Reduced Admissions Processing from One Month to Two Days

Content Management at the Head of its Class

Industry: Government

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Sara Freeman
Director of Information Technology Services
Park University

Established in 1875 in Parkville, Missouri, Park University is an independent, four-year liberal arts college with its home campus nestled on the bluffs of the Missouri river. However, from this idyllic location, Park University has grown to become a global educational resource with a student body of 21,000 enrolled in 40 campus centers in 20 U.S. states. Thirty-four of Park University's 40 campus centers are located on U.S. military bases, serving undergraduate students in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

The Challenge

When a student applies for admission to Park University at any of its campus centers, the application launches a flow of many different types of content, mostly forms, that must be reviewed by three different university offices at the Parkville campus æ admissions, financial aid, and registration departments. Each application for admission is accompanied by grade transcripts, letters of reference, correspondence, and, in most cases, applications for financial aid and supporting documentation, such as the parents' tax statements. As such, student applications must be routed to all three offices for review before the decision to admit the student can be finalized.

According to Sara Freeman, director of information technology services at Park University, the manual sharing of student information was inefficient and time consuming, and often resulted in lost or misplaced paperwork delaying the application process. "Each campus center had its own way of sharing and processing applications," Freeman says. "There was no standardized way to manage and track the status of all of the content across all campuses. Some of it might be located at one of the offices at the Parkville campus, while some of it might still be at the campus center where the application was originally received."

As Park University's multiple, geographically dispersed campuses and its Internet site made its liberal arts degree programs more easily available to a wider student base, it became increasingly difficult to efficiently process the growing number of applications. "Poor document sharing, lost files, scattered student information, and inconsistent processes were preventing us from keeping up with an ever increasing enrollment," Freeman says. "It could take as long as a month for us to get back to the applicants, and this poor customer service was alienating the students we were trying to attract. We needed a document management system to help us easily share information in a very complex business environment."

The FileNet Solution

Park University began looking for a content management system in January 2003. By March, the University engaged FileNet and FileNet ValueNet partner, Xerox Global Services, to implement a FileNet Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution to streamline and centralize the management of all student applications for admission and financial aid. Challenged by an extremely short deadline, Xerox Global Services worked closely with Park University's IT department to implement FileNet Image Services, FileNet Web Services, and FileNet eForms at the Parkville Campus and all 40 campus centers within seven months.

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Simultaneous decision making among Park University's admissions, registrar, and financial aid offices is now a reality thanks to the streamlined processing and centralized repository of student information in the FileNet system. Incoming applications are immediately scanned into the FileNet system and are indexed according to type of form into the appropriate workflow. Instead of physically routing files æ and risking their loss æ back and forth between campus offices and other campus centers, approximately 200 system users at each of the campus centers simply retrieve and share student information without ever leaving their desks. They can just type in the student's name and immediately have all of the information for that student at their fingertips.

The FileNet eForms component makes life easier for prospective and existing Park students in the military, especially those stationed outside the United States. Military students have to rely on electronic correspondence to quickly complete paperwork and check on the status of their applications. Freeman also credits FileNet eForms for helping the university get the "cleanest and best" admissions data that it can obtain. "There is intelligence built into our admission eForms that keeps the data clean," Freeman says. "Someone applying for admission at Fort Bliss, for example, would see information on degree and course offerings only pertinent to Fort Bliss."

Park University uses FileNet Web Services to retrieve student records from the FileNet Image Services repository on the fly. To date, more than 100,000 pieces of content æ applications for admission and financial aid, transcripts, supporting financial documentation, correspondence, etc. æ have been scanned into the FileNet repository. That number is growing by an average of 18,000 scans per month, reflecting Park University's growth as a leading-edge educational institution.

The Bottom Line

By streamlining application processing, Freeman notes that FileNet has helped Park University get closer to "One University," the strategic vision set forth by Park's president. "Even though we have branches all over the United States, we want to function as 'One University,'" Freeman says. "This project with FileNet and Xerox Global Services has pulled us together as one entity more than anything else we've done."

Other key benefits include:

- Reduced application processing time from one month to two days
- Accelerated decision making in three key university offices
- Streamlined communication and collaboration among 40 campus centers
- Increased productivity and efficiency enterprise-wide
- Improved customer service to attract more prospective students

Park University is now in the process of expanding the benefits of the FileNet system to other administrative and academic areas. Freeman notes that the feedback from current system users has made the FileNet system very much in demand. "Change is difficult and it was brought about very quickly, but the buy-in was incredible," Freeman says. "Now, everyone can see the benefits of the exceptional improvement in workflows and the high volume of retrieval and scanning that reflects our growing enrollment. It's wonderful æ with FileNet, there are no lost documents and everything you need is at your fingertips."