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As the coronavirus is forcing higher education institutions to grapple with the challenges of how to reopen, demands for refunds, the realities of state funding cuts, reinventing what admissions and freshmen onboarding look like, and more, University Business is here to help you find solutions.

Our team of editors is focused on shining light on colleges and programs that are innovating, on giving a voice to thought leaders whose ideas can be turned into action, and on helping you navigate the complex maze of legal, health, logistics and other issues you face.

This print magazine is a static example of the journalism we produce on a daily basis and publish on our website and in our newsletters. I encourage you to visit universitybusiness.com regularly and subscribe to our free e-letters to stay up to date on all the latest higher ed news and trends, including our daily coverage with ideas that could help your institution now. Just click the Subscribe tab at the top of the page.

As always, if you have suggestions or ideas to share, feel free to email me at eweiss@lrp.com.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

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COVID-19 and the future of college sports

Power Five conferences want the NCAA to allow schools to cut sports such as volleyball, fencing, soccer, baseball and tennis to allocate an even larger share of the remaining money for sports such as football and basketball.

UBmag.me/sports

How student groups are staying connected

Student organizations at many closed colleges and universities found creative ways to remain active and serve their campus communities.

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Virtual tours need storytelling component

With the demand for virtual campus tours surging, admissions administrators are seeing the importance of offering prospective students a robust online visit.

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Too much screen time?

Though sedentary behavior raises concerns, especially during a pandemic, experts agree that setting too many boundaries for students can have negative outcomes.

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We are all ‘essential’
For higher education to excel, we must create our way forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that we have the ability to be nimble in the delivery of online education, student support services and flexible work schedules.

Taking action
Being nimble and thriving, however, are different things. The education of the educator starts now. Higher education leaders should consider these three action steps to drive a collective capacity to thrive.

• **Action one:** Evaluate what is holding you back from sustaining nimbleness for students. In many cases, what is happening now is probably what should have been happening already. Perhaps, sustaining swift decision-making requires you to stop overthinking and take action. Stop compiling reasons for why new measures will not work. Rather, shift that attitude to: How can we make this work? Most important, stop thinking outside of the box and eliminate entirely that figurative box. Remember, our job is to distribute equitable access to education.

• **Action two:** Push reset (twice) on what quality means to your organization. In one of our dozen daily Zoom gatherings, a respected dean reminded us of how important quality and continued investment in our “new” processes will become. These include remote student support and learning services, quality faculty training, stakeholder engagement, and our own personal investment in what we do. Quality matters in what you do and in how it is applied.

• **Action three:** Carefully realign expectations. Consider what students may expect now versus what you assume they expect. Don’t be the one who says, “I can’t wait for everything to go back to the way it was.” Instead, be the one who reminds the team that our ability to serve students at broader levels is indeed possible—and we now know our own limits are being redefined. What’s more, student expectations about our abilities as well as our expectations about theirs are in flux. Face-to-face education is a cornerstone of our fine brick-and-mortar institutions. But like anything, expectations—especially when access to learning becomes more agile—will continue to require careful monitoring. You must create your own way, one that best aligns with your environment and community, and not play the endless game of catch-up with every other college.

Students need us, whether our delivery mode for higher education comes in the form of a community college, technical college, university or private college. Each serves a unique niche with distinctive values, strategies and mindsets. Regardless of your current state of affairs, rethink the way you can continue to serve that mission and vision. Think purposefully about how it will look and feel to your next generation of students. Whatever your idea is, when you know it rings true and holds promise, grant it entrance. Take action.

Ensuring equity
Our work is in fact equity work. It is about ensuring that our community and individual stakeholders have an opportunity to build a better future. The reality is that exactly how we continue to advance this delivery of an equitable future must never become a one-size-fits-mostly-all model. Our technology use and increased risk tolerance must become normal organizational behavior.

Invest in your processes and methods. Make tough decisions that you have been putting off.

Keep up the good work, and keep away from your box. Better yet, toss it and refresh your thinking regularly. We should not need a global crisis to nudge us.

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**About Ken Trzaska:**

Ken Trzaska has been president of Seward County Community College in Liberal, Kansas, since August 2015, leading with a highly collaborative and all-team focus. The development of a unique and nontraditional strategic plan, Moving Seward Forward, promotes five key organizational directions that frame daily work. For over 23 years, Trzaska has served successfully in executive leadership and faculty roles at small, medium and large colleges and universities in urban, suburban and rural communities.

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You must create your own way, one that best aligns with your environment and community, and not play the endless game of catch-up with every other college.
New Research: Business models for campus and energy initiatives shifting

University Business (UB) and Schneider Electric partnered to survey approximately 200 higher education leaders, including CBO, CFO, VP of Finance and Administration, and VP of Facilities, from around the country. This survey explored how colleges and universities are approaching funding and implementation of campus modernization and energy infrastructure projects.

The demands of campus operations and its energy infrastructure are evolving and keeping pace will be critical to protecting the business of tomorrow. However, adequate funding can be difficult to muster when an institution has many competing priorities. As systems grow in complexity and affordable talent and labor becomes tougher to find, new business models are needed to provide institutions with the flexibility and resources to grow.

**Growing concern around who will manage and operate facilities**

Campus modernization is top of mind for most institutions today with 86% of survey respondents reporting that their institutions are currently constructing or renovating campus facilities, or planning to in the next three years.

A vast majority reported challenges in all areas of facility management with about three quarters citing deferred maintenance and workforce management as top obstacles. More than half also cited skills gaps and outdated technology (Figure 1).

Funding was also a challenge for respondents with nearly 80% citing competition for capital and resources competing with other campus priorities, and nearly 45% struggling to find solutions that solve for debt capacity and balance sheet impact (Figure 2).
For energy infrastructure—such as central plants, onsite renewables and mechanical systems—respondents cited both aging energy infrastructure and increasing energy costs as top challenges (Figure 3).

“The method by which a campus must grow and perform is changing. There is a need to expand footprint, increase research, bolster amenities, and at the same time upkeep campus grounds, including its energy infrastructure,” says Charlie Johnson, Schneider Electric’s National Higher Ed Market Leader. “To address these competing priorities, institutions need new ways to access capital and shift risk, and remove the burden to own and operate facilities.”

**Emerging business models alleviate competing budgetary allocations**

Public-private partnerships (P3), so far associated with housing or dining, is emerging as a new business model for campus modernization and energy infrastructure. Through P3 for energy institutions can shift operational and capital risk to innovative partners that deliver both expertise and funding.

Institutions are already leveraging a variety of funding models to move critical campus and energy infrastructure projects forward (Figure 4). Despite being a newer model, already 35% of respondents are exploring a P3 for energy projects, but more information is needed for the 42% that remain unsure.

“What we’re seeing is that those most willing to adopt a more comprehensive business model, such as P3, are already shifting away from the traditional design-bid-build model,” says Johnson. “They also no longer have a dependence on budget allocations to move critical infrastructure projects forward.”

Compared to business models considered more traditional for energy projects such as design-build and performance contracting, the unique value of P3 is in having a strategic business partner and access to a network of energy experts who can provide guaranteed outcome and operational assurances that go beyond cost savings or power purchasing. By shifting ownership burden, P3 can also free up operational capacity and resources providing institutions with financial flexibility to pursue business goals more aggressively.
Colleges hope for face-to-face, but ready backup plans

Leaders are developing alternative class schedules, new dining and housing policies, and plans for coronavirus testing

College and university leaders say their top priority for fall 2020 is to resume face-to-face learning to the greatest extent possible while keeping staff and students safe.

At Montclair University in New Jersey, President Susan Cole’s team is detailing the following possibilities: a normal campus environment, a hybrid of in-person and online classes, and a fully online institution.

“We are trying to plan for three different universities and it’s pretty complicated,” Cole said. “We have to have the highest quality of instructional programs, we have to continue our research endeavors, and we have to be able to support students to the greatest extent possible to succeed.”

Across the country, campus leaders are prepping a range of alternatives, such as suspending large lectures, delaying or dividing the fall semester and housing all students in single dorm rooms. And they acknowledge that higher ed may not return to normal right away.

“Seeing people walk around in masks is going to be a dramatic change to what we’re used to,” says Lance Tatum, senior vice chancellor of academic affairs and leader of the coronavirus task force at Troy University in Alabama. “We may have to bridge some anxiety by giving students more opportunities to work in online platforms rather than saying they have to be in class every day.”

Flexibility is key
Beloit College in Wisconsin plans to split the fall 2020 semester into a pair of seven-week “modules” during which students will take two courses each, Provost Eric Boynton says.

“We’re treating this year as an experiment that’s designed not just for COVID but to give students more flexibility during their days,” Boynton says. “Our aspiration is to be in residential mode, but we’re ready to pivot in any way that’s necessary.”

The module model, which will also be in place in spring 2021, creates a “hinge point” in the middle of a semester that allows the school to shift between in-person and online learning as circumstances dictate.

The idea originated several years ago at Beloit but was never put into practice. Administrators envisioned that students only taking two courses would have more time to participate in internships, career-focused programs, and other co-curricular activities, Boynton says.

In addition, Beloit will flip courses of more than 30 students this fall. Lectures will be posted online while students meet in small groups of about 10 for discussions with instructors.

Troy University will likely adopt a five-semester model that gives the university the flexibility to move from online to in-person instruction during a two-term fall semester.

Administrators are figuring out what space will be needed to hold smaller classes that allow students and instructors to maintain social distancing. That will likely require hiring more faculty.
at a time when Troy, like colleges and universities across the country, will face financial shortfalls and enrollment declines, Tatum says.

As for campus life, the task force is now figuring if the university can offer single rooms in dorms and if it can even use older residence halls with communal bathrooms at all.

“The areas where people congregate, the rec center, the student activity center, all of that is going to be dramatically different,” Tatum says. “Where we used to see people out on the quad playing frisbee, all of that is going to change. It will look like we have fewer people on campus whether we do or not.”

**Two courses at a time**

Centre College in Kentucky will shift to a block schedule that divides its traditional 13-week, four-course academic term into two blocks of two courses. “While our hope is for in-person instruction for all of fall 2020, the ‘CentreBlocks’ schedules enables us to offer any combination of in-person and remote learning in response to the public health situation,” says Alex McAllister, associate dean of the college.

The 90-minute courses will run five days a week. Professors will be able to meet with their students more often as they will be teaching fewer students in each block, McAllister adds.

“From a student perspective, taking only two courses at a time means less mental shifting among subjects, which should reduce stress and help both first-year and current students more easily transition into a new academic year,” McAllister says.

The block schedule emerged during weekly meetings where deans in the Associated Colleges of the South (of which Centre College is a member) share ideas for adapting to the COVID-crisis, says Ellen Goldey, Centre’s vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college.

**Tracking the virus on campus**

Coronavirus testing, antibody testing, contact tracing and isolating those who fall ill will also be essential to reopening campuses.

University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins plans to test all students, faculty and staff for COVID-19 when in-person classes resume on August 24.

“Our plan is to test, trace and treat to present our campus community a flexible and adaptive teaching and learning environment,” Robbins says. “There are many factors that remain beyond our control. However, we are tackling what is within our control to ensure our students have the opportunity for a full on-campus experience.”

But administrators may not have total control over their fall 2020 plans. Campus leaders will likely be making final decisions with the guidance of local and state officials, says Barbara K. Mistick, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

“I’ve been in touch with hundreds of presidents in the last week, and their No. 1 priority is getting students back on campus,” Mistick says. “But it’s complicated. There are so many different decision points.”

Financially, there will be “pockets of vulnerability” among some small private colleges and regional public institutions trying to survive the crisis.

For example, Mistick recently spoke to a school that generates 15% of its revenue from a study-abroad program that may not return any time soon.

“For institutions that have tried a number of different things but haven’t really hit a stride, that’s going to be really significant when they have an assault on all their revenue sources at once,” she says. —Matt Zalaznick

**PEOPLE WATCH**

Jamie Martin, previously vice president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF), began her two-year term as president in June. The association represents faculty and coaches at the state’s 14 universities of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

As president, Martin wants to ensure state system universities are properly funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Martin, a member of the association’s faculty and coaches negotiations teams, is also a criminology department chair at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP).

Her roles on IUP’s APSCUF chapter included department representative to representative council, delegate to legislative assembly, grievance chair and executive council.

**Other people news:**

• In August, University of Texas President Gregory L. Fenves will begin leading Emory University (Ga.).

• Sharon Gaber, president of the University of Toledo (Ohio), will become the fifth chancellor of The University of North Carolina at Charlotte in July.

• Teresa Woodruff, dean and associate provost for graduate education at Northwestern University in Illinois, will become provost and executive president for academic affairs at Michigan State University in August, assuming the Board of Trustees approves the appointment. —Steven Blackburn
An estimated 28 million American adults, 11% of those aged 18 and older, have canceled education plans—ranging from formal degree programs to personal development—due to the COVID-19 crisis. Of those still considering education or training in the next six months, 59% are interested in non-degree programs, including certificates, certifications and courses for reskilling, upskilling or personal interests.

That’s all according to a new analysis from Strada Education Network, a national social impact organization dedicated to forging pathways between education and employment. The data is from Strada’s weekly, nationally representative survey of 1,000 Americans, tracking the impact of the global pandemic on their lives, work and education and conducted on April 22.

“In times of flux, Americans have frequently turned to education as a way to meet the challenges of a changing economy,” said Dave Clayton, Ph.D., senior vice president at the Strada Center for Consumer Insights. “While COVID-19 has created unprecedented change to our lives and work, we do not yet know the full implications for education. Thus far, the majority of Americans who are considering more education are telling us they will look for immediate opportunities to develop their skills.”

As for five-year education plans, about half of Americans surveyed intend to enroll in postsecondary education and training in the next five years, relatively consistent with previous findings from early 2019. The most significant change observed is that when Americans do plan to enroll in the next five years, there’s a marked increase in their likelihood to enroll in a trade school, community college or online-only college or university.

Enrollment data from administrators’ own institutions can be paired with these insights into Americans’ informal and formal education plans and then used as a signal, Clayton says. “One thing that’s clear from our data—and both now and in previous years—is the importance of helping prospective students understand the clear relevance and connection between education programs and career pathways. Assurances that courses and training will count toward degree or certificate goals is also critical. With so many dynamics changing around them, education consumers seek confidence that investing themselves and their money in courses or training will work for them.”

View the full findings at UBmag.me/strada. —Melissa Ezarik
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Amid COVID-19, academic libraries flex digital muscles

Most departments had to rethink resources, pedagogy and support for students and staff as American campuses closed one after the other this semester. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the academic library has made the transition to completely digital services rather smoothly, according to a new survey by library staff at the University of Illinois.

Throughout March 2020, academic libraries transitioned from fully operational to partially open to a remote resource. Curiosity about how other libraries were faring through these changes inspired a survey from Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, professor and coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction at University Library, University of Illinois, and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, the manager for Library Reference, Research Assistance and Instruction.

We disseminated the survey via listserv, social media and through our professional networks and have been able to capture responses representing roughly one-quarter of the entire U.S. not-for-profit higher education sector,” says Janicke Hinchliffe. Of 3,000 academic libraries nationwide, over 800 responded to the Academic Library Response to COVID19 survey.

Library reference, research assistance and instruction services rapidly transitioned to digital formats. “Reference is primarily, and often exclusively, being provided via phone, email or chat,” says Janicke Hinchliffe. In addition, digital library HathiTrust launched a temporary emergency access service that permits researchers at member institutions to access digital materials that correspond to physical books in their library.

Large-scale provision of tech hardware to support remote learning has mostly been undertaken by campus IT, not the library, the survey found. This leaves library staff to attend to the spike in requests for remote services.

“[Administrators] can have confidence that the investments in digital library services and resources over the past two decades have positioned their libraries to pivot to remote and online delivery,” says Janicke Hinchliffe.

—Stefanie Botelho

STUDENT AFFAIRS

Colleges conduct well-being check-ins on every student

Campus leaders at some institutions—even large public schools—are calling each one of their students to check in on their well-being while the coronavirus outbreak keeps campuses closed.

In Michigan, Grand Valley State University’s “Project Reach Out” is contacting 24,000-plus students. As of late April, about 170 volunteers had reached more than 16,000 students, says President Philomena Mantella.

Driving the initiative is the fact that students are experiencing the situation differently. “Some students have had limited disruptions, are absolutely comfortable in their living environment and can’t wait to get to campus,” Mantella says. “And then you have students who have two parents diagnosed with COVID, and they’re isolated from everybody, uncertain about everything and needing every kind of support you can imagine.”

While faculty have been plenty busy with the shift to online instruction, other university staff report that making the calls has given them a sense of real purpose during the closures, Mantella says.

‘Let’s ask the students’

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is another large public institution where leaders have committed to reaching out to all students by the end of the semester.

Faculty and staff members—including Chancellor Donde Plowman—had connected with more than 13,000 of the 29,000 undergraduate and graduate students by late April.

“We wanted to know that what we were doing is helpful—that we’re providing students with the resources they really need and desire at this time,” said Vice Provost for Student Success Amber Williams, who came up with the idea with two colleagues. “So we said, ‘Let’s ask the students. Let’s just check in and see how they’re doing.’”

The University of Kentucky’s “We Need to Check in on Our Family” effort involves reaching out to all 30,000 students. The initiative is led by Student and Academic Life and the Student Government Association.

“Participating in calling students is important to me and my colleagues,” said Lance Poston, executive director of Inclusive Health and Campus Partnerships and LGBTQ* Resources, said in a university release. “It is a key way that we can reach out to our students to see how they are doing during these unprecedented times: listening to their experiences, discerning how we can connect them to resources and reminding them that we are here to support them.”

—Matt Zalaznick

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Survey explores 2020 trends and priorities in higher education

Jenzabar partnered with University Business to develop and deploy a survey of higher education leaders in the UB audience in February 2020. Some 175 respondents participated from a variety of sizes and types of institutions, who described how data analytics, enrollment and student success factor into their strategic priorities.

**Trends and top priorities**
Respondents were asked if, over the past five years, their department had been required to ‘do more with less,’ or accomplish more tasks with fewer people and resources. **87% said they agree strongly or somewhat that they have had to do more with less.**

When asked if the population of nontraditional students at their institution had increased in the past five years, 11% said it had “significantly” and 38% said it had “somewhat.” Another 40% said this population had remained the same size, and just 12% said it had decreased.

The 49% who said this population had increased were asked if their institution has struggled to meet the needs of nontraditional students. **The majority (58%) said “Yes, somewhat” while 8% said “Yes, definitely.”** 34% said no, their institution had not struggled to meet these students’ needs.

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**Has your institution made improving student success and completion rates a strategic priority for the near future?**

- 81% Yes, this is a top priority for the near future
- 18% Yes, this is important, but not a top priority
- 1% No, this is not a priority for our institution

**Has your institution made increasing enrollment a strategic priority for the near future?**

- 74% Yes, this is a top priority for the near future
- 19% Yes, this is important, but not a top priority
- 7% No, this is not a priority for our institution
When asked about their institution’s top strategic priorities, some 81% said improving student success and completion rates was a top priority, and 74% said that increasing enrollment was a top priority.

Access to critical data and tools
All respondents were asked if they or their department had access to enough of the data necessary to make the most informed strategic decisions. While 37% said they had “high levels of access to all the data” they needed, 56% said they only had access to “some of the data” they needed. Another 7% said they had access to “very little” of the data they needed.

When asked if their department utilized an analytics tool or platform to help them identify insights and make decisions, 57% said yes, but 43% said no, they are not using such a platform. Those who said they were not using an analytics tool or platform were then asked if they thought such a tool would help them or their department make more informed decisions. 32% said “Yes, definitely” and 56% said “Yes, probably” this would help them or their department. Just 11% said “No, probably not.”

“Data taken from the survey of UB subscribers, “2020 Strategic Priorities in Higher Ed,” conducted in February 2020, with 175 respondents participating."

Jenzabar provides market-leading technology solutions that help higher education institutions achieve their mission. With cloud-based ERP solutions, student information systems, and advanced data analytics tools that provide detailed insight to enable more informed decision-making, Jenzabar can support institutions of any size achieve their strategic initiatives.

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How COVID-19 is changing the face of college admissions

Strategies for driving engagement with prospects—and providing flexibility

By Kristen Capezza

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Flashback: It's September 2019 and higher education is facing one of the largest disruptions to date; the National Association for College Admission Counseling votes to remove long-standing provisions of the Code of Ethics and Professional Practices (CEPP). Words like “sweepstakes” are introduced to the college process.

Fast-forward: The spring season approaches, and this year, it’s not business as usual. Our challenges are not a result of CEPP changes. The global pandemic forces campuses to close and operations to resume remotely. Enrollment teams scramble to make class and create strong connections with admitted students.

Driving engagement

Many of us would claim our institutional culture becomes apparent through on-campus events, bringing to life our glossy viewbooks. At Adelphi University in New York, visitors experience the personalized interaction of our faculty, staff and students, and feel the safety and energy of possibilities that await them.

For many, COVID-19 stole those visit experiences. But Adelphi recreated them online, as did others. While no online interaction can replace the feeling of pulling onto campus, our honest and innovative responses may help us long into the future. Here are four to consider:

1. Build transparent, empathetic communications. As enrollment leaders, we must acknowledge social, financial and other priorities that guide human behavior, and work extra hard to reflect them in an empathetic way. This should remain central beyond the pandemic.

2. Harness the power of robust asynchronous and synchronous web content. Stealth shopping is not new. Invest in web design, content and user experience. Build a mix of real-time and on-demand content. Your website will remain a key to your enrollment strategy.

3. Offer virtual opportunities. Students want to build meaningful social and emotional ties to their future campus community. Whether on campus or behind a screen, students and families are comforted by individual and small-group interactions. Virtual tours, one-on-one Zoom advising, student panels, and parent and family chats are just a few opportunities. When colleges resume on-campus operations, leaders should remember the students and families who cannot visit every campus of interest, and continue to use these innovations.

4. Power up your networks to demonstrate value in the college experience. At Adelphi, faculty, staff, our nearly 8,000 enrolled students, and our more than 115,000 alumni have reached out with a uniform welcome message to admitted students and families. It will remain a part of our strategy in the future.

Providing options

Our team has planned the following.
• We’ve set aside a handful of seats for students who decide late in the summer that they wish to attend our school.
• We’re offering flexibility in our acceptance and financial aid deadlines.
• We’ve reduced our summer program costs at the undergraduate level; and with over 200 online courses, we’re welcoming current, visiting and prospective students to spend the summer with us.
• We’ve created opportunities for prospective and visiting students to “try us out” this summer, providing those who transfer to us this fall with one-time discounts equivalent to any amount spent on Adelphi’s summer courses—on top of merit- and need-based aid.
• Virtual recruitment will continue through the summer, allowing students to get answers and build connections.

Looking ahead

The fall enrollment picture is uncertain for colleges coast to coast. Students are delaying decisions, and many are asking for deposit extensions. We anticipate a large number will change plans and opt to stay local, seeking comfort in being near to home. Some students will request gap semesters and years, waiting to start a campus experience uninterrupted by thermal scans and face masks.

We must keep our students and institutional missions at the core of our decisions, offering flexibility and accessibility to those who need it most.

We must keep our students and institutional missions at the core of our decisions, offering flexibility and accessibility to those who need it most.

Kristen Capezza is vice president for enrollment and communications at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York.
Two-way interface keeps financial aid office and bookstore on the same page

FA~Link by Trimdata updates student accounts in real time

It was spring 2011, and the financial aid staff at Bucks County Community College were awash in labor-intensive processes to meet the unrelenting demand for information. “Students were wrapped around the building, waiting for someone to review their financial aid accounts so they knew how much money they had to buy books for the new semester,” recalls Assistant Director of Financial Aid Jack Labarko. “I had just come from a highly automated department, so when I saw staff writing out little cards for students, I thought: ‘What is this?’ It took me back a bit.”

1 of 3 integrations: Colleague
That legacy system has since been replaced by FA~Link, a two-way interface that connects the financial aid office and the Follett-operated school bookstore. As students at the suburban Philadelphia institution shop in-store or online, their accounts are updated in real time so there are no discrepancies between the bookseller and the financial aid office. Students can access their accounts from any device, and FA~Link integrates with Ellucian Colleague, the school’s ERP system. FA~Link also integrates with Oracle PeopleSoft and Ellucian Banner.

“We’re no longer inundated on the first few days of classes,” Labarko says. “Staff can now concentrate on higher-level issues, such as helping students complete verification paperwork online. They are not busy looking up account balances, reconciling reports, or investigating and correcting errors.”

Working remotely during COVID-19
The system flags items not eligible for purchase with financial aid, saving cashiers from manually checking each purchase. Additionally, the FA~Link reporting feature allows Labarko to see how much is being spent on each of the community college’s three campuses.

“And we’re able to process our veterans’ vouchers through FA~Link,” Labarko says. “Veterans have a special cohort and require special services, so this has been a great bonus.”

A particularly timely benefit: activating bookstore credits when Labarko can’t get onto campus. “It’s been truly great while we’re working remotely,” he says from his home during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We can operate at 100 percent.”

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AI = ARTIFICIAL INSTRUCTOR?

Most higher ed institutions are using artificial intelligence for administrative affairs, but Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is bringing this technology into the classroom.

After stepping into the Situation Room, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute students are “transported” to a restaurant in China. A computer-generated waiter walks up to them and asks, in Mandarin, what they would like to eat. These students then respond, to which the virtual waiter reacts through the use of artificial intelligence.

Later, a Beijing airport materializes around these students who must now retrieve their luggage and find transportation to their next destination with the help of AI-powered digital avatars.

“Or there might be an object that students have to find in Beijing, which would involve negotiating their way through the city and interacting with digital individuals along the way,” says Shirley Ann Jackson of the New York-based institution.

Called the Mandarin Project, these experiences at RPI’s Cognitive and Immersive Systems Lab combine gamification, immersion and AI to improve the ways in which students learn Mandarin.

Beyond RPI, higher ed mostly employs AI outside of the classroom for research and development. In addition, AI is being used for large-scale data collection and reporting to, for example, drive down the cost of instruction and assessments, for example, says Brian Fleming, executive director of the Sandbox CoLLABorative at Southern New Hampshire University. Chatbots are used to answer student questions virtually and preserve staff resources.
To some extent, AI powers digital courseware for personalized learning and large learning platforms, such as YouTube. “There are also applications of AI or, at least, machine learning that accelerate the speed of learning platforms,” says Fleming, a member of Harvesting Academic Innovation for Learners (HAIL) Storm, a network of higher ed leaders who pursue transformational change.

“The important part of education is helping students think, and most computers are only programmed with AI algorithms to answer questions, not pose questions,” says Stefan Popenici, co-author of the research paper “Exploring the impact of artificial intelligence on teaching and learning in higher education” (UBmag.me/popenici).

Who controls the data?
As AI solutions continue to enter the market, faculty and campus administrators need to limit or at least understand where data gathered by AI goes.

“Even though a vast majority of researchers don’t believe artificial intelligence can read or engage with student emotions, schools need to realize that students will gradually realize how much of their data AI can collect and will hold universities accountable,” says Popenici, also a senior lecturer in higher education and development at Charles Darwin University in Australia. “What kind of messaging do we want to give students? That we have complete control of their data?”

Campus leaders and faculty, therefore, need to ask difficult questions when looking to adopt new technology, such as platforms that require payment from students. “If higher ed is not responsible for this technology, then who will be?” says Fleming.

Providing cultural familiarity and sensitivity
At RPI, the Mandarin Project aims to ensure students will make a difference in the world when traveling abroad. This requires mastering the languages and cultures of the places they visit.

“As a technological institution, our foreign language [offering] was not large enough to equip our students with the necessary skills to successfully navigate the world,” says Jackson. “We were interested in providing experiences that would give them cultural sensitivity and the sense that, when visiting a country for the first time, they had been there before.”

The institute started the project by equipping a classroom space at RPI, which was already outfitted with technology, to create a human-scale immersive environment, with Watson, a data-driven and knowledge-based IT services platform from IBM.

“We chose to teach Mandarin in this lab because it is a level-four language, which means it’s not only an important language to learn, but challenging to master,” says Jackson.

Accelerating instruction
Before incorporating artificial intelligence, the Mandarin Project used gamification to accelerate the language acquisition and immersion to help students gain

Higher ed chatbots everyone is chatting about

- **Arizona State University**: Chatbot Sunny has sent over 3 million texts to students on various subjects, such as deadlines, requirements and financial aid.

- **Winston-Salem State University (N.C)**: Chatbot Winston increased enrollment by 2%, decreased incoming phone calls by 36% and increased on-time bill payments by 74% in 2017-18.

- **Georgia Institute of Technology**: Jill Watson, built on IBM’s Watson platform, is a teaching assistant that helps students enrolled in the Knowledge-Based Artificial Intelligence course.

- **The University of Southern Denmark**: Chatbot Kitt receives all IT service department inquiries from employees and students.

- **Deakin University (Australia)**: IBM Watson received 1,600 questions a week to learn the ins and outs of campus life and how to study in the cloud in 2015.

- **University of Adelaide (South Australia)**: An international eligibility assessment chatbot that uses Oracle Digital Assistant has participated in more than 9,000 sessions, since June 2019, with prospective students without needing to involve university staff.

Source: Stefan Popenici, co-author of the research paper “Exploring the impact of artificial intelligence on teaching and learning in higher education”
AI = ARTIFICIAL INSTRUCTOR?

CULTURAL IMMERSION—The Mandarin Project provides an immersive environment that allows students to engage in task-oriented group activities that focus on communication and other social practices in Mandarin.

Steven Blackburn is an associate editor at UB.

Cultural competence and a sense of familiarity with where they could later go.

Originally, students only interacted with human professors who spoke Mandarin in this immersive environment. “Using actual teachers slowed down the process of accelerated learning, so we decided to replace humans with a digital being,” says Jackson. “But to make interactions with these digital avatars more natural, we needed artificial intelligence.”

The first level involved a team of computer engineers, game developers and artists from the institute adding responsive and verbal queries, so the avatars could answer questions and point to objects.

“However, we wanted to go beyond a Q&A-type of interaction,” says Jackson. “To make it more real, we began adding complexity and nuance.”

This involved coding facial recognition and motion capture capabilities into these avatars. Additional coding was later inputted to allow avatars to interact with more than one student and then more coding was added so multiple digital avatars could interact with each other.

Meanwhile, all of these changes needed to be integrated into natural language processing, a branch of AI that deals with the interaction between computers and humans using the natural language.

“Even though we started with gamification and immersion,” says Jackson, “our use of artificial intelligence was what helped us achieve our pedagogical intent to accelerate and increase student cognitive learning.”

Steven Blackburn is an associate editor at UB.
How coronavirus tested a graduate program launch

University of Utah’s Master of Business Creation faculty pivoted to manage the new program like the startups of their student entrepreneurs

By Thad Kelling

We all know launching a master’s program can be tough. There are debates, approvals, more approvals, recruiting, and new curriculum to develop.

Now, imagine you’re starting a new type of program and mix in a global pandemic. This is what faculty at the University of Utah’s David Eccles School of Business faced as they enrolled the first group of founders in the Master of Business Creation (MBC) program during the 2019-20 academic year in partnership with the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute.

The pandemic was a perfect test for the fledgling MBC. The experience showed how a novel approach to entrepreneurship education at the master’s level can be successful—even under the most challenging circumstances.

Meeting student needs

MBC is designed to adapt to the changing needs of the founders enrolled and the business environment. Founders spend nine months launching and scaling their companies. Everything they do—from classes to mentor meetings and grades—revolves around their startups. To provide this program, the faculty in the Eccles School’s Department of Entrepreneurship & Strategy created a fluid curriculum and support structure.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, MBC was affected much like every other university program in the country. At first, there was panic as news changed daily, and then classes and support moved online.

Once the initial shock passed, the faculty realized they just needed to manage the program in the same way they started: by being entrepreneurial and managing the program like a startup.

Moving to online learning

A lead MBC faculty member, Jack Brittain, approached the pandemic with a learning attitude. The result was a program that improved as it moved online. Brittain says students, faculty and mentors became more engaged as they moved to a digital format that was more fluid, interactive and easy to alter from day to day.

Students, faculty and mentors became more engaged as they moved to a digital format that was more fluid, interactive and easy to alter from day to day.

Viewing challenges as opportunities

For evidence of the program’s success through the crisis, take a look at three of the 20 startups:

• Doxy.me is a telehealth company. It exploded and was able to get the help needed to manage thousandfold growth.

• My School Dance lost all 70 clients for its app to manage high school dances. But it received help to change direction and create Virtual Prom Live, a series of proms for students across the country.

• True North Behavioral Health, which provides counseling for first responders, moved online and started building an app to reach customers anywhere. “Without this support, I’m very clear that we would not have been in a position to pivot under the current financial conditions,” says Andrew Sidoli, founder of True North.

This test of the MBC program provides insights for other schools that want to develop programs for entrepreneurs. They should be designed to confront every challenge as an opportunity. Just like the founders in the MBC program, they should be entrepreneurial. When designed in this manner, challenges can make them stronger.

Thad Kelling is the director of public relations and marketing at the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute, an interdisciplinary division of the David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah.
Whether designing its landmark Campus Reimagined initiative or responding to a pandemic, Florida State University has demonstrated how using existing technology in a smarter way can lead to better outcomes.

The Tallahassee institution has long used data to inform decisions on everything from course options to library hours. In 2018, however, information management became the cornerstone of Campus Reimagined—designed to first help students better understand their interests and goals, and then provide a personalized experience based on acquiring knowledge necessary to fulfill their personal passions.

**Managing information effectively**

“The most recent shift in using data is toward identifying unique characteristics, goals and aspirations of students,” says Associate Provost Rick Burnette. “How do we use technology—specifically data—to make sure the experience is as meaningful and impactful as possible for our students?”

To advance that goal, the university partnered with Microsoft to set up a data lake and manage information effectively.

“It’s one thing to have a tool; it’s another to use it appropriately.”

“The school is already using every Microsoft data visualization and management tool,” says Sean Brown, chief strategy officer for Campus Reimagined. “But the human factor was extremely important. We found Microsoft’s view of digital transformation was parallel to ours, and it had the road map for where we were headed.”

‘Maintaining continuity of collaboration’

“Microsoft representatives provided the expertise we needed,” Burnette adds. “They said, ‘Here’s how to get more bang for the buck with the technologies you have.’ It’s one thing to have a tool; it’s another to use it appropriately. Microsoft provided a lot of focus.”

For more information, please visit aka.ms/etfhe

Share this story online at UBmag.me/microsoft
As a result, when COVID-19 led to campus closure and wholesale remote learning for some 42,000 students, FSU was ready. “We had the technology, so people could collaborate over Teams,” Brown says. “We found that the things you could do six feet apart or across the quad could still be done when you were a nation apart. We were able to maintain continuity of collaboration.”

Remote learning after COVID-19
That continuity was key to administrative and academic success, Burnette says, and raised an important question: “How do we use technology to make sure we’re not just delivering the same presentation remotely, but we’re making it an interactive learning experience?”

The school’s tech partner is helping with answering that question.

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“Both in the Campus Reimagined partnership with Microsoft, and the broader university, it is clear that a secure digital platform with chat, video communication and document sharing is very important,” Brown says. “When students return to campus, we’ll need to maintain digital collaboration and distance delivery to continue maximizing student experiences and success.”

Pandemic accelerates the need for first-tier remote learning options for higher ed

How has the coronavirus prompted higher ed leaders and their communities to better appreciate the importance of the campus experience?
Higher ed leaders have always appreciated this, but students, faculty and staff are now feeling just how important the campus community is to their experience, and how much learning occurs in and outside the classroom. Campus leaders realize they need to foster community for distributed populations, and technology can help.

How can colleges combine first-class remote learning with crucial on-campus experiences to improve student success after the coronavirus crisis?
Providing flexibility on when and how students consume information, and how they meet and interact with others is important to the entire experience. College is more than just the classroom. There are many lessons to be learned on campus: Time management, self-discipline, organization and group collaboration. Human interaction is critical. Technology should not disintermediate students and teachers. It can connect people and inform their interactions to make them more personal and effective.

How can colleges and universities ensure remote learning remains a first-tier offering even after the COVID-19 pandemic?
Colleges and universities have always focused on quality learning experiences. The pandemic showed how agile campuses can be. Their rapid transition to remote learning was impressive. Moving forward, the conversation has to focus on learning with remote inclusion as a first-tier option for any or all participants—students and faculty. Over the next few years, we’ll see significant investments in learning experiences and pedagogical evolution of models designed for inclusion. Faculty and students will have options for on-campus and remote learning, and synchronous and asynchronous learning. It will be more than lecturing to muted squares over a video conferencing tool.

COVID-19 has created an urgency for project-based or active learning scenarios, continuous engagement over various modalities, and interactions that extend the classroom and give everyone a voice.

How can higher ed leaders ensure that both distance and on-campus experiences promote equity and remain inclusive?
Now that students have access to low-cost devices or virtual machines on the cloud, we need to ensure they have access to high-speed internet. Microsoft is working with telecoms, energy access providers and others to provide high-speed internet using TV white space. These partners are using our Airband technology to promote equity and to help close the massive digital access gap, particularly in rural and agricultural areas.

Our Immersive Reader capabilities ensure learners of all abilities can see and hear text. With rich controls for word spacing, contrast, text size and even colors, we help people overcome vision and reading challenges. Immersive Reader is also found in our Browser and Office applications, and we make it available to partners who can integrate into their interfaces and scale these inclusive experiences.

Pandemic accelerates the need for first-tier remote learning options for higher ed

Q&A with Rob Curtin, Director of Higher Education Strategy, Americas, for the Education Industry Group at Microsoft

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PUTTING AN ESPORTS ARENA ON CAMPUS CAN REAP REWARDS—FROM BOOSTING ADMISSIONS TO ENHANCING ACADEMIC OFFERINGS—BUT TAKES PLANNING AND REQUIRES FORMING COALITIONS, WHILE KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

One of the stops on an in-person campus tour at the University of Delaware has been the first floor of the Perkins Student Center. It’s a place where parents can easily lose their teens and where teens can “lose their minds.” Mesmerized by the glass-fronted, blue-lit facade in front of them, recruits are usually awestruck by what they see and have to be pulled away by Mom or Dad.

That spot, UD’s Esports Arena, opened just a few weeks before the campus had to shut down for the semester due to the pandemic. It quickly became both a jaw-dropping photo opportunity for families and a popular place on campus for Delaware students to hang out. It is outfitted with an array of high-tech features, including a stage setup, a wall of hexagonal video panels, a state-of-the-art broadcast booth, and even a scent machine.

“We were charged with creating vibrancy and being relevant, and we knew that it was going to be an attraction to help boost admissions,” says Tony Doody, director of University Student Centers. “It’s definitely a show-stopper.”

Designed to be used by anyone on campus for free, the arena features not just esports equipment bells and whistles but also something most research universities really want—a tie-in to academics. UD is planning to launch an interdisciplinary major around esports in the coming academic year.

“I’ve never seen our President [Dennis Assanis] so excited,” recalls Doody of the grand opening. “He said, ‘You’re going to need to build two or three more of these.’”

As colleges and universities look for ways to boost interest and increase enrollment, many have found success through esports.
VISIONARY VENUE— When the University of California, Irvine, unveiled its UCI Esports Arena in 2016, it was a groundbreaking achievement for campus-built esports rooms. The 3,500-square-foot space, a former converted pool room, is still going strong, boasting 72 workstations that serve team members, the student body and local community.

And, as campus leaders who have strategically housed esports in a dedicated space on campus have realized, an official arena can be a promotional vehicle to attract and build credibility with high schoolers.

The buzz has caught the attention of administrators nationwide as colleges of all sizes seize on the value of esports by building new facilities or creatively revamping underutilized rooms. Even in the midst of COVID-19-related campus closures, planning for upcoming spaces carries on.

Carving out a space for esports
For those looking to launch an esports arena on campus, planning for future success is a good starting point, advises Josh Kell, CEO of Horizon AVL and Esports Integration, a New Jersey-based firm that designs large venues and arena systems. Kell, who along with Scott Payette Architects in Boston helped dream up and build out Delaware’s facility, says that “most colleges just put computers in a room and say they have esports. That’s not esports. That’s gaming.” Kell suggests taking these steps:

- Defining your mission as a college or university and how the institution is best preparing esports students for the industry
- Developing your roadmap for the next 3-5 years
- Selecting games, affiliations, leagues and hardware
- Discussing curriculum, branding and community
- Planning and building the facility

Finding space on campus is not always easy. “Space is the fight everywhere, so any space you can get is cool enough to start,” says Chris Haskell, associate clinical professor and esports coach at Boise State University. “Utah State started with a tiny 13x10 room, but they have six workstations, and it works. Set up shop where you are, then be on the lookout for the next space. Institutions are very much like hermit crabs. You may outgrow the space you’re in, but you are locked into a life where you occupy the best space available.”
Joey Gawrysiak, professor and director at Shenandoah University in Virginia, can attest. His esports program started in the top floor of the library, moved to the basement of the health building and now has moved into a unique space pitched by the university: an unused Armory Building garage.

It isn’t modern, but it is spectacular, with seating, a broadcast area and a stage for esports players … most of it with mobile capabilities, so it can host events offsite. Its opening was delayed by the coronavirus shutdown, but when it does open, it will offer hands-on experiences to those who are in its Bachelor of Science esports program. Where did he get the vision? Boise State.

Six degrees of esports
Despite the competition during game play, collegiate esports has a familial “six degrees of separation” quality to it. Those looking for advice on building an esports arena can simply reach out to another esports director or student life director for support.

Haskell built one of the premier programs at Boise State, which now features three esports spaces. But when he started, he had “no machines and no players,” and needed guidance. So, he made five trips in three months to the University of California, Irvine, to talk with their leaders, who “were fantastic with their time.”

Now, Haskell will guide others just getting started. “One of the questions I get most often is, “How did you get your university to build you this space?” The truth? Boise’s program has been blessed by $2.2 million in donations.

Kathy Chiang, assistant director of UC-Irvine Esports, knows about fundraising and financial challenges when building a space. Esports originally lived in the Rec Center and was little more than a few pool tables and a couple of Xbox consoles when campus leaders drew up plans to repurpose it as a public-use space in 2015.

“It was severely underutilized and wasn’t really generating any revenue,” Chiang says. “Students would come in

5 CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESPORTS ARENA PROJECTS

1. Know that almost any space could work. “We’ve yet to see brand new, purpose-built esports facilities. They’re all cleverly redesigned other spaces. If we were given a broom closet, it would be the coolest, decked-out, neon-lit broom closet of all time.”
   —Chris Haskell, esports director and clinical associate professor, Boise State University

2. Address power and security. “Make sure you have enough power and good internet connections … and that you don’t have 5,000 firewall rules like the rest of campus that can bog down games. There are patches that happen daily. Maintain security to have a good experience for your students.”
   —Kathy Chiang, assistant director, UCI Esports, University of California, Irvine

3. Decide between multiuse and just-for-esports. “Seventy to 75% of our space is open play. I don’t care who you are, if you’re an enrolled student, you can swipe in and use the arena anytime we’re open.”
   —Brandon Smith, esports director and enterprise project lead, The Ohio State University

4. Plan for remote use. Boise State has 110 workstations. It has 30 gaming laptops that got little use before the pandemic. Now, Haskell says varsity players are using them to keep playing at home. Something to consider as you build for the future.

5. Ask questions. “What is the goal of having the space? Is it to have practices and competitions? Is it to have events with spectators, or is it something for students to come in and play more casually? What is the interest on campus? Are you providing console or gaming PCs? What is the administrative support you have?”
   —Joey Gawrysiak, director of esports and associate professor, Shenandoah University (Va.)
Chris Burt is UB's esports editor.

with laptops and sit in the area where the Xboxes were and plug into the wall.” Refurbishing it the way the team envisioned would be costly: $250,000. But the team took on the challenge, without university finances, by “getting a lot of sponsors and partners to come in and fund it,” she says. “They provided equipment that is very valuable—towers, monitors, peripherals and chairs.”

In the four years since the launch, UCI Arena has pulled in 13,000 unique users. Because of all the traffic, UCI is adding another esports facility in the future.

Chiang’s advice on any arena build? Listen to the real experts.

“Find leaders on your campus who are already doing esports,” she advises. “They understand which titles are popular and events that bring people out of their dorms. If you don’t get their input, you’re missing the mark.”

Brandon Smith, esports director and enterprise project lead in the Office of Student Life at Ohio State, echoes Chiang’s words. “Make sure you’ve engaged your Student Advisory Group early on. Use your facility to bring disparate working groups together so you can learn about that population,” he says.

Smith spent more than a year studying, pitching and perfecting his esports facility that launched last October—a necessity on a campus with 1,400 student organizations. OSU converted space in an aging Lincoln Tower residence hall.

Now, it is artfully tricked-out and includes VR setups and a sea of workstations, both for esports players and the campus community. His team worked with consultants, an architect and a designer, who noticed that the original plan lacked accessibility.

“You have to remain flexible,” Smith says. “We didn’t put together our list of final equipment until the last minute. We were conscientious about studying power. We’ve paid a lot of attention to air conditioning and not overloading the system.”

His space has “97 percent” of what he’d hoped for ... and he, too, got sponsors. Most importantly, he did a lot of legwork early, met with all key stakeholders and kept Ohio State’s mission in mind.

“Build on the strengths of your university,” Smith says. “Use esports for whatever your university can get out of it, to promote your university, to help students succeed. Start with something that gets you going sooner, rather than later.”

Upcoming Academic Esports Conference & Expo, academiesportsconference.com

**Three eSports Arena Builds: From Modest to Massive**

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* To save costs, all design work and construction was done in-house
** UCI is adding another esports facility in the future
Streamlining the campus parking experience

Park Assist’s patented camera-based, smart-sensing parking guidance system makes UT Dallas parking more efficient

The University of Texas at Dallas wanted to create a more streamlined and efficient parking experience for the approximately 32,000 students, staff, faculty and vendors on campus regularly. Additionally, UT Dallas had seen parking capacity double from 7,000 to 14,000 spaces over 10 years.

When planning for three new parking garages, which would add over 2,700 spaces, UT Dallas leaders elected to explore technological options to make it easier for users to take advantage of the university’s multilevel color-coded system. They also sought to enhance the perceived value of parking permits and gather actionable data for analysis and forecasting of future needs.

‘Actionable parking data’
“We wanted a solution that would add value for end users, while also providing actionable parking data to help manage today and to plan enhancements for the future,” says Bob Fishbein, associate vice president for auxiliary services.

After two years of research, UT Dallas chose Park Assist’s patented M4 camera-based, smart-sensing parking guidance system (PGS).

Guidance and license plate recognition
Before installing the Park Assist M4 system, traditional static signs and markings served as the only indicators directing drivers to color-coded areas for specific user groups, with no indication of whether bays were occupied or available.

Lacking sufficient data on parking usage and trends, UT Dallas found it challenging to forecast usage and to allocate the proper number of spaces for specific user groups in multiple parking areas. Drivers spent a long time looking for appropriate color-coded spaces.

M4 smart-sensor LEDs are programmed to quickly display a broad spectrum of colors to guide permit holders to unoccupied bays in their designated parking areas. License plate recognition technology at entry points and in the camera-based, smart-sensors allows the system to ensure that permit holders occupy appropriate spaces.

Increased permit usage and better analytics
The perceived value of acquiring a permit has risen dramatically as a result

“The ability to change parking spotlight colors to match our parking permit needs was essential.”

For more information, please visit parkassist.com

Share this story online at UBmag.me/parkassist
of the streamlined parking strategy and the ability for permit holders to easily find unoccupied spaces in their designated areas.

“The ability to change parking spotlight colors to match our parking permit needs was essential to us,” says Cris Aquino, director of parking and transportation for UT Dallas.

Leveraging the data-driven analytics of the core M4 system, UT Dallas operators can fine-tune the number of bays assigned to various user groups and areas as well as accommodate special events to maximize efficiency. Also, actionable data is helping UT Dallas accurately plan for an additional 1,200-space garage.

How much time do faculty, staff and students spend looking for parking spaces and locating their vehicles?

Wasted time is tricky to quantify. We do know from a benchmarking study we did with the Brisbane Airport Corp. in Australia that parking guidance systems reduce the time it takes to park—anywhere from 25% to 60%. These percentages are based on the quantitative impacts of our M4 parking guidance systems on the time between vehicles entering the parking garage and parking in a vacant space.

Why is parking garage security important, and how can colleges improve their current systems?

Typically, most criminal activities occur between the vehicles—not in the middle of the driving aisles. Traditional security systems do not necessarily provide the visibility required to capture and document everything in a garage. A camera-based parking guidance system is installed in the middle of the driving aisle. The system covers every parked car. College and university parking facilities experience high turnovers between morning and evening classes, and those are times when people worry about security. Improving security in garages is a critical part of providing a secure parking experience.

How can higher ed improve policy compliance and enforcement?

Most campus parking facilities have some form of permit system. Traditionally, that’s been through a monthly or a semester-based permit. Many colleges and universities don’t have an automated method for compliance or enforcement. The approach has been either to put boots on the ground to manually check permits on dashboards or windshields, or to install gate equipment at entries and exits. Both are costly, with boots on the ground including labor costs. A camera-based parking guidance system, which includes license plate recognition technology, integrates with a permit system to provide a set of reports and rules. For example, when someone parks in a zone with the wrong permit, a noncompliance alert is generated. It could start as a soft warning and progress to further enforcement based on the parking rules.

What parking management solutions streamline and optimize these operational efficiencies?

The key asset is the parking space. Everything else is there to support it. Measuring what’s going on with the parking space is a critical part of being able to optimize the operations associated with it. Camera-based parking guidance systems monitor parking spaces and their availability in real time. The data is distributed to directional signage to signal where there are available spaces, and it also flows into dashboards and mobile apps for operational staff to understand the performance and utilization of the parking facility.
SOUND SOLUTIONS

5 steps for delivering outstanding audio in distance learning
Online distance learning programs and higher ed videoconferencing can squeak by without stunning video or other flashy visuals. But poor audio is likely a dealbreaker for all involved. It’s not that the video side isn’t pretty important, but as IT and AV experts know, many factors go into ensuring top-notch sound—everything from hardware to room design to the performance skills of instructors.

“Because sound is invisible, unlike video and lightning, people often overlook it,” says Ian Wilkinson, the director of technology support services at Texas Tech University’s College of Media & Communication. “One of my ambitions is to bring awareness to people in online education to be mindful of the soundscape around their content,” adds Wilkinson, a longtime speaker at UB Tech.

Goals like that are even more important for higher ed institutions working through campus closures and the related switch to all distance learning, all the time. Here are five key steps, starting, perhaps, with what you need to spend money on.

1. Invest in microphones (good ones!)
   Wilkinson has a mantra when it comes to distance education: Spend more money on microphones than on your cameras.

   The microphones built into many cameras produce lesser quality audio than standalone units. “If you have $1,000 for a camera, I say get a $100 camera and spend the other $900 on the microphone and audio equipment,” he says. “People can deal with not-great visuals or a low-res image, but if they can’t hear it, no matter how good it looks, people are going to be irritated and they’re going to turn it off.”

   At Kansas State University’s Olathe campus, the only time students complain about distance learning is when there have been audio problems, says IT Manager Nate Scherman.

   At both Olathe and Kansas State’s main Manhattan campus, several rooms are equipped with ceiling mics. While presenters don’t have to worry about attaching lapel mics or using other devices, IT and AV techs must ensure the ceiling mics cover the rooms adequately, Scherman says.

   K-State presenters have also had success with built-in camera mics made by Polycom. These cameras track speakers automatically and integrate well with videoconferencing platforms such as Skype, Zoom and Microsoft teams.

   This tracking gives distance learners a good view of the face of the presenter, rather than a static, wide-shot of a classroom full of students, Scherman says, which complements the audio for students.

2. Realize it’s a performance.
   Professors presenting online—whether for a live feed or a lecture capture—need to be exceedingly aware of their surroundings.

   Rustling papers or typing notes, the noises that are picked up by microphones, can be pretty irritating to viewers and listeners. Plus, that’s a prob-
lem an AV tech can’t fix with software or hardware, says George Chacko, the senior manager of A/V services at Pace University in New York.

“One of the biggest factors with audio is user presence and awareness,” says Chacko, whose presentation at UB Tech 2019 in Orlando covered audio and video for online collaboration. “A lot of times people are too involved in the presentation and don’t realize they’re making ambient noise.”

Presenters who speak softly or who don’t adjust microphones to suit their height can make audio harder to hear. Whirring fans, squeaky chairs, vibrating computers, fingers drumming on tables and sounds coming through windows can also disrupt the audio, particularly when listeners are using headphones, adds Wilkinson of Texas Tech.

Poor audio also causes accessibility problems, making videos harder to caption.

What this all means is that instructors need to treat online learning as a performance.

“A noisy environment is distracting and leads to less retention of information,” Wilkinson says. “The stuff we tune out as people, the mic doesn’t tune it out. If a video is noisy or the sound is terrible, students will not enjoy the presentation and not learn as much from the content.”

### 3. So, train those presenters!

Often, presenters who record themselves will do a quick check to make sure everything is working, but they rarely watch the entire video, experts note. That’s why encouraging instructors to rehearse is as important as training them to spot potential noise disruptions, Wilkinson says.

Because some people have a hard time watching themselves on video, Wilkinson recommends a “faculty exchange” program in which presenters share their videos so they can provide each other with feedback.

Asking students for feedback is another way to improve video presentation skills—and ensure high-quality audio.

“You should listen to the people who have to consume your content to get their grade and move on through school,” Wilkinson says.

At Pace, Chacko and his team offer presenters tips such as making sure microphones aren’t pointing at audio speakers. Readers who are in rock bands know, of course, that the wrong placement can cause feedback.

Also, Pace educators are encouraged...
to host videoconferences from smaller rooms, where there will be less echo and the environment will be easier to control.

4. Stay in touch with instructors
And at K-State University-Olathe, even before COVID-19 closures, about 80% of the classes were conducted by videoconference with the main campus about two hours away.

The IT team, therefore, likes to stay in touch with instructors to provide feedback on their presentations and help them make adjustments when problems arise, explains Scherman. “Our goal is for everything to be easy to use so they can be teaching as naturally as possible, even though students are video-conferencing.”

Scherman recommends that instructors not rely too much on screen shares or PowerPoints when delivering remote instruction. “For many distance students, just seeing a PowerPoint can get monotonous if they don’t see people and have that feeling of interaction,” Scherman says. “We tell instructors they should stay on camera as much as possible.”

5. Learn to multitask
Matthew Evertson, a English professor at Chadron State College in rural Nebraska, says he has embraced distance learning because it allows more students to participate in his classes more often.

“Teaching remotely, Evertson has to keep more things in mind than just his lecture notes. Before each class, for example, he has to check that the classroom’s camera and ceiling mics and are properly configured with Zoom, the online video-conferencing software the college uses. If he forgets, it can cause degraded audio, particularly for class discussions. When the remote students message in to notify him, he may not see their alerts for several minutes if he’s lecturing, Evertson says.

And sometimes, he simply can’t fix the audio problems, which he may not even notice until he reviews the video after class, he adds.

“I’ll double check the mics and we seem to have them all correct but some of the time the audio’s just inexplicably bad,” he says. “We’re just cutting out. It could be the internet—there’s no way for me to know.”

Still, Evertson says he remains a firm believer in distance learning. “The students who are Zooming in, they’ve been very active in the conversations, and I’ve been able to have lots of students come into class who normally wouldn’t be able to do it.”

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer of UB.

Audio excellence
Here’s a quick-start guide to ensuring high-quality audio in online education:

1. Invest in high-quality microphones.
2. If recording in an active classroom, consider placing microphones in the ceiling so they cover the whole room to pick up discussions.
3. Encourage instructors to hone their performance skills.
4. Tell instructors to be aware of background noises, such as fans, rustling paper or sounds coming through windows.
5. Don’t point microphones at speakers—it creates feedback.
6. Suggest that instructors review recordings of their online courses to check sound quality.
7. Have instructors share their videos with colleagues to get feedback.
8. Get input from students on sound and video quality.
9. Make the recording process as easy as possible for instructors.
All respondents were asked if there has been an overall increase in the volume of packages received by students, faculty and staff members on their campus, compared to 3-5 years ago. **43% said there had been a “significant increase” and 27% said there had been “some increase” in the volume of packages received.** Just 23% said the volume had “remained the same” and just 8% said it had “decreased” on their campus.

Those respondents who had experienced an increase in volume of packages were then asked if the increase had created significant problems for their institution. **57% said “Yes, somewhat,” and 13% said “Yes, definitely.” Just 29% said this had not created problems.**

The same respondents were presented with a list and asked to identify the most significant problems created by the increase. The most common challenges were **lack of storage space (77%) and logistics of delivery and/or pickup (77%).** These were followed by “Recipients not picking up packages in a timely manner” (47%) and “Large amounts of cardboard and paper waste/recycling” (35%).

Overall, has there been an increase in the volume of packages received by students, faculty and staff members on your campus, compared to 3-5 years ago?

- **43%**
  - Yes, a significant increase
- **27%**
  - Yes, there has been some increase
- **23%**
  - This has remained the same
- **8%**
  - This has decreased
Would you say this increase in the volume of packages has created significant problems for your institution?

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<td>13%</td>
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When asked to describe how much insight their institution had into the total costs of all shipping, receiving and postage being used by all departments, 37% described it as “extensive and detailed,” while the leading answer was “Some,” selected by 44%. Another 16% said they had “Very little” insight and 3% said they had “None at all.”

What are the most significant problems created by the increase in volume of packages?

- **77%**: Logistics of delivery and/or pickup
- **77%**: Lack of storage space
- **47%**: Recipients not picking up packages in a timely manner
- **35%**: Large amounts of cardboard and paper waste/recycling

“This survey clearly demonstrated that Institutions are continuing to experience a significant increase in packages received on campus, and this trend is creating many challenges,” says Jason DeStratis, product manager at Pitney Bowes. “Leading institutions are implementing solutions such as on-campus tracking and delivery, self-service parcel pickup with intelligent lockers, and centralized management to keep track of costs and reduce expenses.”

If you would like to learn more about the campus mail and shipping solutions available from Pitney Bowes, visit PB.com/UB

*Data taken from the survey of UB subscribers, “Campus Mail Survey,” conducted in February 2020, with 163 respondents participating.
The coronavirus pandemic has and will continue to result in cancellation of important occasions, big and small. The college graduation is a particularly bittersweet loss in this fray. Many colleges and universities will likely host in-person commencement ceremonies later this year, but others are forging on now, building virtual events to celebrate students before summer begins.

Campus IT teams are already overloaded with remote learning needs, so many universities are outsourcing the process of creating a virtual ceremony with pre-recorded materials. Here’s a look at three actions these institutions are taking as they organize personalized, memorable experiences during the 2020 COVID-19 graduation season—creating pomp in uncharted circumstance.

**Soliciting student and family involvement**

With less than half a semester to plan, some higher ed institutions moved swiftly to reimagine their ceremonies.

**Florida Gulf Coast University** President Michael Martin sent a letter to pending graduates inviting their virtual attendance to the May 3rd ceremony. A tassel and mortarboard were also included with the letter. Students were asked to don the graduation garb in a short video clip as they shared a sentiment of thanks, or excitement for the future.

These clips, along with Martin’s speech (recorded the day before the nation’s stay at home order began), were integrated with other media. “We’ve developed a targeted social media video campaign featuring President Martin, faculty, staff and graduating seniors,” says Deborah Wiltrout, university associate vice president for marketing and communications at the university. “We also have a robust local media campaign, which has resulted in coverage by the region’s television stations and newspapers, about the event to generate excitement.” A story will be posted on FGCU360.com, the university’s news website.

A secure student portal where students could upload a photo, a comment

**More moving online**

A few of the colleges and universities that were converting their spring 2020 commencement ceremonies into digital experiences as of early May:

- Arizona State University
- University at Buffalo
- Clemson University
- University of California, Davis
- Florida State University
- University of Louisiana at Lafayette
- The Ohio State University
- University of Oklahoma
- The Pennsylvania State University
- Portland State University
- Purdue University
- University of South Carolina
- The University of Texas at Austin
- University of Wyoming
- Youngstown State University
- West Liberty University
Keeping it simple in complicated times

Accessibility, simplicity and shareability have never been more important.

“We’re combining website, database and video technologies to deliver mobile-friendly and ADA-accessible content, and using a custom Snapchat lens so students can commemorate their special day,” says Jeff Garner, FGCU’s assistant vice president for digital communications. For ADA compliance, FGCU is embedding a clip of the full commencement and conferral speech from YouTube with closed captioning.

West Virginia University students are encouraged to wear their graduation regalia during their May 16th virtual ceremony. They’re also encouraged to share videos and pictures via social media with the hashtag #WVUgrad.

Like Florida Gulf Coast, WVU leaders tapped StageClip for assistance with the event. Graduates were encouraged to upload short videos, photos or messages which were formatted into individual ‘clips’ and available for them to easily share with friends and family via email and social media after the virtual ceremony,” says Lisa Martin, special events coordinator.

With many schools choosing third-party providers for commencement support, campus IT teams can focus on the evolving needs of their newly solely digital institutions. Colleges are also relying less on live streaming for these events—a technology that has been growing in popularity as a way to allow non-attendees to view ceremonies. The focus now is more on compiling pre-recorded material for an edited, smooth experience. Jostens, Definition 6, Full Measure and Marching Order are a few providers of virtual commencement platforms.

Planning parting words carefully

A live commencement speech to a packed sports stadium requires a much different approach than a prerecorded talk. “The speaker should talk as if addressing a very small group in an intimate setting. Consider exchanging the podium for an armchair,” says Eileen Smith, a public speaking coach. “Think of this digital commencement speech as the modern day equivalent of President Franklin Roosevelt’s fireside chats.”

In such chaotic times, it is important to validate the feelings of disappointment and frustration the audience has about not being together, says Smith.

At FGCU, many 2020 grads also faced the challenges of Hurricane Irma. President Martin’s address drew connections, and applauded their bravery. These kinds of personal connections and candid anecdotes will help students feel connected, even if they can’t be together.

For other colleges and universities whose leaders may choose to only delay their commencement ceremonies, sites like Quaranteen University—launched and run by students to provide ceremonies for high school and college students—offer alternate option. That is, a chance for students to pull together themselves to participate in a grassroots virtual goodbye.

Stefanie Botelho is UB’s newsletter editor.
How to Improve Campus Facilities Maintenance and Operations

Using facilities maintenance data more effectively

The quality of campus facilities can be one of the most influential factors for prospective students before they choose to enroll in a college or university. Many higher education institutions struggle to maintain or repair aging campus buildings and to keep up with student expectations without increasing costs.

University Business recently conducted an audience survey covering this topic and asked higher ed leaders about the biggest challenges they face. This web seminar discussed the results of the survey, as well as strategies for improving the maintenance and operations of campus facilities.

Kasey Hobson
Senior Product Manager
Dude Solutions

Kasey Hobson: Correlation is not causation. There is no cause and effect with correlation. There may be an association, but the two variables may not be related. Causation would indicate that one event is the result of the other. Causation can be a little more challenging to show. It’s important that when we have data, we present and use it in a way that helps us make decisions to be more efficient, and that we’re not just putting two unrelated items together to make the data work.

Analytics helps us to provide and identify patterns and to suggest an improvement, and it allows us to help individuals make decisions that can better their organizations. It can help with decision-making about funding or needs-based items, or even with changing everyday patterns or making adjustments to staffing or investment into maintenance and operations. It can also allow us to be forward-thinking, using data to drive insights.

How do you focus on the basics of capturing data and deciding what to do with it? Use report dashboards and key performance indicators to help tell your organization’s story. Reports allow you to provide the right information to the right people at the right time so they can drive decisions.

Dashboards allow you to bring together a host of datasets in one location and provide insights into what matters. Then, using key performance indicators can help not only at an organization level, but also across industries. Once that foundation is established, you can start to answer questions, and you can begin to tell a story with your data.

Our survey questioned 100 participants from private four-year,
public four-year, private two-year and public two-year institutions. The first question had to do with the overall effectiveness of facilities maintenance and operations on a scale of 1 to 4. The average rating was 3. The next question was regarding the ongoing maintenance of campus facilities being more costly and burdensome over the past five to 10 years, and the respondents were in staggering agreement that it cost a lot more money.

We asked: “Has your institution been negatively impacted by unexpected and costly repairs, not just expected daily maintenance?” We saw across the participants that unexpected repairs could derail a plan. They can affect the planned maintenance that’s already scheduled, and that can have a downstream impact for maintenance and operations to continue on a planned path, which then can change the outlook, the budget, and the overall plan for the year and following years.

We asked where facility money is spent, and we saw that corrective maintenance is a higher cost and that proactive investment is lower. We also dove into whether institutions were able to anticipate facility needs. The results were pretty much that they’re spending either equal or more time responding to problems than to preventing problems.

We asked if facilities and departments can set a preventive maintenance schedule for one to two years in advance, which is key to preventing unexpected corrective maintenance costs. Less than half said “yes.”

With predictive analytics, we can look forward to what the future holds for maintenance operations. You may be asking questions about what maintenance costs today, such as: How many hours are we spending on maintenance? What event facilities are being used? How much energy are we consuming? With predictive analytics, we can shift to looking at tomorrow. How much will maintenance cost in one to two years or five to 10 years? That allows for capacity planning, resource planning, and budget planning.

At Dude Solutions, we aim to give our clients a deeper understanding of their operations. We want to help them to make decisions and to drive change management and efficiencies back into their business, based on the insights that they can get out of their data in the system.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws031220
Planning for Your Institution’s Future Financial Success: Secrets from 6 Higher Ed Leaders

Insights from recent research

Stewart Clark: We analyzed our survey data from 100 higher ed institutions and compared it against survey results from prior years, and the responses haven’t shifted significantly. In particular, most institutions continue to see a challenging financial landscape for higher education, and they haven’t shown forward momentum against key financial goals. This year’s report also includes the insights and advice from a panel of prominent budget and finance experts at both public and private colleges and universities.

The first section of the survey is a high-level view of the current state of higher ed finances. We asked the respondents if they believe their institution’s current business model will be viable in five to 10 years, and 40% don’t believe it will be, which is a pretty scary statistic. The panelists acknowledge that changes to organizations’ financial management are going to be required to ensure sustainability over the long term.

Another survey question asked what specific actions they’re taking to address financial sustainability. Reducing expenses has been the top goal for several years, and it was slightly lower this year versus last year—67% versus 73%. That begs the question of whether some of the schools are feeling a little less pressured on the cost side. Panelist Kimberly Bregenzer said, “It’s a real need to reduce expenses, given how challenging it has become to continue to increase tuition.”

The final question in this section highlights whether institutions feel like they’re agile. The vast majority, about 86%, lacked a high level of confidence, and 1 in 5 had no confidence at all.

Logan Anderson: One of the things that came out in this year’s survey was that a lot of institutions aren’t operating efficiently. When I talk with clients, they want to transition from trying to figure out what happened in the past to thinking about what’s going to happen next.

One of the indicators of operational inefficiency at a lot of the institutions is the budget cycle length, which can indicate whether an institution can perform critical, basic functions in an efficient manner. The survey results indicate that these processes are becoming longer, not
shorter. Many institutions are using an incremental budget model as a way to shift unrestricted or allocated resources across the institution.

The survey asked: “How do leaders within higher education feel they stack up against other industries when it comes to adapting modern financial planning tools?” Of the respondents, 76% feel they’re behind. This leads to a lag in the key strategic decision-making process, reducing the ability for the institution to flex dynamically.

Stewart Clark: Quality data enables institutions to follow the money trail. Unfortunately, though, for most colleges and universities, transparency of financial data is still an ongoing challenge. More than half the institutions we surveyed struggle with a whole range of key financial reporting capabilities.

The final survey question looked at a more recent trend in data science: predictive analytics. Given the challenges that many schools are having with the basics around reporting capabilities, it’s probably not surprising that only about one-quarter of institutions are using predictive analytics to support their planning and their finance activities. That said, 47% have predictive analytics as a long-term goal for the institution, and we think that’s a positive trend given the challenges the industry is facing.

Logan Anderson: One of the interesting points that came out of this year’s survey is how important organizational structures are, and it came in two parts: how the process is managed and how the people are managed.

This comes down to the idea of centralization versus decentralization. Because most universities are leveraging a centralized model, users are notified of their spending authority, but they don’t have a lot of discretion over the funding and the spending. But if you have great tools that allow you to distribute the process, it’s easier to execute a decentralized model.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws030320

The third annual edition of Kaufman Hall’s financial trends report provides insights on key performance benchmarks, and plans and challenges facing higher education budget and finance professionals in 2020. The report also includes insights from innovative officials at the University of Southern California, University of Arizona and Lane Community College in Oregon, among others.

This web seminar addressed some strategies, uncovered by research, from these leading institutions that can help any institution plan for financial success and sustainability.

A University Business Web Seminar Digest • Originally presented on March 3, 2020
Protect Your Campus With a Zero-Trust Cybersecurity Approach

Securing vital systems and data

A University Business Web Seminar Digest • Originally presented on February 26, 2020

Today’s colleges and universities require a cybersecurity model that embraces mobile-heavy user behavior, and protects people, data, devices and applications no matter where they are located. A “zero-trust” approach meets these needs by evaluating and granting access to users and devices both inside and outside of the campus environment based on levels of potential risk.

In this webinar, presenters discussed how to implement a zero-trust cybersecurity approach through a combination of clear policies, strategic use of technology and effective training.

Chris Irwin: Before we can understand what zero trust is, we need to understand what zero trust isn’t. Zero trust isn’t literal. You can’t build and manage a practical strategy around absolutes. Security is constantly changing. The variables are too complex, and you can’t just set a monolithic path and follow it.

Zero trust isn’t an adjective. You aren’t going to be zero-trust. It’s a very fluid state, and it’s a journey to get there. It’s not a product. There are no such things as zero-trust technology. There are lots of products and solutions that will help you get to a zero-trust state, but there’s no single solution. And zero trust is not a revolution.

What is zero trust? It’s a mindset. What we want to do is think. We don’t want to trust any single source. We want to employ multifactor authentication when it is available. We want to focus on breach containment.

And we need to understand that there aren’t enough people to handle all the work. Everybody’s understaffed, and the number of devices that we’re dealing with, the number of signals that we’re seeing, and the number of applications that we’re dealing with are all rising exponentially. You have BYOD in a university space and you have distance learning, so our student population has expanded exponentially.

So what does that mean? We have to focus on automation—on doing automated detection and remediation response to try to get to that zero-trust mindset. Automation is key.

Sam Buckhalter: The challenges of IT are changing drastically. At Microsoft, we believe identity is now the center of the modern approach to security. We want to help address the explosion of apps and all the challenges you have today. We want to make sure you’re able to keep up with the ever-evolving data privacy regulations, the General Data Protection Regulation and the different policies you have to comply with going forward. We want to meet your end users’ demand for increased modernization and flexibility about where they work and how.

As we dive into zero trust, we’re first shifting our mentality. We’re no longer looking at the physical network perimeter as the security boundary. We’re moving into logical constraints. What cloud and on-premise apps do we have? How do we need to protect them? Are they high-risk
If content access is granted incorrectly, what’s the value of that data to your organization? The second part is to assume that every resource on the internet is on the open web. We’re treating users the same way, whether they’re on your corporate network or in Starbucks. Effectively, there is no safe place.

Finally, we’re looking at a “never trust, always verify” mindset. We never trust the default elements of an environment. You want to be asking these questions: Where does this user log in? What are their standard behavior patterns? Do they usually log in from Colorado? Why am I seeing logins from France or South America? What is their normal behavior? What devices are they coming from? Are those devices trusted? Are they personal devices? Are users coming in from web-based experiences? And how do you handle each of those scenarios? We’re always verifying while providing the experience and security mechanisms that are necessary for specific sessions.

The world is much bigger than Microsoft, so Microsoft single sign-on supports over 1 million third-party apps. You can connect to those apps, and you can leverage the same zero-trust mentality and all of the security functions that you use for Microsoft Office 365 workloads.

Ultimately, we want to provide one collective identity for all single sign-ons. You want to be able to give users access to all of the apps they need and offer the same level of security control.

“We have to focus on automation—on doing automated detection and remediation response to try to get to that zero-trust mindset. Automation is key.”

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws022620
UB Survey Results: Improving Campus Mail Center Operations

Adapting to changing student needs and expectations

A University Business Web Seminar Digest • Originally presented on March 11, 2020

Campus mail centers are evolving rapidly. The continued increase in online ordering has resulted in large volumes of packages being delivered to campuses, creating a variety of challenges.

University Business recently conducted a subscriber survey about this topic with Pitney Bowes, asking higher ed leaders how their institutions are handling the increase in packages, what their greatest challenges are, and how much insight they have into their shipping costs.

This webinar addressed the survey results and ways campus mail operations can improve efficiency and flexibility, reduce costs, and meet changing student expectations.

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: First off, our subscriber survey had a pretty high-level question: “Overall, has there been an increase in the volume of packages received by students, faculty and staff on your campus compared with just three to five years ago?” Our top answer was “yes,” with 43% saying that. Another 27% said there’s been some increase. But just 23% said the volume has remained the same. Jason, this probably doesn’t come as a big surprise to you.

Jason DeStratis: Absolutely not. Two-thirds of the respondents are saying there’s an increase. That’s what I’m hearing when I’m out in the university space. And with online shopping, I don’t see that pattern changing. It’s going to continue to grow.

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: When respondents said “yes,” we asked: “Would you say this creates significant problems for your institution?” Almost 15% said this has created significant problems, with almost 60% saying “somewhat.”

Jason DeStratis: If you have a modern facility, you may have the space to deal with the volume coming in. But for a lot of universities and colleges, their receiving facilities have been around for a long time. Small, cramped space is an issue when it comes to package volume, and processing in a tight space can also be challenging.

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: We asked about their significant problems. It was a tie for the top answer: a lack of storage space and the logistics of delivery and/or pickup. Both were 77%. Almost half said “not picking up packages in a timely manner” was a problem.

Jason DeStratis: If recipients are not picking up packages in a timely manner and not present to receive packages, there are struggles. You’re holding on to packages longer and having to maintain custody of those packages longer. There is a cost associated with that. Having an inventory of packages that haven’t been picked up is a waste of space.
“As universities are looking to promote themselves in a competitive market, one thing they don’t want the prospects touring campus to see is a huge line just to pick up whatever you ordered from Amazon.”

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: The next question we asked was about where and how packages are delivered. The top answer by a huge margin was one central mailroom for all students.

Jason DeStratis: Monday can be the worst day for a lot of universities. The lines are long for students to pick up their packages. That is not only a stress on the operations, but also something the students aren’t thrilled about. As universities are looking to promote themselves in a competitive market, one thing they don’t want the prospects touring campus to see is a huge line just to pick up whatever was ordered from Amazon.

Every university and every college has a different starting point and has a long history of how they got to today. The most important thing to understand is the current state of circumstances at the college or university. What can we do to make an impact on those circumstances? How do you get control of the information around all the packages and mail being moved through your system?

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: We asked our survey respondents to describe how much insight their higher ed institution has into the total costs of shipping, receiving and postage for all departments. More than 30% described it as “extensive and detailed” but that there is a lot more uncertainty. The leading answer, “some,” was selected by almost 45%. Another 15% said, “very little.”

Jason DeStratis: I think this is right. Once again, some universities and colleges have been able to make the decision to bring everything under control. That doesn’t mean they have solved all of their issues, but bringing everything under control has been an initiative. I think that for a lot of folks, it’s: “We’ve been doing it this way for a long time, and until recently, there wasn’t all that much pain behind it.” Now, that pain might be starting to grow, and that’s why we’re here talking about this.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws031120
Predictive Analytics and the Future of Enrollment Management

Using enrollment management data strategically

Bryan Terry: One of the pressures that some enrollment managers are facing is: How much of the recruiting budget should be allocated to different populations? Most of us don't have unlimited budgets, and money is an issue. But it's not just about money. It's about people, it's about time and it's about bandwidth. And we need to be prepared for an even rockier road ahead in the admissions world.

On the predictive analytics side, I believe in the bell curve. To the right of the curve are the students who are coming, no matter what. On the left side of the curve are students who are not coming, no matter what we do. But how much time do we spend with that population of students we're not sure are coming? We have a gut feeling, but we don't know for sure. The bell curve helps us work with that. That's why we like Rapid Insight. The product helps us understand who the students in the middle are, and gives us ways to reach out to them.

The middle group is the fence-sitter group. We have teams of financial aid and admissions people who go out and try to move those students into the "great fits" group because time is critical. We use Rapid Insight to say, "Let's focus on this population of students because it's going to make the most sense." Another reason is the ease with which you can review your data. Rapid Insight allows us to take stock of our information about our prospects and students.

Finally, many institutions do a great deal of work with data to predict how well a student does on the way in. But how often do we see students dropping out based on financial need? You have to ask if your student success model looks beyond the first year. It can help with retention. Pay attention to the student success side. I don't think we do nearly enough of that kind of work at our institutions.

Working with Rapid Insight, we've been able to identify easy wins. We can collect information not only to enroll students, but also to help those students succeed and graduate. I'm not
Data-informed enrollment management is the standard in higher education. Many institutions are harnessing the power of predictive analytics, which can enable leaders to improve everything from incoming class headcounts and academic quality to key performance indicators for diversity and financial aid outlays.

This web seminar focused on predictive analytics and the future of enrollment management. It featured the vice chancellor for enrollment management at Arkansas State University.

saying that a personal touch doesn’t help, but it’s not going to help all students. You have to do what’s right and back it up with data. Invest in predictive modeling because it will tell you what population to stay in contact with. Then, you can work hard on making sure you’re interacting with students you actually have a chance to enroll.

James Cousins: The most significant aspect of Rapid Insight’s background is that we’ve been doing this for quite a while. Our company mindset is providing our customers with a tool that they can use to build in-house capacity. We pride ourselves on the partnerships that we have with our users and the support that we offer.

You need to be able to assess the impact of your admissions from your in-state and out-of-state recruiting efforts and from other initiatives. It involves gathering as much data as you’re able to gather, with the confidence of being able to explore it and blend it into a single source.

A lot of the upper-level insights you can easily act on are a result of predictive modeling. There are many ways you can accomplish that, but I’m looking forward to showing you the way that Predict can help.

Enrollment management is definitely not a one-person effort, and it’s definitely not an effort undertaken by people who all think the same way. It’s all about outputting your data, and being able to take the results and share them in whatever format allows you, your team and your institution to act on them most effectively.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws021820
How are higher education technology leaders using IT resources today and planning to meet the future challenges? How are colleges and universities allocating IT budgets across the run-grow-transform spectrum of priorities? And how can IT leaders move from just maintaining technologies, to growing and transforming their institutions?

This web seminar explored the results of a new UB subscriber survey exploring these topics, as well as higher ed technology leadership, budgeting and strategies for 2020 and beyond.

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: We deployed a survey to UB's full audience of higher ed leaders. One of the questions was about how their IT budget is allocated. The leading answer: 67% of the IT budget is typically allocated toward maintenance and operations. Andrew, does this surprise you?

Andrew Graf: It doesn't surprise me at all. We see this quite frequently. As technology proliferates, sometimes people in university administrations forget that all new technologies have to be cared for on an ongoing basis. This is a common challenge.

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: Another question: Do respondents feel they are meeting student expectations, particularly when it comes to technology and their college experience? A very small percentage agreed strongly. A higher percentage said, "yes," they meet student expectations. But more than half said they disagreed, and another good percentage said they strongly disagreed.

Andrew Graf: Again, this doesn't surprise me. But one thing that did surprise me is that there's anyone who says they strongly agree that they're meeting student expectations at this point, especially since students are engaging with and leveraging consumer-focused technology all the time, and that technology is changing rapidly. It’s hard for most universities to take large enterprise systems and put interaction points on them that can compete with the ease and simplicity of the tools that students are using day in and day out.

When 67% of an institution's budget is spent just keeping the lights on, it's hard to change this dynamic. How do we switch resources to provide technologies that not only meet expectations, but also satisfy students?

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli: We've talked about a number of challenges. Will you talk a bit more about solutions to some of those challenges—some of the ideas and strategies?

Andrew Graf: A few areas we’ve seen schools focus on are improving service management maturity and addressing self-service and automation, resource capacity planning and total cost of ownership.

Technology has exploded in higher education, and we continue to add more and more. We see a big opportunity to step back and review: What is the total cost of ownership of the different platforms we’re using, and how do we find ways to make them more cost-effective or to choose other solutions that may be more cost-effective?
Where are we going to get the biggest bang for the buck?
When you and your team step back and think about your process maturity, you’ll be able to identify a couple of key areas where you’re lagging or where you could effect change. Start there. And then, fine-tune.

The second component of this is driving self-service. One of the better ways to reduce the drag on resources is to self-serve more students, faculty and staff. Help Desk Institute did a study that compared the cost of self-service requests with the requests that team members had to address. Non-self-service requests cost on average $22, and self-service requests cost around $2. That’s an incredible return on investment.

Total cost of ownership for an application includes your licensing and maintenance fees, and also all the internal time that it takes to set up and, most importantly, to care for and feed. Managing vendor costs is becoming a bigger and bigger challenge. As you think about system administration, it’s important to evaluate how much time is actually going to be spent on the application. That should be asked about a lot in a request for proposal. Also, ask what can be automated within the system. What will save you time? What can you automate to lower the total cost of ownership?

What’s our philosophy about how we develop products? Our pillars are accessibility, serving students’ needs, rapid impact and fitting within budgets. If you look at these pillars that we use, maybe it could help in your own evaluation of technology, whether you’re building or buying.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws021120

“As you think about system administration, evaluate how much time is actually going to be spent on the application in a request for proposal. Also, ask what can be automated within the system. What will save you time? What can you automate to lower the total cost of ownership?”
Accuracy Matters: Accessibility in Faculty-Created Video

Accurate captioning improves videos, which is vital for online learning programs

A University Business Web Seminar Digest • Originally presented on February 20, 2020

Videos are essential for online programs, but they must be accessible. Requiring busy faculty to create video captions can be a challenge.

In this web seminar, the co-director of the Center for Excellence at Northwood University in Michigan discussed strategies for ensuring that faculty include accurate captioning in videos.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws022020

Jeanna Cronk: Our journey began with purpose. Our students are used to learning through videos, so we’ve been encouraging our faculty to try to use more videos for homework demonstrations, mini-lectures for classes or even just introductions.

At the time we started encouraging this a few years ago, our faculty mainly used webcams. A best-case scenario would be faculty giving the video to our media services team, who would then put it on their server so that students could at least stream it. About three years ago, we found out that our lecture capture product was reaching its end of life. And when I say lecture capture product, it was just instructors recording from a webcam or putting together a PowerPoint.

We knew we needed to find something better. We do not have a recording studio. We don’t have a department dedicated to helping our instructors record or edit videos with fancy equipment. So the responsibility was on the faculty members’ shoulders, with their university laptops, their webcams and some microphone headsets. Some of them were even recording on their smartphones.

We selected TechSmith Relay because we were already familiar with some of their products, and also because of how user-friendly this captioning product is for our faculty. The instructors are able to follow a few demonstration videos, and then they can access the product from their own devices, record, do some minimal editing, and upload. We also like that it integrates with Blackboard and that it has analytics with the videos, so the instructors don’t have to try to guess who is watching.

The TechSmith Relay tool analytics will say: Here’s the name of the user who played your video, and here’s the percentage of the video that was played. The tool also integrates with our grade center. So an instructor can indicate, for example, that if a student watches 80% of the video, then they get 80% of the possible points that were tied to that. Instructors can add quizzing into their conversations or chat messages.

An additional benefit is that the program can automatically generate captions. About six months prior to launching our TechSmith Relay program, we rolled out Ally in our Blackboard classes. It’s integrated into multiple learning management system instances, but it essentially helps faculty improve the accessibility of their course files. So when we started with Relay, it was an easy extension to
Jeanna Cronk  
Co-Director, Center for Excellence  
Northwood University (Mich.)

“The TechSmith Relay tool analytics will say: Here’s the name of the user who played your video, and here’s the percentage of the video that was played. An instructor can also indicate, for example, that if a student watches 80% of the video, then they get 80% of the possible points that were tied to that.”

talk to our faculty about the importance of captioning.  
I try to move beyond just the legal requirements of captioning and get into the variety of benefits. The first one is obvious: A student has a hearing impairment and is relying on the captions to understand the content. Accuracy is important in that instance. Captioning is also fantastic for students who are nonnative English speakers, such as international students. We also talk about the viewing environment. Maybe the student is in a situation in which they can’t have the audio playing, or their earbuds died, or they have the wrong cord adapter so they have to rely on the closed captions.  
The quality of audio is also a critical piece. If the video has bad audio, students won’t watch it. So that’s another advantage of having captions—for an additional resource if the audio is bad.  
Then, of course, there’s retention of content. A lot of students say they want to see the words as well as hear them in certain subjects. For example, if there is terminology they’re not familiar with, or if there is a specific spelling they need to become familiar with, they can turn on that closed captioning.  
Finally, there’s multitasking. Students may be at the gym, and they’re on the elliptical machines and they’re trying to watch your video at the same time. With captions, they have the opportunity to read while doing something else.
Addressing Today’s Campus Needs with Mobile Ordering

Serving the campus community while maintaining social distancing

A University Business Web Seminar Digest • Originally presented on April 7, 2020

During these unprecedented times, many higher education institutions are finding unique ways to serve those who may need to remain on campus, while adhering to social distancing requirements. Many campus dining venues are transforming into grab-and-go operations to help limit person-to-person interactions.

In this web seminar, a panel of campus leaders discussed how they are using mobile ordering to serve students and faculty while maintaining social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

John Diaz: Initially, we thought we would do a nice presentation on how mobile ordering has been deployed on campuses. Then all of a sudden, COVID-19 came along, and the use of these technologies changed quite a bit. What has been the impact of COVID-19 on campus?

Nirmal Palliyaguru: We moved to kiosk-focused dining services. Students order the food through the kiosk, and we make sure everybody uses hand sanitizer after each transaction. We blocked off all seating on campus. It’s become almost like a drive-up or a pickup option.

Jennifer Paiotti: For us, it’s created an unbroken circle of change. We were on spring break when this came about, and then we transitioned to remote learning for the remainder of the semester. Within about two weeks, we had everyone moving out of their residence halls and on-campus apartments and moving home. Classes are now entirely remote, and 99% of staff are working remotely.

Tess Martinez: About 300 students remain on campus because they can’t get home. One dining hall is open, and we have a convenience store in the same building using mobile ordering. It wasn’t there before, but we were able to quickly repurpose a sandwich shop into a store for essential items so students can get medicine, toilet paper, hand sanitizer and microwave meals.

John Diaz: We’ve heard from a number of our clients that mobile ordering is working well for them as part of their response to COVID-19 since it helps them meet many requirements. One of the big things is that it helps them facilitate social distancing. For clients who already had mobile ordering deployed on campus, it gave them the ability to pivot relatively quickly and help keep their students and campus constituents healthy and safe.

The technologies can be used for more than food. Push notifications allow for accessible communication during a very fluid and very dynamic event.

We’ve also had some clients who didn’t already have this deployed and needed to get mobile ordering going very quickly. Fortunately, this technology lends itself to remote use, so we don’t have to send technical staff to campus.

How has this technology played a part on your campus?
Jennifer Paiotti: We’ve used it for targeted emails and push notifications. We’ve been able to message our students on how they can download digital books for classes. Our on-campus wellness center will be using mobile ordering for the delivery of box lunches to their offices. And in the fall, we’ll be using it to distribute textbooks to 3,800 registered students.

Tess Martinez: We set up the Market on Craver’s Essentials Program. Students drive up to a little loading dock, staff hand over items and off they go. There’s also food that’s going to expire, so we’ve been using a mobile-ordering market to sell off bundles of things, such as Starbucks coffee beans at a reasonable price.

John Diaz: How might things change when we start back up, and how will mobile ordering play a part?

Nirmal Palliyaguru: We will continue to expand offerings on mobile. Right now, we have our cafés and the primary buildings, but as we get ready for fall, we will be bringing in more venues.

Jennifer Paiotti: We will expand our mobile ordering, too. I look at things from a nondining perspective—possibly working with our recreation center, scheduling classes for our Health United building or integrating with our student emergency fund.

Tess Martinez: We have plans to put our ID card office on mobile so students can order replacements, submit photos, the whole nine yards. We’re talking about putting our concessions for football games on mobile so people can order from their seats.

Nirmal Palliyaguru: The technologies can be used for more than food. Push notifications allow for accessible communication during a very fluid and very dynamic event.

John Diaz: V.P., Retail Solutions Product Management Transact Campus

Jennifer Paiotti: Marketing Director, Auxiliary Services Xavier University (Ohio)

Nirmal Palliyaguru: Director, ACCESS Card Office and Property Management Santa Clara University (Calif.)

Tess Martinez: System Administrator The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws040720
Higher ed is under pressure to do more with less. Some schools are seeking to grow enrollment and revenues while maintaining or even reducing administrative overhead. This can be challenging for smaller institutions, which may lack the resources and knowledge base of larger universities.

In this web seminar, a leader from Bene’s Career Academy in Florida described how the institution was able to double its enrollment and add a new campus, while reducing many administrative tasks and costs, streamlining processes, and automating operations by implementing a cloud-based SIS.

Alex Arthur: Today’s students are doing a lot more research before deciding on a school. How do we get this information to these prospects quickly so they can make informed decisions? Immediate access to information is key to being able to get to Generation Z. We have to think outside of the box and start thinking of different platforms that can keep prospects engaged.

Dave Bracken: Our goal was to take all of what we did, put it all together, and look for a solution set that would allow us to run everything from A to Z. We found Orbund. What we loved was the ability to do everything from beginning to end—all in one system and all cloud based.

When a prospect fills out our web form, it goes into Orbund. Based on the campus location or which admissions officer is working on that particular day, Orbund automatically emails the right person with all the information about the prospect, triggers an automatic response system and does drip marketing.

Once a student is ready for enrollment, everything is electronic, from the registration process through to the graduation ceremony. The admissions process brings each student into the SIS, and finds out what program they’re interested in, their start date and their tuition. Everything associated with that student is all in Orbund. Our document management is also integrated, as well as our compliance reporting, automated procedures and system for tracking students after graduation.

Again, this is all cloud based. It’s built for web interfaces and web portals, and the pricing model allows for an unlimited number of student and teacher portals. All of these steps are designed to increase the efficiency of my staff and instructors and to increase the usability of the system by my students.

We’re able to import our ISIR files, which allows us to build our prospect pool from the ISIR records and will enable us to create the demographic information needed for iPads. So we’re populating data fields that we need for our compliance reports based on ISIR.

After 3 1/2 years, our Orbund system is used at three campuses. Our teachers are all grading papers electronically. Students do everything electronically. I don’t have paper in my world anymore.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit UBmag.me/ws022520
The Academic Esports Conference & Expo™ is the place for higher ed leaders and their teams to find out more about the revolutionizing world of competitive video gaming. With digital learning and online programs more essential than ever, a thriving esports program will enhance student engagement and maximize their academic experience.

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LAST WORD

We are all ‘essential’
Higher education continues to be on the front lines of innovation for the public good

By Jo Allen and Andrew K. Benton

Language matters. And in the life-and-death decisions surrounding COVID-19, the terms “essential employee” and “essential business” seem harsh. As citizens, we understand the need for safety behind the designations, but let’s be clear: In the broader value to society, we are all—every employee and every business—essential. We believe that a fuller understanding of how we are all essential is one of the great lessons that will come from this pandemic.

As governors make difficult decisions about stay-at-home orders and more, we are grateful for so many whose jobs have made our discomfort more tolerable—grocers, cleaners, waste collectors, deliverers, restaurateurs, repair personnel. It also seems a particularly poignant time to look at that designation of higher education as an essential business.

Even with most students leaving campuses (except for small numbers of international students and others for whom going “home” is not an option), we still serve, and faculty and staff provide, reimage, and deliver education and other services, primarily from their homes.

Higher ed’s past, present and future
The essential nature of higher ed resides in its past, present and future roles for advancing humanity. It is, after all, colleges and universities that educated the epidemiologists racing to find a cure or vaccine for COVID-19; and it is doctors, nurses, technicians, psychologists, nutritionists and other health care providers who serve on the front lines now. But it is also today’s students who are learning to anticipate and prepare for the next pandemic, whether they study health or the disciplines that will help us recover.

Higher ed’s greatest promise has always lain in the collective good. The nation, indeed, the world, that emerges after this pandemic will need more college-educated workers and leaders. More health care providers, to be sure. But also more scientists, technologists, business thinkers and leaders, public policy researchers, social workers, data analysts, teachers and other college-educated professionals who will be instrumental in learning and teaching lessons to prevent or address the next crisis. And we will need entrepreneurs of every stripe.

We will need writers who can explain and convince us of needed steps, resources and connections, and who can get information out. We will need artists and musicians to capture, interpret, and maybe even make some kind of sense of all of this—or give us a way to corral and chronicle the swirling emotions we feel.

Powerful partners
Our investment in our students for their—and our own—futures could not be more critical.

Our past, present and future essentialness reflects decisions this country made decades ago to invest in higher ed as the most promising avenue for bettering our nation. Research shows that investment has paid off, and private higher ed has been a powerful partner with our community colleges and public institutions in delivering that investment.

In North Carolina, 36 private institutions educate 90,000 students and award one-third of the undergraduate degrees and one-third of graduate and professional degrees (including 59% of medical degrees) in the state. Meredith College manages over $55 million in financial assistance to make this possible. California’s private, nonprofit institutions educate over 198,000 undergraduates, of which over 57,000 are Pell Grant students. They also serve over 180,000 graduate students, of whom nearly 13,000 graduate annually into the California health care workforce.

Just as significant is the economic impact we have on our communities. In North Carolina, the private higher ed sector is the state’s largest private employer with more than 66,000 employees and, with far more variables than employment, delivers an impact of more than $14.2 billion per year. In California, more than 100,000 employees serve at private, nonprofit higher ed institutions, which provide over $2.2 billion in institutional student aid to undergraduates.

Shaping the future
Clearly, the struggle to get back on our feet as a nation will be daunting, but the loss of higher ed as an economic engine would be even more disastrous.

The past of higher ed taught former generations of professionals how to recognize and prepare. The present has seen that preparation move into action. The future will be shaped by those whose education is preparing them for contributions to whatever comeback we envision and success we must. Our investment in our students for their—and our own—futures could not be more critical.

Jo Allen is the eighth president of Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Andrew K. Benton is president emeritus of Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, where he served from 2000 to 2019.
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– DEEANN WENGER, PRESIDENT NELNET CAMPUS COMMERCE

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