Purchase, it takes just 20 minutes.

By choosing Purchase, CCC's procurement processes have indeed entered the modern age. Staff save countless hours—which is a huge benefit, since 50% of higher education staff report working more than institutional full-time hours—and they avoid plenty of frustration using its streamlined functions and getting the materials they need to foster success at their school. These days, the biggest question they have to ask themselves about their purchasing process is what to do with the extra time they used to spend on chasing down paperwork and manually approving orders.