Making technology efficient, scalable, and secure

Arizona Western College Moves Business to the Cloud

> " Engaging a partner like Ellucian to manage our technology in the cloud was an easy decision once we realized the potential to significantly improve service for current and prospective students. "
>
> Dr. Glenn E. Mayle, President
> Arizona Western College

Filling the capacity gap

AWC's remote location makes finding and retaining top IT talent a challenge. As a result, the college has struggled to provide students, faculty, and staff with reliable, secure, and modern technology.

Colleague® by Ellucian has served as AWC's ERP and primary tool for connecting students, faculty, and staff since 2001. Yet with limited resources, the college has not always taken advantage of the full suite of tools and capabilities Colleague has to offer.

About Arizona Western College

Arizona Western College (AWC) serves a primarily Hispanic, rural population in the southwest corner of the state with lifelong learning opportunities.

Enrollment: 12,000

Objective:

Transform technology infrastructure and improve scalability, security, and cost to meet the needs of AWC students and Arizona.

Solutions:

- Ellucian Cloud Application Hosting Services

- Colleague® by Ellucian

Business outcomes

- Greater cost-effectiveness

- Scalability

- Improved system reliability

- Reduced risk

- Better quality and availability of tech support

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After a year of cost-benefit analysis and strategic assessment, AWC board and staff agreed that outsourcing management of its hosting and applications in the cloud was the right decision. They chose Ellucian as a partner for both the short-term transition and long-term support.

"To attract and retain full-time employees with the caliber of talent available on Ellucian's team would be impossible given our budget and location," says Mary J. Schaal, Ed.D., Dean, Institutional Effectiveness, Research & Grants. "We can now plan and launch important initiatives with greater confidence that we have reliable, knowledgeable technical support."

Implementing the cloud services solution took six months – a relatively short amount of time considering the technical and cultural shifts required. AWC and Ellucian spent significant time up front developing a plan to engage all departments in testing and migration. Ellucian then worked hand in hand with AWC to move all essential data and applications to the cloud, while assuming day-to-day management of these assets.

Faculty and staff now have access to tech support 24/7, 365 days a year. And rather than having to train on-site staff to keep up with constantly changing technology, AWC benefits from a team of experts that can quickly deploy any solutions needed.

Another challenge AWC had been facing was not yet switching from UniData to SQL Server. AWC is now using the Ellucian cloud platform to migrate to advanced SQL Server technology.

The central IT team has shifted focus from fixing daily issues to more strategic initiatives, such as building programs to support key functions.

Increasing cost-effectiveness

AWC is not in a position to make large capital investments in technology every few years. When the college looked at the ongoing cost of adding new servers, as well as continual upgrades to hardware, network, security, and software, it found that cloud hosting was ultimately more cost-effective.

AWC also took advantage of Ellucian Application Management Services. Maintenance now takes place remotely and with greater reliability, reducing costly downtime and providing the college with a more predictable cost model.

Return on investment will come from more efficient, effective technology and its positive impact on the institution's success rates in such areas as recruiting and retention.

Improving scalability

Given its commitment to serving a diverse student body, AWC was awarded federal funding to increase the quality of its infrastructure and services. This includes improving ability to launch new programs quickly and respond to the changing needs of students in a timely fashion. Transitioning to the cloud is playing a critical role in AWC's ability to meet these goals.

> Customers who deploy their applications in the cloud typically derive two to four times the value of every dollar they spend.*
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> *Based on analysis of Ellucian customer ROI

The cloud enables AWC to scale IT resources up or down based on time of year, program demand, and other variables. And Ellucian keeps applications running smoothly during peak loads.

For example, the majority of AWC's enrollment takes place at two distinct times each year. But every year, they've experienced server outages as soon as the system was over-burdened. With cloud hosting, the college has reduced costly downtimes.

AWC has also adopted Ellucian Recruiter™, which is licensed on a subscription basis and hosted in the cloud (SaaS). The software can scale to meet changing Admissions and Enrollment demands. It also saves the college from expensive software upgrades.

The institution has now shifted focus from maintaining hardware and software to program quality and delivery.

Reducing risk

Like all industries, higher education faces constant threats to data security. In addition to the cyber-hacking and data backup issues common to all institutions, AWC faces natural disasters unique to its geography, including earthquakes.

With cloud hosting, AWC data is backed up continually and saved to multiple locations in order to avoid service disruptions. And it's protected by a layered security approach that includes physical (server cages, cameras, armed guards), infrastructure (incident response teams, flagging, firewalls), and application (role-based permissions, intrusion detection, encryption) components.

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> Outages and slow service make us seem less sophisticated to current and prospective students. Having Ellucian monitoring our applications, server, and network have a direct impact on our ability to attract and retain students.
>
> Bryan Doak, Dean
> Admissions and Enrollment Services
>
> "

Leading by example

As one of the first community colleges to implement a comprehensive cloud services strategy, AWC is a model for institutions nationwide. Ultimately, their success was based on having three elements in place from the start: funding, executive support, and full faculty and staff buy-in. These are not always easy to ensure and maintain throughout project conception, implementation, and maintenance of impact. But each played a key role in creating the technological and cultural shift needed for this game-changing initiative to succeed.

"This was a true partnership between our college, which strives to be a leader in using modern tools to improve the lives of faculty, staff, and students, and Ellucian, a leader in using technology to help institutions achieve their strategic goals," says Dr. Mayle.

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ABOUT ELLUCIAN

Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world. We deliver a broad portfolio of technology solutions, developed in collaboration with a global education community, and provide strategic guidance to help education institutions of all kinds navigate change, achieve greater transparency, and drive efficiencies. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries around the world look to Ellucian for the ideas and insights that will move education forward, helping people everywhere discover their futures through learning.

To learn more, visit www.ellucian.com.