

Spartanburg Methodist Modernizes with Colleague SaaS



Spartanburg Methodist College is boosting student experiences by embracing SaaS modernization

Spartanburg Methodist College is a private college just a half hour northeast of Greenville, South Carolina. Spartanburg Methodist offers associate degrees and bachelor's degrees to serve their student body of just over 1,000 learners. The institution emphasizes a “students first, students always” mindset, embedding this philosophy into every aspect of its operations.

After years of increasing enrollment and a historic transition from a two-year private institution to a four-year private institution, the college recognized that its outdated student information system (SIS) was no longer meeting the needs of its growing community. Maintaining the existing SIS, reliant on outdated software, became increasingly challenging. To support its expanded academic programs and enhance the experience for students, faculty, and staff, the college migrated to a modern SIS that could meet its evolving needs. After evaluating several alternatives, they chose Ellucian Colleague SaaS.

“We looked at some of the major vendors, viewed the demos, and it was unanimous among our end users who were involved in the evaluation,” said Jason Womick, Vice President for Information and Technology Analytics. “They liked what Colleague SaaS could do — good product, good implementation — it was unanimous across the board.”



Case Study

Challenge

Spartanburg Methodist College's prior student information system relied on obsolete software, hindering campus operations like registration, even as its student body grew.

Results

1. Ellucian Colleague SaaS provides Spartanburg Methodist with modern, cloud-based technology; regular updates; and new features to support anticipated enrollment growth.
2. Ellucian Colleague SaaS and Experience empowered Spartanburg Methodist's transition to a four-year institution, delivering \$300,000 in annual savings and \$20,000 in additional revenue.
3. Implementation was completed in nine months.

Scouting the Best Solutions and the Best Partner

For Womick and his colleagues, modernization came as a necessary and obvious step forward for their college.

“When we decided it was time to upgrade, we just knew, ‘Oh yeah, we have to go to SaaS;’” he said. “It wasn’t even much of a conversation of ‘Should we or shouldn’t we?’ It was 2021; I don’t need to keep building data centers. Let’s go with a partner that’s built the data centers, they’ll have the security, they’ll have experts doing their installations. It just was a no-brainer.”

Many other options, compared to Ellucian’s Colleague SaaS, were either incomplete or hybrid systems with inflexible features and inconvenient access requirements, failing to meet the college’s needs.

“Everybody wanted Colleague,” Womick said.

Spartanburg Methodist signed up for Colleague SaaS in April 2021, went live by March 2022 and was registering students for the Fall semester just one year later. Womick said the full implementation took just nine months, from the kickoff in June 2021 to the go live in March 2022.

“I feel like we made a pretty good pace.”

Simplifying Registration with Colleague SaaS

Before adopting Colleague, Spartanburg Methodist advisers registered students for classes. With Colleague SaaS, students now register themselves, while advisers continue to provide guidance as needed. This empowers students to take charge of their academic journeys and enables faculty to focus on teaching, professional development, and mentoring students and other faculty. Spartanburg Methodist also deployed Ellucian Experience with Intelligent Learning Processes and Degree Audit, offering students a web and mobile hub that consolidates everything students need in one place.

“With Colleague SaaS, we now use Experience instead of the portal that was built into our old system,” Womick said.

“So now we have that ‘one-stop shop’ that we didn’t have before. Colleague SaaS has allowed us modernize much of the student experience.”

Spartanburg Methodist’s career development offerings also reflect an exciting change thanks to Colleague SaaS. Once a student obtains their associate degree, they may continue on to enroll in the college’s bachelor’s program, which offers several professional development courses. Keeping track of their grades, time to completion, and other important factors has been easier with Colleague SaaS. “We’ve found that it’s handled that well for us,” Womick said.

Adapting Ellucian Solutions to Meet Spartanburg Methodist’s Expanded Mission

Spartanburg Methodist made a swift and seamless transition to Colleague SaaS while implementing an expanded mission and significant operational changes. In 2019, the college made a historic shift from a private two-year institution to a private four-year institution. The change to Colleague SaaS proved advantageous for supporting the college’s non-standard term lengths for online courses. While other SIS software remains locked to standard term lengths and their rigid deadlines, Colleague SaaS accommodates items like

registration dates and add/drop dates within non-standard term lengths for these courses. This provides flexibility to configure dates within Colleague to fit the institution's needs.

"Our online program courses, like in many online programs, aren't full semesters," he said. "Colleague handles those start dates — and the associated add/drop dates — much better than our old system does. That allows us to make the courses visible to our students in a much better way."

Colleague's features go far beyond custom start and end dates, and Spartanburg Methodist has taken full advantage of them as its student body continues to grow.

"It gives us more flexibility," Womick said. "Colleague is more modern; it's a more robust system than our old system. It can handle us trying different creative things with our bachelor's degree program."

While Spartanburg Methodist's primary goal in moving to Colleague SaaS was to enhance its capabilities to support future enrollment growth, the college has also realized financial benefits. Initial estimates point to over \$300,000 in direct annual savings, achieved through reduced staffing needs—thanks to voluntary attrition — and IT cost reductions from eliminating on-premise hardware maintenance.

The college's business office also verified an additional \$20,000 in annual revenue, attributed to the transition to Colleague SaaS and TouchNet for payment plans. TouchNet is an Ellucian partner that provides integrated payment and financial management solutions for higher education institutions.

Reflecting on Success and Ahead with Ambition

Womick and other staff have reflected on their modernization journey and offer advice to other schools struggling with older software.

"I think modernization is the key," Womick said. "I would suggest moving all the way to SaaS. I like that in going 'all SaaS' the experts at Ellucian can manage the Ellucian side and I can have my folks focus on our processes, serve our students and minimize staff updating software."

He also said that Ellucian can update its software more quickly than he and his staff could, and do so with fewer errors, leaving him and his team to focus on other matters.

"Look for a system that lets the software experts manage [updates] and is built on software and systems that are forward-thinking," he said.

To ensure a successful technology transition, Womick added that it's also essential to gather insights from others who have undergone similar SaaS implementations.

"Check with people who have implemented it. Make sure you're going with a system where the implementation actually follows through and does what's promised, which was the case [with Colleague SaaS]."

Womick and the Spartanburg Methodist team are excited to explore new ways to optimize Ellucian solutions, particularly Ellucian Intelligent Processes, starting with modernizing athletic forms and processing them online, and continuing automation to save labor and enhance student success.

In the meantime, Womick is glad that Spartanburg Methodist made the transition.

"What I tell people sometimes is '[Colleague] SaaS makes us do things the right way,'" he said. "If you're on-prem and something weird has happened, it's easy for a database administrator to fix it in the database but you don't know what else that really affects. Whereby doing it SaaS, [...] I know that I'm being safe with my data. It makes you feel better about how everything's being managed."



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