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Charting the right path with IT governance

Implementing a governance model guides priorities and provides transparency

Located in Lincroft, New Jersey, Brookdale Community College is a public two-year institution serving approximately 14,000 students. The college maintains a robust IT infrastructure, and its administration has long been supportive of utilizing technology to drive efficiencies and improve the student experience.

In late 2016, as Brookdale was in the midst of outlining an ambitious IT strategic plan, the institution began to examine the options for implementing a technology governance model to effectively guide priorities, decision making, and technology investments. The purpose of the governance model was to, in effect, create a level playing field for the adoption of technology, solutions, and approaches. "We wanted to establish a decision-making process that allowed us to prioritize key projects, ensure that our technology resources were being used to its fullest potential, and support the institution's goals and objectives," says George Sotirion, chief information officer at Brookdale.

The institution's leadership recognized that a strong IT governance policy would not only bolster the college's mission, but also inform campus constituents about why certain technology solutions may or may not be implemented. "We wanted to clear away the clouds and identify the technology that was most important," says Brookdale Community College President David Stout. "The plan would help us map expectations to our strategic plan so that we could rank projects accordingly."

BROOKDALE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Primary Challenge
Implement an IT governance policy to help guide decision-making and technology priorities

Solution
Ellucian Managed Services

Results
Enhanced collaboration across the institution

Increased transparency into the decision-making process

Better focus on priorities that support the institution

"Sometimes the college community wasn't aware of exactly why certain decisions were being made, and if they were putting forth ideas, why those ideas weren't being adopted, causing a level of friction and disengagement," says Sotirion. "So really, it all had to do with transparency."

Brookdale partnered with Ellucian Managed Services to establish a cross-functional IT steering committee to create an IT governance plan. The committee allowed stakeholders to provide input and agree on the path forward. The committee then presented its formal plan to Brookdale's president and the senior leadership team. The plan was met with overwhelming support and was formally adopted in late 2019.

Eliminating confusion

Sotirion notes that, prior to implementing a governance plan, establishing IT priorities and decision making occurred in a siloed, inefficient fashion. "Various teams across campus established their own vision of the most important technology task to undertake and where we should be putting our resources," he says. "That system would sometimes lead to inefficiencies and, occasionally, conflicts between departments over competing IT projects."

To combat this problem, the IT steering committee began with workshops and information gathering sessions, all while keeping the college's leadership involved. With the input of deans, students, faculty, and other constituents, the committee began crafting a plan that would not only build transparency and collaboration, but also guide the institution in prioritizing its technology needs in a manner that would foster growth, efficiency, and—most importantly—student success.

"What's on everyone's mind is the budget—and how we can acquire the right technology to meet the demands of employees and students," says Stout. "A college president is not in the position to select technology. But the value of a governance structure is that we can identify and prioritize projects with the agreement of cross-functional leaders. That's the value, it provides crucial insight for a president as to what will work. Some new technology may seem like it can save the world, but will it work for us? Our new governance structure allows us to answer that with more confidence than ever before."

"Probably the most pleasant part of the project was how among all the constituency groups it really was universal that there needed to be an established decision-making process," says Sotirion. "And I think because of that, there was a lot of enthusiasm to participate and to buy into the new plan."

Collaboration is key

For Brookdale, the end result has been the creation of a governance structure that allows for collaborative decision-making and a focus on priorities that support overall college outcomes. "Projects and resources can now go to the area that has the most opportunity and best aligns with the college's strategic goals and objectives," says Sotirion.

President Stout emphasizes that the new governance model has certainly been a success, and the real value comes from the clarity it brings to discussions around campus technology. "Our governance model empowers us to ask more questions around how we can improve. It has led us to make more meaningful decisions, quickly and easily, and people are now more willing to have conversations about the ROI of projects."
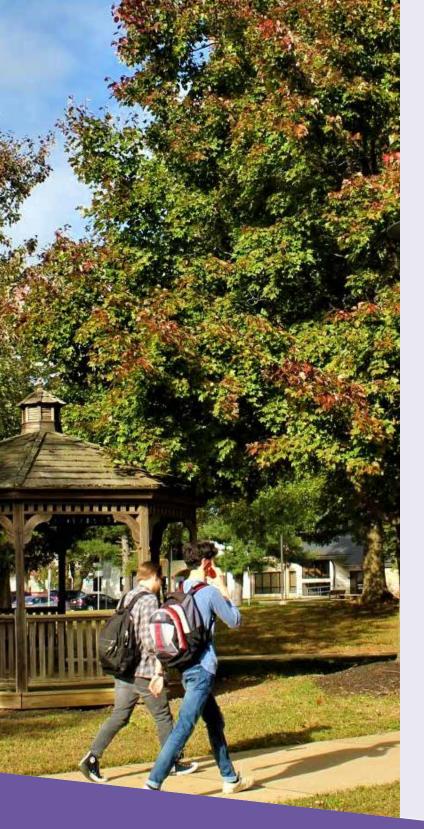
Sotirion notes that the process for incorporating a technology governance model has had additional benefits as well, with renewed emphasis on security and data standards. "Some of the major things we've been working on now is creating a data standards and information security group," he says. "We've put a formal program in place that has been adopted by our Board of Trustees and we're continuing to work on that and build out additional frameworks underneath it."

For other institutions that may be considering an IT governance model, Sotirion recommends keeping the lines of communication open and involving multiple constituents across campus. "By engaging with all of the different constituent groups on campus, you can discuss the opportunities for technology to help your institution and it gives you a unique opportunity to partner with these constituents to lead the change," he says.

President Stout agrees. "I would recommend getting other employees across campus involved in the process for their buy in. Rely on their expertise, because they can see around corners and see the emergence of new technologies in different ways. That enables the institution to see further down the road and prepare for what comes ahead."

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