



# Olivet Nazarene University Transforms Operations with Colleague SaaS

ONU's strategic shift to Ellucian Colleague SaaS has allowed the university to focus on process efficiency and student impact, setting a new standard in higher education IT management.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, staying competitive means more than just keeping up with change — it requires leading it. For Olivet Nazarene University (ONU), maintaining its edge meant confronting aging, resource-intensive IT systems that hindered efficiency and innovation. Legacy solutions had become costly and difficult to manage, placing strain on the university's IT team and stalling efforts to provide modern services to students and staff.

To address these challenges, ONU took a strategic step by implementing Ellucian Colleague SaaS, a shift that would not only streamline their operations but also fundamentally reshape their approach to campus IT.

## Overcoming Legacy Challenges and Simplifying with Colleague SaaS

ONU is a private, faith-based liberal arts university located in Bourbonnais, Illinois. With nearly 200 areas of study, title-winning athletics, and a vibrant campus community and online network, ONU serves a diverse student population.

In recent years, the university faced significant IT challenges, including the management of increasingly complex server environments. "We could see that things were getting more complicated," Bert Ackerman, Director of Information Technology, said.

Leadership discussions revealed that legacy systems were impeding progress, slowing the pace of technological innovation. "With numerous

## Case Study



### Stats

Bourbonnais, Illinois  
4-Year Private Institution  
3,000–5,000 Students

### Solutions

Ellucian Colleague SaaS

### Results

- 80 hours per week in technical demands were redirected to enhance user experience and support processes
- Support response times improved dramatically, from two to three days down to just three hours



institutions adopting SaaS solutions, we risk falling behind in a rapidly evolving market,” Dennis Seymour, Chief Information Officer, explained. “Our legacy systems were becoming complex and difficult to manage, threatening our operational efficiency and competitive edge.”

As operational demands escalated, so did the strain on the IT team. “We were regularly addressing support calls during off hours to maintain system integrity,” Ackerman said. “This is neither sustainable nor scalable.”

Additionally, hiring and retaining qualified personnel to meet growing technological demands was challenging. The competition for skilled IT professionals made it difficult to maintain the expertise required to support and innovate within their existing infrastructure.

To address these challenges, ONU embraced a SaaS model for long-term sustainability. This strategic shift refined operational efficiency, reduced reliance on hard-to-fill specialized roles, and positioned the institution for long-term growth and adaptability.

ONU implemented several key solutions within Colleague SaaS, including self-service capabilities that empower students to manage their own information, from registration to financial aid. The platform’s advanced analytics tools provide real-time insights into student performance and institutional operations, enabling data-driven decision-making.

The flexibility of Colleague SaaS allows ONU to streamline IT operations. The platform integrates seamlessly with other systems and applications, facilitating the adoption of new technologies without significant disruptions. Additionally, the SaaS model enables the IT team to prioritize innovation over maintenance, allowing ONU to allocate resources toward strategic initiatives and improve resilience and user experiences.

“The growing complexity of managing our on-premises environment became burdensome. Ellucian’s cloud solutions allowed us to offload those responsibilities, strengthening business continuity and disaster recovery beyond our on-campus capabilities. With the SaaS model, we could focus on the product and our users instead of server management,” Ackerman explained.

### **Shifting to Proactive Student Support**

The implementation of Colleague SaaS marked a turning point for the IT team at ONU. Before the transition, the technical demands of managing their systems consumed approximately 80 hours each week. Post-migration, those hours were redirected to optimize user experience and improve business processes.



"We were able to repurpose a full-time position, shifting our focus from merely keeping systems running to actively supporting and improving the user experience," Ackerman said.

In the two years following the transition, support response times improved dramatically, positively impacting student success by increasing the efficiency and reliability of systems. "The update process has been seamless," Ackerman said. "Our programmer can submit updates and implement them in about three hours, a drastic reduction from the two to three days it used to take. We can now focus directly on the product and ensure timely delivery of services to students and constituents."

With the burden of maintenance lifted, the IT team maximized the value of Colleague SaaS, leading to more responsive service for both students and staff. The positive impact of this transformation extended beyond IT. "The reduced downtime and improved access to services like financial aid have made a significant difference in our day-to-day operations," Seymour said.

This seamless transition not only improved operational efficiency but also enabled Olivet Nazarene University to adopt a student-first approach.

"The shift to Colleague SaaS has allowed us to prioritize our students more than ever. We now have more staff dedicated to working directly with students, addressing their needs, and supporting their academic and personal growth. This increased focus on students has transformed our ability to engage with them and strengthen the student experience at ONU," Acherman added.

### **Innovation Supported by Swift Employee Onboarding and Analytics**

Seymour and Ackerman envision a transformative five-year journey building on ONU's existing Colleague SaaS platform, aiming to further modernize operations by creating a more efficient, responsive, and data-driven environment. Central to this vision is Seymour's passion for optimizing employee onboarding, ensuring that new hires can leverage the system's advanced capabilities from day one. "With Colleague SaaS, we can onboard talent swiftly and effectively," he said, highlighting how this approach not only maximizes efficiency but also fosters a culture of innovation that will support the university's long-term growth.

Ackerman, meanwhile, has a bold vision for enhancing the university's analytical capabilities to drive data-informed decision making. With the strain of maintaining outdated systems lifted, the team can now focus on advanced data analytics. Colleague SaaS supports this objective through robust data integration, real-time access, and powerful analytical tools,



all while streamlining workflows and expanding operational capacity via integration with third-party reporting tools.

The seamless integration with external tools and the flexibility of Colleague Studio, a development environment within the Ellucian Colleague ERP system, enable ONU to adapt swiftly to evolving needs. Colleague Studio provides the IT team with tools to adjust workflows, modify data integrations, and create personalized reports tailored to the university's unique requirements.

Reflecting on their success with Colleague SaaS, Seymour and Ackerman believe it will be a catalyst for future innovation.

"With core operations securely managed, we can dedicate our efforts to exploring new innovations that strengthen our university's capabilities," Seymour said. This mindset of continuous improvement will keep Olivet Nazarene University at the forefront of higher education, ready to adapt and thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.



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