



Oral Roberts's Enrollment Surges with Banner

Oral Roberts University has seen 15 consecutive years of enrollment growth by understanding student needs.

In April 2014, Mike Mathews was appointed Chief Information Officer (CIO) at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma—a four-year private institution. Oral Roberts had steadily grown enrollment by 5% over eight years from the 2006–07 academic year to the 2013–14 academic year, but keeping lightning in a bottle was another matter.

Some of this came down to sticking with what works. By the time Mathews came on board, Oral Roberts had already utilized Ellucian Banner for over 20 years. However, general budget concerns had arisen and some members of ORU's leadership were pushing to consider evaluating other software platforms for their ERP/SIS needs. Mathews and others proved ORU was on the very best ERP/SIS system and the university has reaped the rewards ever since.

In subsequent years, ORU has implemented additional solutions like Degree Works to boost enrollment growth to 35% from the 2013–14 academic year to the 2020–21 academic year and to provide a comprehensive student experience. Banner and Degree Works have enabled ORU to personalize student schedules to meet every student need from that student's learning style to the time of the day they feel most alert. This is evidenced by ORU continuing to rank in the top 10 universities in student engagement in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Doubling Down on Banner

During his interview process to become ORU's CIO, Mathews was asked outright about replacing Banner. According to him, he was



Case Study

Main Challenge

Oral Roberts had to maintain its student growth and success

Solutions

Banner
Degree Works

Results

- 15-year enrollment growth
- Better student data analysis
- Smart experience

approached and queried about how long it would take to switch to another ERP.

“I said, ‘Well, I did nine ERP implementations in my career—from manufacturing, high-tech, and education—I’ve never taken longer than nine months,’” he said. “‘However, if you agree to me coming on board, we may decide that Ellucian is the best choice. We will follow a process and ensure that is the best thing for ORU.’”

One of the reasons for Mathews’ support of Banner is because, in his opinion, a higher education institution can implement Banner as it is rather than use it to implement an entirely new resource system, which he says is a mistake that many schools make.

“One of the greatest benefits of Ellucian [Banner] is that it does exactly what it’s supposed to,” he said. “It’s a student information system that works well; , which allows us to take the majority of our resources and put them into innovation, creativity, marketing, and student acquisition.”

This focus allows us to be innovative with data science which can now tell you how many soy milk products our students drink, how much bacon they eat, how much e-sports they play, and then correlate that into grades, retention, and recruitment.” This is a much bigger payback than trying to implement a new ERP/SIS system.

“I have no incentive to try and replace systems that are already doing what they’re supposed to do.”

Mathews says that in the years since he started at ORU, sticking with Banner has proven to be the right choice. In fact, he was at an Arizona State University conference recently when the head of a statewide system pulled him aside and told him he’d made the right decision—a decision that he wish he’d made himself. “He said, ‘I went and made the mistake of trying to evaluate new systems and I’ve spent years now not coming to any conclusion, and it hindered me from being innovative like you were,’” Mathews recalled.

Guiding Students to Success with Degree Works

Oral Roberts University was founded in 1963. Changing times necessitated the school’s philosophy of keeping in touch with equally changing student needs, and the age of smartphones is no exception.



“A student today will have a smart experience at Starbucks,” Mathews said. “They’ll have the same thing at a fitness center or at their bank. There’s not an entity today that doesn’t have some kind of smart experience with people who would be our students, so when they come on our campus, if they don’t sense a smart experience, they’re out.”

In response, ORU developed a mobile app that provides students instant access to everything from financial aid to their grades. Mathews was quick to point out that Ellucian Degree Works plays a role in that as well, citing how the solution gives students access to their degree paths.

This feature empowers students to complete their degree programs and graduate on their terms while keeping parents in the loop.

After working with previous iterations of similar software, Oral Roberts implemented Degree Works in 2020. Mathews says it enables the school to plan courses better and helps the registrar’s office. “When a student and parent feel that the ‘back office operations’ are pretty flawless, they can sense the difference,” he said. “We’re all in. So it’s really ‘How do we make the student experience the best among all our peer universities?’ It’s reassuring that the *Wall Street Journal* agrees that ORU is providing one of the top student experiences.”

With its comprehensive view of a student’s degree progress for both students and advisors, Degree Works is a part of ORU’s student experience every step of the way.

Reaping Rewards and Winning Awards

Mathews’s and Oral Roberts’s forward-thinking attitudes are well known in higher education, and every solution comes with its own rewards. Banner and Degree Works were beneficial for ORU but the university didn’t stop there. When the school invested in Ellucian Travel and Expense Management, it expedited the processing of expense reports and saved a staff of 370 people countless hours of time.

Then, in 2018, ORU won Ellucian’s EllumiNation Technology Award for reaching millions worldwide with its augmented and virtual reality platform Whole Person Education, which is also powered by Banner.

“When we applied for that award it was really to say ‘How do we reach students globally?’” Mathews said. “We put in an



\$8.5 million Global Learning Center to prove that we could reach other countries by using these [virtual reality] glasses in immersive learning experiences and make things more instant for them. When President William M. Wilson started we were at 85 countries that we were reaching; we're up to 154 now."

ORU's website says that the Global Learning Center and the school's Geovision Ecosystem provide more than half a million immersive learning environments to reach students worldwide.

According to Mathews, winning the EllumiNation Award also added to the discussion about globalizing education by doing more than just setting up campuses everywhere. Finally, the approach of making education more accessible to more people has led to ORU being rated the most diverse college in Oklahoma.

Looking Ahead with Ellucian

Oral Roberts University began its partnership with Ellucian in 1991 and sees no sign of stopping any time soon. The university has high hopes for its continued relationship with Ellucian in the years to come. In fact, ORU has just added to its list of Ellucian solutions with CRM Advance, which helps institutions facilitate fundraising efforts and build better relationships with donors.

"It's really a matter of understanding what will students embrace, what won't they, and how do you personalize that to make their experience?" Mathews said. "It starts with 'Make sure that back office system works flawlessly.' I can go on our campus and if you ask students what they think of the Ellucian Banner system, they love it. It does exactly what they expect it to do."

Looking to the future is a way of life at Oral Roberts University. President Wilson recently signed another 10-year contract to stay with ORU, extending his total tenure there to 20 years, which Mathews said is practically unheard-of in higher education. However, at their university, it goes hand-in-hand with a philosophy of partnering with the right people and signing contracts that make sense for the university. Mathews said that Ellucian simply gives ORU one fewer thing to worry about.

"We've been on Banner for [30] years and see no reason to switch to any inferior ERP system, seeing that Banner is the very best in the education space."



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