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Success Story: Western Michigan University Slashes Through Tedious Work with CampusLogic

Like so many other institutions, Western Michigan University's physical financial aid office was abruptly closed last spring as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic caused devastation across the state, country and around the world. Unlike many other institutions, however, WMU quickly adapted to the new reality of virtual campuses, shutdowns and work-from-home protocols in less than 24 hours.

"We had one day to bring the office up virtually," explains Shashanta James, the school's Director of Student Financial Aid. "We left work on Monday, and on Tuesday we were virtual."

While schools across the country struggled to adapt to life gone virtual, WMU was (and remains) at the forefront of adaptability and success amid uncertainty. tion."

Timing isn't everything, but it sure does help.

WMU went live with CampusLogic just three months before COVID-19 upended daily life, CampusLogic's streamlined onboarding process had everyone up to speed by the time the team was forced to go virtual, literally overnight.

Before turning to CampusLogic's award-winning automation and personalization tools, WMU's financial aid office was overflowing with paperwork. Steven Foster, Associate Director of Financial Aid at WMU was struggling to keep up with the influx of paper-based, manual processes.

"Our office was extremely manual. We had a lot of paper coming in and a lot of students coming in and asking questions. It was a lot of manual work in order to process one form for one student."

Those processing times? 10 days, to be exact. Long lines at the financial aid office, frequent questions and frustration reigned among the student body.

Sluggish processes weren't just complicated for students: WMUs financial aid staff felt the brunt of sifting through thousands upon thousands of documents that were crucial to student enrollment and retention. Weeks-long processing and verification timelines, constant calls from students and overworked staff yearned for a streamlined, easy-to-navigate system.

Foster explains: "We were looking at the major improvements we could make that would enhance the student experience, and enhance our staff experience as well."

Enter: StudentForms and CampusCommunicator by CampusLogic

With ScholarshipUniverse, CampusMetrics and ClearCost already onboard, the choice to add additional CampusLogic products was an easy one.

What's more, the new technology and processes enabled sustainable and effective solutions right away.

"The power of having multiple platforms with CampusLogic; you have that uniformity," Foster explains. "You have that efficiency. I tell the staff all the time: we purchased the product at the absolute right time."

StudentForms simplifies financial aid processes—like verification, professional judgments, and SAP appeals. StudentForms, a key component of CampusLogic's Student Financial Success platform, provides a digital portal for financial aid professionals to manage tasks, review files, and automate student communications via text and email.

 Plus, students can upload documents from any mobile device—a feature staff and students love for the time savings.

CampusCommunicator delivers digital, mobile communications throughout the financial aid cycle. It gives students the information they need when they need it, right where they want it—on their mobile devices. Foster discusses how his team utilizes CampusCommunicator,

"We are using that for our financial aid offer. We have been able to pinpoint, with the analytics of the form, what students are looking at, what different populations review their financial aid. We're able to tailor our messaging to those specific populations."

Best of all, and especially in light of the past year, these tools enable a financial aid office to run seamlessly in a virtual setting and provide expanded access and opportunities.

Foster highlights how the two products work seamlessly together to support students. "With CampusCommunicator and StudentForms, we are looking to engage our students with access in the various funding opportunities that are available to them, and let them know 'hey, here are your options from an external perspective.'

Business, Better than Usual, Even When Things are Unusual

Foster explains how the WMU financial aid team has continued its delivery of exceptional student-centric services with CampusLogic, "It has been a tremendous advantage. We're still able to do the work we do. If we did not have CampusLogic, we would probably still be digging ourselves out in 2022."

The Proof is in the Processing

WMU's massive drop in processing times is evidence that the institution has achieved the process improvement and streamlining it needed. Its increased ability to efficiently communicate information and tasks to students is a major factor in reducing verification times. Ten-day processing no more: With CampusLogic, it's technically five, but the office is usually able to beat that by far, even in a pandemic.

"We're processing verifications in half a day," says Jeremy Glefke, Associate Director of Financial Systems. "With COVID-19, I can't even imagine what our processing time would be without CampusLogic."

 Glefke adds that CampusCommunicator far outstrips their previous award letter—a mail-merged snail-mail affair—and allows them to send a digital, mobile-friendly and personalized communication.

The big picture for WMU

Beyond streamlined solutions for staff and drastically reduced manual processes, one of the biggest wins for the WMU team are fewer concerns from students. "We saw a dramatic drop in our call volume," James says. "We are more efficient, so students aren't calling and asking when something is going to be processed—because it has already been processed."

Students can do their parts faster, too. "I was sitting in training with our processing staff," Glefke recalls, "when we had to reject a parent's 1040 because they hadn't uploaded their signed statement. In the time we were sitting there, the student uploaded the missing page. They got a text letting them know the issue and immediately uploaded the requested document. Before, it would have probably taken a week's time to go back and forth to get what was needed. I was 100% sold after that."

CampusLogic first. Next? Student Financial Success

Every CampusLogic solution has one final unifier: Simplifying the financial journey for students and supporting staff who have built careers around helping those students earn their degrees. "We are definitely a group that is passionate about what we do," James explains. "We can now focus on the needs of students, and not focus on paperwork. We have made that transformation," she says, adding that they've been able to do that via a virtual office in the midst of the pandemic crisis.

"We would not be where we are in COVID-19 if we didn't have CampusLogic."