

Overnight Transformation: WMU Goes Virtual, Processes Verifications in Less Than a Day



Like many others, the physical financial aid office at Western Michigan University (WMU) was abruptly closed this spring as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic loomed. Unlike many others, however, it was able to quickly adapt to the new reality of campus 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.”

How They Did It: StudentForms and CampusCommunicator by CampusLogic

StudentForms simplifies financial aid processes—like verification, professional judgments, and SAP appeals. A key component of the cloud-based CampusLogic student financial success platform, StudentForms 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. Best of all, given current circumstances, these tools enable a financial aid office to run seamlessly in a virtual setting.

Business as Usual, In an Extraordinary Time

Explaining how the WMU financial aid team has been able to continue to deliver exceptional student services amidst a mounting pandemic and

mandated shutdowns, Senior Associate Director Steven Foster explains, “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.”

WMU went live with CampusLogic just three months before COVID-19 hit, but easy onboarding had everyone up to speed by the time the team was forced to go virtual, literally overnight. Originally, the financial aid office had been looking for a solution to streamline workflow, 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.” In the end, WMU chose CampusLogic to help make those improvements. With ScholarshipUniverse, CampusMetrics, and ClearCost already onboard, the choice to add additional CampusLogic products was an easy one.

Verifications in a Half a Day

A massive drop in processing times is proof that WMU has achieved the process improvement and streamlining it was aiming for. Its increased ability to efficiently communicate information and tasks to students is a major factor in reducing

verification times. Previously, its processing standard was ten business days, Foster explains. With CampusLogic, it's five, but the office is usually able to beat that by far, even during 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." He adds that CampusCommunicator has also vastly improved on their previous award letter—a mail-merged snail-mail affair—and allows them to send a digital, mobile-friendly, personalized version.

Quick and Simple Service for Students

All of this means the office fields fewer questions and 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 are able to do their part faster, too. "I was sitting in training with our processing staff," Glefke remembers, "when we had to reject a parent 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."

Keeping the Focus on Student Financial Success, Not Paperwork

WMU's financial aid team is always trying to do what's best for the students and families they serve, James explains. "We are definitely a group that is passionate about what we do. 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."



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