



Fostering Student Success and Keeping Students on Track to Graduation

Campus-wide support, the involvement of stakeholders, a strong implementation team, and an easy product usage has made the adoption of Ellucian Degree Works™ fast and strong at the University of Alabama.

Ellucian Degree Works provides institutions with a comprehensive set of web-based academic advising and degree audit tools to help students and advisors negotiate an institution's graduation requirements. Available as an integrated add-on to Banner® Student (or as a stand-alone application integrated to a different student system), Ellucian Degree Works' robust academic planning tools and real-time counseling capabilities help advisors provide students with consistent and meaningful direction. The University of Alabama

went live with the solution in 2009, replacing a previous unsuccessful advising product.

"With the earlier product, the data was inaccurate and did not replicate reality. As a result, staff had no confidence in the information in the system and there was very little support for the product," recalled Michael George, university registrar.

As enrollment spiraled by 47 percent over 10 years, the need for an effective advising solution became a high priority. Although enrollment was increasing, the university remained conservative about hiring new staff because of the uncertain economic climate.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Profile:

- Tuscaloosa, Alabama
- Enrollment: 30, 232
- ua.edu

Challenge:

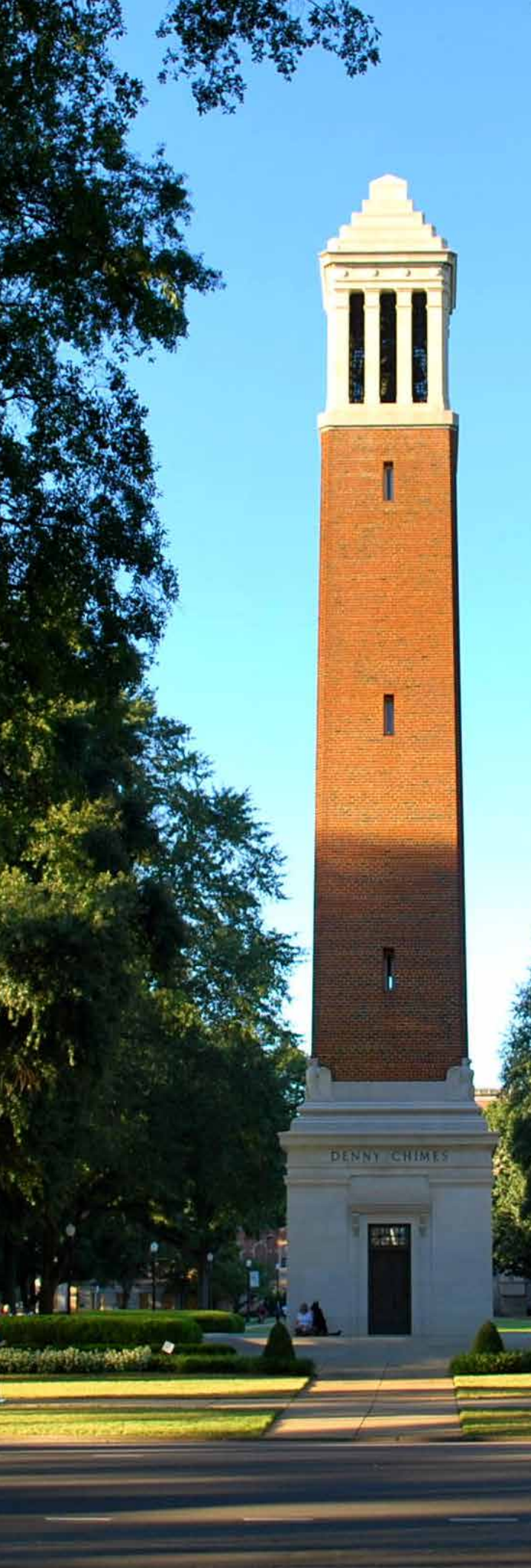
- Provide quality advising to growing student population to help keep them on track to graduation

Solution:

- Ellucian Degree Works™

Results:

- Students have more control and responsibility for their course of study, keeping them on track to graduation
- University gains insight into data to support planning efforts
- Advisors are able to keep up with growing student population



“We have learned that we have to leverage technology to the optimal extent possible,” said George. “We’ve had very little growth in infrastructure. Instead, we are focusing on productivity enhancements that help us provide quality student services.”

After viewing a demo of Ellucian Degree Works at AACRAO, the university quickly moved forward with purchase and implementation. “The product sold itself,” recalled George. “Our vice provost saw the demo and within three weeks of our return he had convinced the provost to fund the purchase with the stipulation that it be brought up on an accelerated schedule.”

Within nine months, the product was live and user adoption was fast and strong. “The product is really user friendly and understandable, and available 24/7,” said George. “Our previous product was very laborious and time consuming.”

Degree Works Provides Tools for Students to Take Control of Academic Path

“Degree Works is being looked at and touched all day every day,” emphasized Denny Savage, associate registrar for academic services. “It is used day to day by our advising community, from our college student services personnel to professional advisors and faculty advisors who are advising students for registration for their next term. And the Office of the University Registrar uses it for degree checkout constantly to verify completion of students’ programs in advance of our three commencement ceremonies that are held throughout the year.”

To encourage student adoption, the university offered several book scholarships to students who built educational planners using the software. And colleges and advising offices mandate that students have plans in place before coming to advisement class. The Planner is a tool within Degree Works that allows students to create a personalized semester-by-semester academic plan, or to use a template-based plan provided by their department. The university also gives students an overview of Degree Works during freshman orientation.

“Our freshmen are using Degree Works before they even set foot on campus,” said Savage. “Students make heavy use of the educational planner and we’ve also gotten good feedback on the GPA calculators. Another heavily-used function is the ‘what ifs’. Students and advisors both like that feature, especially if a student is considering changing a major, or is undecided.”

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MICHAEL GEORGE
University Registrar

“One of my favorite features is the ‘what if’ tab,” said Meg McCrummen, Student Government Association (SGA) chief of staff at the university. “It helps you understand how far along you would be in your degree if you changed your major, and how a change in a major would affect the courses that you would need to take and the length of time that you will be at the university. I also think the standardized checklist feature is an important tool.”

“Degree Works has demystified advising and made students take responsibility for their academic path,” emphasized George. “Now when they go to see their advisors, they have already looked at their plan and audit and are better prepared to have a meaningful discussion. The student planning reduces the amount of time our advisors need to spend with students who have a solid path, and frees them up to spend more time with the students who need more help. Degree Works supports the university’s goal of being student centric and supporting our students. It gives students the tools to get their education completed in the shortest time possible.”

Having students build an educational planner not only helps them achieve their goals, it also provides important data to the University of Alabama to assist in its curriculum and capacity planning efforts.

“It has always been difficult to measure demand for individual courses and overall programs,” explained George. “As the university continues to grow, the administration wants to make sure we are as smart as we can be with our course offerings. Our ultimate goal is to mine the data in the student educational planner and compare it to our actual audit so that colleges and department chairs can do a better job of planning.”

The Student Government Association quickly put its support behind the product when they saw its value, and students are driving further staff adoption of the solution. SGA members distributed Degree Works T-shirts, and demonstrated the product for students. Their activities were complemented with ads on campus bus systems and in campus publications.

“The student role and promotion among peers is a really important part of the program being successful,” said McCrummen. “I’m able to tell other students about it because I have full knowledge of what Degree Works is, and what it will do for students and do for the university and for the advising process.”

Strong Implementation Team and Broad Support Across Campus Enabled Rapid Implementation

The university credits its rapid nine-month go live to its strong implementation team, campus-wide support for the program and support from Ellucian. “We assembled a very strong implementation team that included our associate registrar for SIS, a functional lead, advisors, faculty and our student government, who were all committed to making this project work,” said George.

The university staff mapped out degree requirements in the existing catalog against those in the actual system and vetted them with each college. Once the data was accurate, it was sent to Ellucian for scribing into Degree Works.

The university also engaged with Ellucian to provide a project manager to oversee the process.

“Our project manager was very good. She was very good about following up on issues, keeping us on our implementation timeline, and making modifications based on our feedback. We were also pleased with the functional and technical consulting we received from Ellucian,” said Ken Foshee, associate university registrar for SIS.

The fact that Degree Works is from Ellucian, a vendor the university is already working with, was beneficial, too. In addition to Degree Works, the university’s Banner Digital Campus consists of Banner Student, Banner Finance, Banner Financial Aid, Banner Human Resources, Banner Workflow, Ellucian International Student & Scholar Management, and Ellucian Luminis® Platform.

“The fact that Degree Works is an Ellucian product means we don’t have to deal with another vendor,” said Foshee. “And the product has been so well received that it not only helped students and advisors achieve their goals, it also raised the visibility of our office.”

The university will continue to promote the value of the product to its students, with an added emphasis on students in their third year and beyond who are not using the product as heavily as first- and second-year students. But once students interact with the product, it is likely they will continue to leverage its powerful features.

“When I say that Degree Works is this revolutionary program and it is going to change our academic lives, my friends laugh at me and roll their eyes, but I do believe that it’s true,” said McCrummen. “Degree Works is so simple and so easy to use. It leads students right through what they need to graduate.”



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ABOUT ELLUCIAN

Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world. We deliver a broad portfolio of technology solutions, developed in collaboration with a global education community, and provide strategic guidance to help education institutions of all kinds navigate change, achieve greater transparency, and drive efficiencies. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries around the world look to Ellucian for the ideas and insights that will move education forward, helping people everywhere discover their futures through learning.

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