

Student Financial Success Prioritized at Southern Oregon University, CampusLogic Products Implemented to Transform Financial Aid



When Kristen Gast took over as Director of Financial Aid at Southern Oregon University in 2017, she had an honest discussion with her staff about what was going well, what wasn't, and what they wanted to change. The feedback was immediate: processes were causing barriers for students, and manual verification was taking weeks. "I brought CampusLogic in at my previous institutions," explains Gast. "I asked the SOU team if they'd heard of the technology, and their faces lit up. I told them CampusLogic would change everything."

About Southern Oregon University

A public university in Ashland, Oregon, SOU serves over 6,000 students annually—with nearly 3,000 students applying every year. Of enrolled students, 82% receive financial aid—20% of those students are selected for verification. SOU offers robust programs designed to identify and service individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many SOU students take advantage of non-resident discounts via the Western Undergraduate Exchange, hosted by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). SOU's Financial Aid Office is powered by Banner, an Ellucian® student information system

Streamlined Verification with StudentForms

Gast moved quickly to get campus-wide buy-in to revolutionize SOU's verification process, a barrier that keeps many students from enrolling. "Verification is a really confusing thing for students, especially first-generation," explains Gast. "When my team saw StudentForms in action and saw how guided, simple, and personalized it made the process for each student, there were cheers." Gast notes that since going live with StudentForms, her team hasn't been more than one week out for verifications. "With Stu-

dentForms, our office can jump in to help anywhere, anytime."

[StudentForms](#) is a web-based service that allows SOU to convert paper-based financial aid application processes to self-service collection of data, cutting down on confusion and time needed for iterative tasks.

StudentForms: Calming Emotions & Driving Transparency

Professional judgement (PJ) appeals—where students need to provide documentation to prove an adjustment is needed to their financial aid amount—can be an emotional process. "We've had 30 PJ appeals so far for the fall term—each of those students might have had to drop out if they couldn't get more funding," Gast notes. "Empowering students to initiate PJ appeals right through the system and nudging them via text and email to upload the supporting documentation, has taken a lot of the fear out of it."

"With StudentForms, we can pull up data on when a student or parent logged in, view the text and email communications we sent, and see whether the student interacted. It's proof-positive of how hard we're working to make students successful."

Driving Enrollment with Campus-Communicator

Gast then overhauled her award letter strategy with CampusCommunicator by CampusLogic. Prior to CampusLogic, Gast was sending award notifications right out of her SIS. “It was clunky, slow, and it didn’t set the student up for success.”

[CampusCommunicator](#) delivers automated, dynamic financial aid communications that provide students with engaging and understandable information.

Gast no longer prints or mails anything related to financial aid award offers; instead, students receive everything digitally. “We break down the costs to a very granular level, and we make it easy for a student to accept an award right from the FAQ page.” Gast sends word out across SOU’s social feeds, email, and via text alerting students to check for their award notification and claim free money as early as possible.

CampusCommunicator: Data Fuels Conversations

Gast estimates that approximately 5% of students looked at SOU’s printed award notifications. “With CampusCommunicator, we see at minimum a 35% open rate.” Embedded videos and hover copy answer simple questions, taking the burden off everyone and giving staff more time to have in-depth conversations about borrowing. “You never want students to overborrow,” Gast explains. “But you also don’t want a student walking away because he or she doesn’t want to borrow anything at all; that’s just as heartbreaking.”

Bringing More Funds to Students with ScholarshipUniverse

SOU has abundant scholarship opportunities, including \$3.6 million in Raider Aid and \$1.5 million from their foundation and donors—but that money wasn’t being 100% distributed. “It was such a

shame, because people already think they can’t afford SOU, and that’s just not the case.” To improve scholarship efficiency and distribution, Gast launched ScholarshipUniverse, calling it “the most innovative technology our office has brought to SOU.”

[ScholarshipUniverse](#) streamlines scholarship management from application through awarding. Automation and simplicity combine with a vetted external scholarship database to create a modern solution that improves the staff and student experience. “We now have a scholarship platform that matches them to things they would not even THINK they would qualify for,” said Gast. “It’s so much better than the days when they’d have to fill out hundreds of applications, and sort through scams and spam.”

Powered by Data in Campus-Metrics

[CampusMetrics](#)—CampusLogic’s out-of-the-box data analytics product—supercharges the value Gast gets from StudentForms, CampusCommunicator, and ScholarshipUniverse. “The ability to grab data fast is the backbone of CampusLogic products,” Gast explains. “We wouldn’t know how students are consuming information, what the staff is working on, how many files are in queue; data is so important.”

Connecting the Dots: Success in Alignment

Gast’s innovative efforts and advocacy around meeting students where they are is driving success for SOU students and staff. “We’re moving in a different direction in higher education,” says Gast. “We need to be where the students are, give them the tools they need to be successful, and that starts with enrollment and financial aid. Students start planning earlier and earlier, and at SOU we’re out there with them.”



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