

Wentworth Goes Paperless, Speeds Up Processes, and Makes Work-From-Home a Breeze with Ellucian



The COVID-19 crisis is drastically changing the way of life across the world—including in financial aid offices. Social distancing is the new reality. Campuses have transitioned to distance learning, and a majority of staff members are working from home. Yet, student financial needs still need to be met. How are financial aid offices across the country supposed to continue operations in these challenging times? “It was interesting to hear the NASFAA COVID-19 webinar and hear the concerns of other offices around the country,” says Anne-Marie Caruso, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management and Director of Financial Aid at Wentworth Institute of Technology. “They were saying they are struggling. They were asking how they were going to do verifications with their paper processes. Schools didn’t know how they were going to securely get the information they needed.”

But the Boston-based college’s financial aid team was already prepared to turn on a dime. Thanks to their digital, paperless processes, they can stay in touch with students and parents—any time, from anywhere. “Ellucian has given us a platform to operate digitally,” explains Caruso. “We can do business as usual with very little disruption.”

The Solutions: Student Forms and Campus Communicator

[Student Forms](#) simplifies financial aid processes—like verification, professional judgments, and SAP appeals. A key component of the cloud-based Ellucian student financial success platform, Student Forms provides a digital portal for financial aid professionals to manage tasks, review files, and automate student communications via text and email. Plus, students can upload documents from any mobile device—a feature staff and students love for the time savings.

[Campus Communicator](#) delivers digital, mobile communications throughout the financial aid cycle. It gives students the information they need when they need it, right where they want it—on their mobile devices.

No More Chasing Paperwork

While the ability to run the financial aid office remotely is a great benefit, Wentworth financial aid initially engaged with Ellucian solutions to develop a more state-of-the-art approach. They also use Scholarship Universe and Clear Cost, a powerful combination of products that work together to comprehensively streamline financial aid processes. “Everything used to be basically all paper-driven,” Caruso explains, adding that they had no digital upload options for verification, PJs, or SAP appeals. “I’m always looking for new and different ways of improving efficiency in the office, both for staff, and for students and families. Ellucian just checked all the right boxes.”

Student Forms means verification no longer takes two or three weeks. It's completed in three days, five during peak times. "No one misses having to deal with paper anymore," Caruso says. "It's made the office much more streamlined. If we have to reject a form, it goes back immediately. We are not waiting for a paper form a week later and saying, it's wrong, you've got to send it again. It's made it far more efficient. Staff has more time to counsel students because they are not chasing paperwork."

Innovating the Award Letter

Even more time is freed up with Wentworth's new, information-rich award letter, sent through Campus Communicator. "I think it's a very good tool that provides a lot of good, solid information for families," Caruso says. "We have visuals and hover-over explanations. It answers a lot of the basic questions, so those types of calls don't come in as often anymore."

She reports they have parents contacting them to say their award letter is the best they've ever seen. Wentworth loves the fact that they are able to see if, and when, award letters have been opened, making communicating with families that much easier.

Resiliency Key to Financial Aid Success, in Crisis and Every Day

No paperwork, less waiting, and fewer questions help create efficiency, which opens the bandwidth necessary to tackle the diverse and constant things that naturally pop up in a financial aid office. "No day's ever the same. I've learned to be very resilient working in financial aid," Caruso says. Her office, just like others across the country, has had to kick that usual resiliency into overdrive as the COVID-19 crisis impacted life in the financial aid office and beyond.

Because whether in a time of crisis, or just during a regular school year, the focus is always on what matters most: student success. "Being able to help students achieve what they set out to do for their future, that's success for us," Caruso says. "We need to be able to help them on their financial journey to achieve their goals."