



CASE STUDY:

A one-stop shop for improving student outcomes

How Odessa College revamped its student services to provide wraparound support

The Permian Basin region, spreading from west Texas to southeast New Mexico, is famous for its abundant oil and gas deposits. But despite its resource-rich lands, many in the community struggle, and the region's baccalaureate attainment level sits below 16 percent. The community has a deep need for higher education institutions that can understand and effectively serve its diverse, workforce-oriented population.

To meet that need, and to improve its rates of enrollment, completion, and financial aid attainment, Odessa College recently overhauled its campus and program offerings, with a sharp focus on increasing academic planning and advising support.

A key player in workforce education

The state of Texas has an ambitious goal for its students and colleges, known as the 60x30TX initiative: by 2030, lawmakers hope, at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25–34 will have a certificate or degree.



Enrollment
6,618

Objective

Improve enrollment, completion, and financial aid attainment rates

Offer enhanced advising, academic monitoring, and course planning to a diverse student body and under-served community

Solution

Ellucian Colleague®
Student Planning

Results

74% increase in the number of graduates over five years

15.3 point increase in success over five years (students earning a C or better)

28.7% increase in fall enrollment over five years

For Odessa, “the challenge has been creating and sustaining a college-going, college-completing culture in an under-resourced, under-educated region,” says Stephanie Sigler, director of pathways advising at the college. To achieve that, Odessa knew it needed to offer stronger support and better course planning and monitoring throughout their students’ academic journeys.

Extra support to keep students on track

Odessa’s efforts began with an initiative called Design4Completion (D4C), which offers a framework to create more meaningful connections and engagement between students, their student success coaches, and their faculty mentors.

“The driving force of D4C was to leverage technology to provide wraparound support for all of our students,” says Stephanie Sigler, director of pathways advising at Odessa College.

In particular, D4C’s Drop Rate Improvement Program has guided the college’s efforts. The Drop Rate program includes a wide range of support services for students, both inside and outside the classroom. Those services include everything from personal touches—for example, instructors knowing their students’ names by the end of the first week—to proactive outreach by student services when students miss class.

How technology plays a central role

Odessa’s decision to offer holistic, personalized support included the adoption of new technology designed to help the college improve advising, course planning, and student self-service. Odessa’s solution, Ellucian Colleague Student Planning, includes academic planning tools to help students, student success coaches, and faculty members determine what courses students need to complete to stay on track and graduate.

By applying mainstream guided pathways principles and maximizing the features of the solution, Odessa developed clear pathways featuring clear pace and progress indicators. Those pathways have helped the college map course offerings more effectively and offer the courses students want and need.

The college also redesigned the practices of its Student Success Coach office to create a more collaborative environment between coaches and students. Coaches now work alongside their advisees using Colleague Student Planning. Through this reimagined design and process, the college has experienced greatly improved enrollment and graduation rates.

A one-stop shop for students

Odessa has also found success with Colleague Self-Service—or, as Odessa College students know it, the

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STEPHANIE SIGLER, Director of Pathways Advising, Odessa College

Wrangler Portal—which serves as a one-stop shop that lets students access their student planner, financial aid information, transcripts, and tax information.

“Prior to the implementation of Self-Service,” Sigler says, “students had to visit multiple sites to obtain the information that is now centralized in Self-Service.” But now, thanks to the streamlined processes for students and staff in Financial Aid Self-Service, for example, students have immediate access and can view their financial aid awards and verification requests, track their document status, and much more.

“Before Self-Service,” Sigler says, “if students were missing financial documentation, they would get one institutional email instructing them to contact a Financial Aid Specialist for assistance. Now, the live data eliminates frustration and wait times for the students while saving our staff time by helping them work smarter.”

The power of integrated data

One of the keys to Odessa’s improvements has been their ability to view and evaluate data from a single, centralized source. The college has put that newfound power to creative use through its Drive 2 Success program, in which the college awards points to students for campus involvement and rewards them with prizes each month. The annual event culminates in a grand prize giveaway of a new Ford Mustang.



SUCCESS

OVER A 5-YEAR PERIOD



+74% increase
in number of graduates



-6.5% decrease
in drop rate



+15.3% increase
in success rate



“These achievements would not have been possible without our relationship with Ellucian and the depth at which we integrate their products into our day-to-day operations.”

STEPHANIE SIGLER, Director of Pathways Advising, Odessa College

Ellucian’s Ethos integration platform has allowed Odessa to automate the verification process and disaggregate points by events or activities, providing analytics for future initiatives and event planning and helping the college maximize student engagement.

“Engaged students are successful students,” says Sigler. “Now, we can demonstrate that student engagement directly correlates with classroom success.”

Collaboration that gets results

“The erosion of campus silos has allowed us to come together as a team,” says Sigler. “The relationships between students, faculty, and staff have vastly improved due to our collaborative spirit. Together, we ensure that each student is reaching their educational goals in a timely manner, and we’ve embraced innovative technology to improve efficiency and morale across campus.”

The college’s success has been duly recognized in the higher education community. Odessa was awarded the Achieving the Dream Leah Meyer Austin Award in 2018—the organization’s top honor for a college that employs a holistic approach to reducing achievement gaps between student groups and increasing success for all. Odessa was also a top 10 finalist for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence in 2019, and a winner of the Aspen Rising Star Award in 2017 and 2019—an honor bestowed on the top four of the approximately 1,100 community colleges in the nation.

“Colleague Student Planning has revolutionized our advising, registration, and graduation processes,” Sigler says. “By using these tools, students who are working full time in the oil and gas industry have access to increased services and the ability to monitor their own pathway pace and progress.”

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