



### Ellucian customer case study

Colleague® Student Planning gives advisors at John Brown University a platform for stronger and consistent advising, and students the tools to manage their academic progress.

### About John Brown University

John Brown University (JBU) is a private Christian university, ranked first in best value among southern regional colleges by *U.S. News & World Report*, and listed as one of America's Best Colleges by Forbes. JBU is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and enrolls more than 2,200 students from 40 states and 39 countries.

### Objective

Create a consistent and stronger advising process to help students graduate in a timely manner.

### Solutions

- Colleague Student Planning
- Colleague by Ellucian

### Business outcomes:

- Process is consistent, streamlined, and transparent
- Responsibility is shifted to students
- Issues are resolved earlier

### IT improvements:

- Automatic provisioning of students and population of courses and sections
- Integrated scheduling and registration



## Consistent processes. Happier advisors. Empowered students.

### John Brown University creates a stronger, uniform advising process with Colleague® Student Planning

#### Quality advising has lasting impact

Early and frequent advising can positively shape a student's university experience and time line for graduation.

"We are very mindful that students are in our care when they are here at the university," said Steve Snediker, assistant professor of visual arts, cinema at John Brown University. "We want to give them accurate information about their requirements for graduation and good advice about what total package of courses will pay off for the future."

John Brown University (JBU) implemented Colleague Student Planning to make its advising process stronger and more uniform. Colleague Student Planning is a web-based self-service tool that aligns students, advisors, and institutions to a common goal: helping students graduate on time. The university rolled out the solution in spring 2014.

#### Inconsistency led to missed opportunities

Before, the approaches of faculty and advisors varied considerably. Some met regularly with students, while others had indirect contact.

"Our advisory experience lacked consistency and quality. There was no one methodology," recalled Paul Nast,

chief information officer. “Sometimes, students fell through the cracks. And sometimes, students were surprised to learn they were short a class or two at graduation time.”

Snediker advises 45 to 50 students. His advising sessions usually occurred as students were checking out video gear.

“A student would say, ‘Hey, I’m thinking about taking this course. What do you think?’ It was more stream of consciousness than a planned approach,” Snediker said.

He kept track of his advising notes and student progress on an Excel spreadsheet that had been created by a colleague.

Advisors in the Department of Communication tracked their notes in folders that were housed in a central location. Department head Marquita Smith, EdD, advises 20 to 55 students and oversees two full-time advisors.

“Everyone here is pretty individualistic and had their own way of keeping records. Agreements weren’t always documented, and sometimes invalid course substitutions were made. I didn’t have access to approve the changes, or to coach advisors on the decisions they were making. We had three people giving three different sets of advice,” Smith said.

### Variable processes created frustration

The lack of common processes and documentation was frustrating for advisors and students.

“You can’t remember from year to year what you told every student,” Smith said. “If someone didn’t take good notes, there was no record of it. It was frustrating for us and frustrating for the students. Often, we had to recreate plans. That was an inefficient use of time.”

Some advisors were good about alerting the registrar’s office when substitutions were allowed. But even then, the information came in a variety of formats: email, phone, or a paper form.

The pain of incomplete planning was felt most acutely at graduation time.

“We do audits when students get to their last year,” said Becky Lambert, registrar. “We had cases where students’ courses were not meshing with the requirements. Students would say their advisors approved a substitution, but it wasn’t documented. We had to meet with their advisors and figure it out. It was very frustrating for everyone.”

Another problem was that students registered for classes first, then had advisors sign off on a printout of their course selection.

“I strongly encouraged my students to see me before registering for classes, but there was nothing to stop them from registering without talking to me,” Snediker said. “I wouldn’t see their course selections until after they’d already registered.”

### Better tools equal stronger advising

Today, students plan their course of study in Colleague Student Planning before meeting with their advisors. Self-service tools available 24/7 let students create an academic plan, map out the time it will take to graduate, and see how close they are to completing a program.

Out-of-the-box integration to Colleague by Ellucian enables automatic provisioning of students and population of courses and sections. Integrated scheduling lets students easily search for classes and pick the ones that fit their schedule.

“Seeing the course schedule while they are planning is very helpful to students,” Lambert said. “Before,

**“Students can’t afford to spend more semesters in the university because they messed up on their course requirements. Colleague® Student Planning will help students track their requirements more closely and graduate in a timely manner.”**

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**BECKY LAMBERT**, Registrar

**“It gives me a chance to advise the students and make sure they are taking the required courses. I think we’re stronger as an institution now that we’re using the software.”**

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**STEVE SNEDIKER**, Assistant Professor of Visual Arts, Cinema

they had to toggle back and forth between course schedules and registration, and map it all out on paper.”

Students review their proposed schedules with their advisors. They cannot register for the courses without their advisor’s approval.

“I have to approve course selection ahead of time, and I like that,” Snediker said. “It gives me a chance to advise the students and make sure they are taking the required courses. I think we’re stronger as an institution now that we’re using the software.”

Said Lambert: “I think it was very easy before for an advisor to sign off on a schedule without looking at it closely if a student caught them at a busy moment. Now, advisors have worked with the student ahead of time and built their course of study together. The tools help the advisor be more confident and will help eliminate what we used to chalk up to advisor error.”

### Taking the long view

Colleague Student Planning also provides tools for comprehensive degree planning. Intuitive “on-track” and “on-time” indicators make it easy for students to identify required courses and monitor their progress. “What-if” analysis tools show the impact of changing courses or degrees.

“The indicators that show what’s been completed and the remaining requirements are very helpful,” said Snediker, who will urge his students to create a four-year plan. “If students plan ahead, they are less likely to miss a required class or an opportunity. Some courses are taught on a staggered schedule. If a student doesn’t take the course when it’s offered, they have to stay another semester, or do independent study. That adds to their time in college and their tuition cost. Now they can look ahead and plan well.”

Colleague Student Planning has made the overall advising process more streamlined and efficient, according to Smith. “I can easily document substitutions in the notes field and send them to the registrar directly from the application. This will streamline the audit process at graduation time. It will be less stressful for everyone, including the students.”

Similarly, students can review their advisors’ notes. “If a student and I discussed the courses they don’t have to take if they are studying abroad, I put that in the notes field. Then the student can refer back to them. I can flag an action item for students, like ‘Get going on an internship,’ and they see that note every time they log in. This gives more transparency to everyone involved, including parents. The registrar can look and say, ‘I see why you are doing this and how it fits into the overall plan.’ ”

The ability for Smith to log in anytime from anywhere is another bonus. She can communicate with students even when she is not in the office.

### Easier on the registrar

Although the software has only been live for one full semester, the registrar’s office already is seeing a payoff.

“We didn’t have to intervene on as many registration issues this past semester,” Lambert said. “Going forward, when students call us because they are blocked from registering, we can go in and see what the issue is. We can also reach out to students who didn’t register. We can see if they’ve planned anything, or if they met with their advisor. Then we can proactively reach out to them and say, ‘You need to go see your advisor,’ or ‘Is there a problem you need help with?’ That kind of outreach will help with retention rates in the long run.”

The office is getting a head start on reviewing records for the university's juniors and seniors. Students with potential issues are being directed to meet with their advisors to clarify substitutions and other concerns before graduation. Lambert's office also is working with the IT department to start using the tools in Colleague Student Planning to map course offerings more effectively.

### Empowered students take control

Student reaction to the software has been very positive.

"They are very excited about it," Smith said. "Students really like the ability to create a four-year plan, and the visuals are great. They can see the impact of moving courses around or picking up a minor with the safety of knowing they aren't locking in a change. It puts the students in the driver's seat and empowers them."

"The software plays a big role in promoting student responsibility in the advising process," added Lambert. "It's shifting more of the responsibility to students, and that's where we want it to be. We want them to take ownership in their movement toward graduation while still sending them to their advisors for their expertise and guidance."

"Students come in with at least a start on their schedule now. We're spending less time building a schedule on paper, and more time talking cost issues or other concerns," Smith said.

Nast said adoption of the solution by students and advisors has been quick because of its ease of use. "The solution stuck out when we first saw it because of its functionality and features. From an IT perspective, it was quick to implement and requires very little maintenance."

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**MARQUITA SMITH**, EdD, Head,  
Department of Communication and  
Assistant Professor of Journalism

Colleague Student Planning has elevated advising to a consistent level of quality, made the process easier on the advisors and students, and shifted control to students.

"Graduating in a timely manner has become more important to students and parents in the last 10 to 15 years," Lambert said. "Students can't afford to spend more semesters in the university because they messed up on their course requirements. Colleague Student Planning will help students track their requirements more closely and graduate in a timely manner."

### Customer solution at a glance

Colleague Student Planning  
Colleague by Ellucian

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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.

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