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CASE STUDY:

A modernized registration system for lifelong learners

Searching for an enrollment solution that improves efficiency and yields actionable data

Northwestern Michigan College (NMC), located in Traverse City, Michigan, serves a diverse student body, focused on providing workforce development, continuing and extended education, and community college courses and degrees.

Like many community colleges, NMC's extensive non-credit and extended education programs are designed to serve a wide variety of students—from summer enrichment and year-round youth programs to courses specifically designed for those age 50 or older. The number of different demographic groups necessitates a more complicated enrollment process than a standard for-credit course might. For example, a youth-oriented program might require information about allergies and emergency contact information. And older adults may even be hesitant to register online at all, requiring a more-user-friendly approach.

With this in mind, NMC began looking for an enrollment solution specifically geared toward continuing education and workforce

Northwestern Michigan College

Enrollment: 5,400
Traverse City,
Michigan, USA

Challenge
Increase efficiency by eliminating cumbersome manual enrollment and registration processes

Solution
Ellucian Elevate™

Results
Increased online registrations

Better use of staff time

Improved tracking and analytics

development. The institution already had a robust ERP, but the needs of its non-credit department required a different solution.

The institution was also hoping to get more than increased efficiency out of the solution as well. "We were looking for ways to be able to market our classes and find data about our classes and students more easily," says Maureen Carlson, publication and promotion specialist for Northwestern Michigan College Extended Educational Services.

Integration matters

The registration process for continuing education courses at NMC had been labor intensive and error prone. Nearly everything was accomplished on paper, from manually taking registration information to canceling registrations. "Our processes involved a lot of telephone communication with students," says Carlson. "We had staff who would take registrations over the phone, put it on paper, enter it into our system, and then hand it off to another person to process the payment. So, we had a lot of information recorded on a form and then later put into the system by two different people at two different times—it was cumbersome."

The institution wanted a solution that would allow students to self-register. Perhaps just as importantly, they preferred a solution that would integrate with its current ERP, Ellucian Banner®. "The integration out-of-the-box into Banner was a high requirement," notes Donald Cunningham, former director of the NMC University Center. Integration would allow NMC to have a holistic view of a student over the course of his or her academic journey. For example, a student might attend a summer camp as a youth, earn an associate degree after graduating from high school, and then return to NMC several years later to obtain a certificate to improve his or her skill set. Integration with the ERP would grant administrators visibility into both credit and non-credit programs. "It was a no-brainer to go with Elevate as our solution," says Cunningham. "We knew Ellucian was all-in on trying to improve the complex continuing education registration system process, and Elevate puts all of our student learners—credit and non-credit—in the same ERP."

A good fit

NMC implemented Ellucian Elevate™ in January 2017. Carlson notes that the vendor's ongoing support helped pave the way for a successful implementation. "Once we had implemented Elevate and we had a semester under our belt, we still had questions about whether we were doing things right," she says. "For instance, we were wondering about the most

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MAUREEN CARLSON, Publication and Promotion Specialist, Northwestern Michigan College Extended Educational Services

streamlined way to set up courses and sections. And Ellucian was always very helpful."

With the implementation, NMC has been able to categorize its courses, offer search functionality, and communicate more effectively with students.

The new system has also helped NMC free-up valuable resources within the department. The institution previously fielded around 20 phone calls per hour during peak registration times, but after the implementation, that number has fallen to approximately six or seven, since a much larger percentage of students are now enrolling online. That means fewer people need to be dedicated to answering those calls. NMC has also experienced a much more efficient refund process. What used to take hours has been reduced to a few minutes.

With these added efficiencies, NMC's staff can focus more on marketing and developing courses, rather than taking phone calls and registering students. The online system also helps NMC to keep track of which courses are most popular, or which ones may need to be eliminated. And because NMC caters to students from a variety of age groups—from three years old and up—they can use the information within the database to keep track of those students as they move from course to course, non-credit to credit, and so on. This kind of insight allows NMC to build lasting relationships with individual members of the community, and to market more effectively to those individuals.

And because NMC's registration is now hosted in the cloud, much of the burden and stress of maintaining the solution has been eliminated, making it easier on NMC's small IT staff.

Increased online enrollments

Since implementing the new system, NMC has seen an impressive uptick in the number of online registrations.

NMC experienced particular success with online registration for its youth program. "We implemented it just before we launched our annual children's program," says Carlson. "About 60 percent of our students registered online for the program that summer—and that was a huge increase over the previous online registration for that demographic, which had been around 10 percent."

Other demographic areas have seen an increase in online enrollment as well. "After that first summer we launched Elevate, 38 percent overall registered online—that's up from about 10 percent as well. And many of those students are age 50 and over."

And now that the new system has been up and running for some time, the number of online registrations for
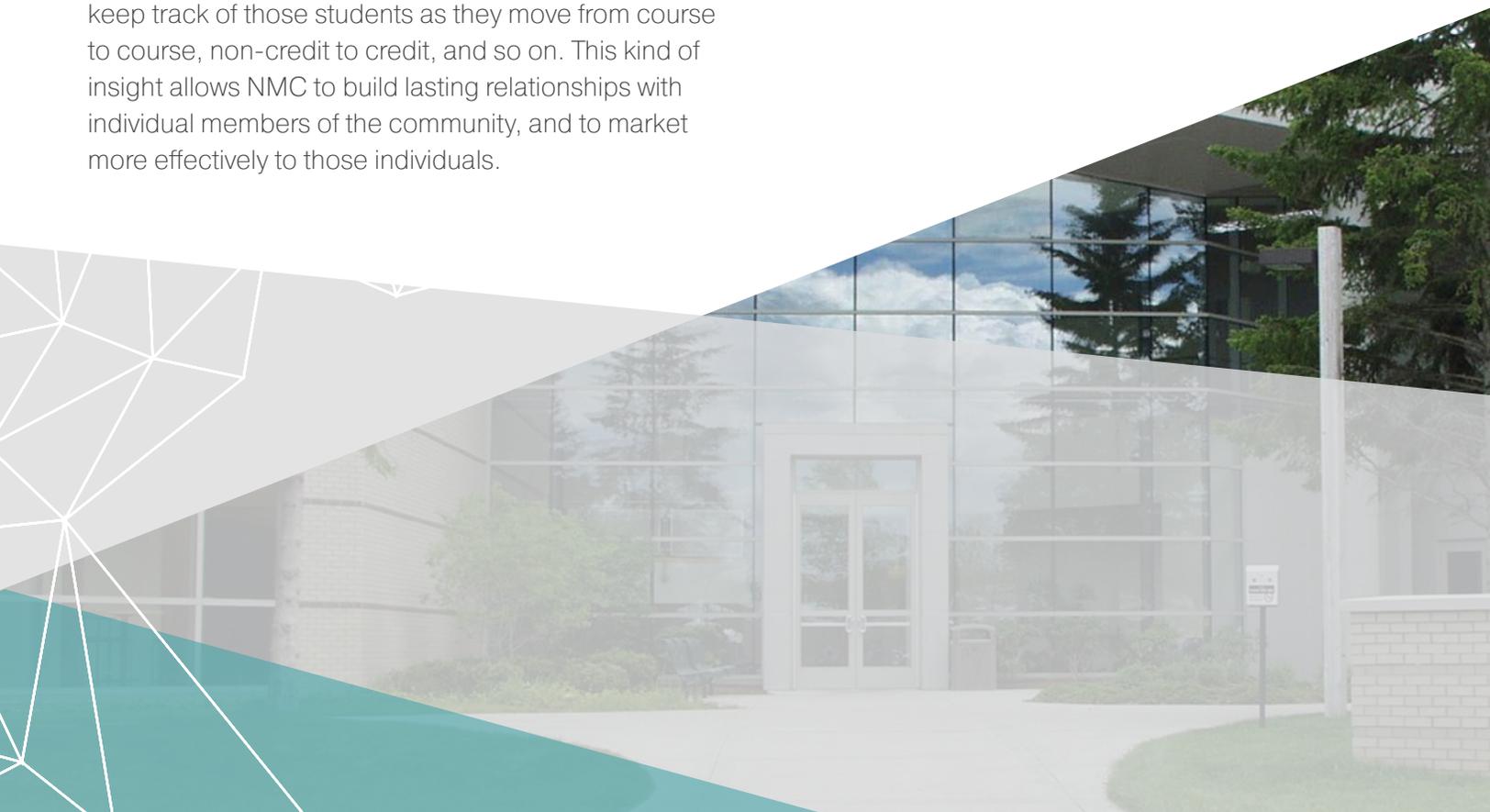
non-credit extended education at NMC appears to be increasing. "We just started enrolling for our fall session," says Carlson. "We're not even one month into it and 41 percent of our registrations so far have been online."

According to Carlson, the increased communication with students has also been a plus. "I think our students have enjoyed the transition because they are now able to get an email confirmation when they register and a receipt in their email," she says. "I think that has made them feel confident that they have successfully completed the process."

For Carlson, the system's flexibility and configurability has been a major asset for NMC, and she believes that any institution looking for an enrollment solution would benefit from it as well. "You could use Elevate however you want to, and there's so many different ways that schools can configure how they are entering their data for courses," she says.

"We knew Ellucian was all-in on trying to improve the complex continuing education registration system process, and Elevate puts all of our student learners—credit and non-credit—in the same ERP."

DONALD CUNNINGHAM,
former Director, NMC University Center

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