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Modernization as a Change Agent

How St. Thomas University partnered with Ellucian for a SaaS-enabled digital transformation

St. Thomas University (STU)—a private institution in Miami Gardens, Florida—faced mounting pressure to generate new sources of revenue while continuing to support the needs of a diverse student community. Outlining a bold vision for the future, they partnered with Ellucian Managed Services (EMS) for a complete turnaround of operational processes and technology.

In the fast-changing world of higher education where competition for students is fierce, President David A. Armstrong, J.D. understood STU needed eliminate complex, legacy processes and rally around change. Remaining static would not only impact the institution's bottom line but would fail to achieve the learning outcomes core to STU's success. A turnaround at this scale would require collaboration across all stakeholders, so STU leaders began their strategic plan by reexamining the institution's value proposition to its students, alumni, and community as an Archdiocesan university. It was important to strengthen the school's distinctive Catholic and Miami identities while piloting new innovations to stay competitive. All employees would have a part to play.

As STU planned an operational overhaul, change management would only be one half of the equation. They needed the right technology to meet their long-term goals.

Renewed Mission, Reimagined Operations

In the past, STU lagged in modernizing its processes and technology. The result was unproductive strategic planning, disengagement from the school's core purpose, inadequate technology infrastructure, and labor-intensive back- office processes. STU, once the leading Catholic school in the South, found itself unable to keep up with rapidly evolving conditions in higher education. Confronting the possibility of a merger, leaders set their sights on an ambitious growth plan.

CASE STUDY

Main Challenge
STU needed to transform their operational processes and technology.

Solutions
- Ellucian Managed Services
- Ellucian Colleague SaaS

Resuts
82.3% increase in undergraduate enrollment

75% reduction in IT ticket backlog

Established a new, tiered IT governance system to improve project efficiency

Streamlined staff onboarding with an improved technology alert system

As the university accelerated investments into their mission and expanding programs, they needed to simultaneously retool their operations to sustain momentum. STU's strategy sought to build business resiliency with three operational objectives:

- Diversify revenue streams, driven in part by establishing new and innovative academic programs

- Strengthen the university's fiscal position and produce consistent operating surpluses

- Drastically reform operations, including a complete transformation of their technological footprint

Scaling a university means setting the stage to enable and sustain growth. This requires an investment in adequate systems and technology, commitment to training staff, and—crucially—the right partner to help see it through.

Partnering with Ellucian Managed Services (EMS), President Armstrong was confident technology would be an instrument for growth, not an inhibitor. He characterizes the school's relationship with EMS as one driven by "real talk." "Ellucian is a partner, not a vendor," he explains. "If we get to the point where our IT team can't fix a problem, I know that the Ellucian team is easily available and will do everything they can to help us."

During this phase, the EMS team focused on momentum-building operational and technology solutions to sustain the university's growth. **In close collaboration with the school's finance and HR offices, EMS swiftly:**

- Installed six miles of Single Mode Fiber interconnecting the campus and (400) Wi-Fi 6 wireless access points

- Established a new, tiered IT governance system to improve project efficiency

- Reduced IT ticket backlog by 75% due to improved processes and transparency

- Streamlined staff onboarding with an improved technology alert system

- Improved the technology inventory system to support new users

- Provided 24/7 IT expertise and continuity support

- Reduced Help Desk's "average speed to answer" to one minute

As the partnership continued, the role of EMS transformed from crisis support to strategic thought leadership, identifying new revenue pipeline opportunities, brainstorming new community programs to attract local recruits, and developing a technology vision and strategy that will help STU meet its growth aspirations.

Accelerating Future Growth

Technology modernization can serve as a change agent for higher education. STU leaders, in partnership with the EMS team, charted a SaaS-enabled digital transformation journey together, resolving ongoing concerns and clearing the path to unprecedented growth.

Previously, antiquated, overly complex infrastructure and manual workarounds made STU's operations vulnerable human error and natural disasters. As more time passed with legacy, on-premises systems, concern mounted over potential shut-downs, whose lengthening recovery times would be detrimental to student learning, school reputation, and finances.

Looking ahead, Ellucian Colleague SaaS will fundamentally change the way the STU operates. **In addition to answering business continuity concerns inherent to legacy systems, IT and school leaders recognize other SaaS benefits:**

- Easy, 24/7 access to modern software applications for students, faculty, and staff
- Access to advanced applications and high-tech solutions
- Agility for integrating new solutions
- Elimination of labor-intensive customizations and installations
- Improved cash flow
- Enhanced data protection and security capabilities
- Redirection of time for IT, HR, financial aid, and finance teams toward more high-value activities
- Ability to expand student reach through online programming

President Armstrong reflects, **"Today's students are digital natives. Access to secure technology is becoming an important—if not the most important— aspect of the day-to-day experience of students. Cloud is the only means to keep pace with those changing expectations and reach more students."**

Furthermore, the cloud supports STU's growth trajectory. As user headcount increases, on-premises data centers would need to be overhauled to keep pace. With the cloud, STU no longer needs to manage and upgrade servers. Instead, Colleague SaaS will easily scale to meet the growing capacity and integrate new functionality as needed.

Over time, these SaaS solutions will help to modernize the student experience while minimizing the cost of operations, letting STU focus time and funding on the three pillars of their strategic plan: **"Limitless devotion. Limitless opportunities for students. Limitless results."**

With an eye on future growth in partnership with Ellucian, STU will continue to modernize operations, expand learning opportunities, and effectively serve a greater number of students.

In their first phase of strengthening operations, STU recorded a **4.6%** increase in overall enrollment, including:

82.3%
increase in undergraduate enrollment

82.7%
increase in master's programs enrollment

36.4%
increase in the law school enrollment

8.7%
increase in doctoral programs enrollment

What is SaaS?
SaaS (software-as- a-service) describes models in which cloud-based applications are hosted and maintained by a third-party vendor and delivered over the internet via subscription.

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