Austin Community College Crushes Manual Processes with Campus-Logic

The financial aid team at Austin Community College (ACC) has an important job to do: Every day, they support more than 60,000 students across 12 campuses. Among their student body, nearly half apply for financial aid every academic year. But with 37% of these students selected for verification annually, the institution's manual processes had become a bog for both students and staff; and less than 50 percent of students completed the verification process.

Manual processes, roadblocks and arduous cycle times

Before CampusLogic, ACC students who faced verification, professional judgments or appeals also faced arduous processes. Every individual document had several manual touches along its route. After being turned in by the student, documents would then go to an off-site service center to be scanned by the records department, which manages all documents for the entire 12-campus system. These processes took weeks, along with additional transportation and wait times to move files to a separate processing facility, where all processes were completed and filed. In total, cycle times took anywhere from six weeks to two months during the ACC financial aid team's busy season.

Looking for a new solution to solve old problems

When ACC began searching for a solution, their team had a few non-negotiables in mind, says Jason Edens, ACC's Associate Director of Financial Aid Compliance. As his title suggests, compliance was essential in the institution's decision to partner with CampusLogic. Legal concerns, particularly those around compliance, were top of mind. Where manual processes yielded increased risk for human error and regulatory issues, the ACC team was impressed by CampusLogic's yearly compliance updates, reduced cycle times and decreased risk.

Edens says the decision to go with StudentForms wasn't a difficult one. "StudentForms met all of Austin Community College's needs."

Besides being extremely cumbersome for staff members involved, the lengthy process also put students at risk. Edens says that since most of ACC's applications are submitted in June and July, it was rare for verification to be completed before the start of the school year. Too often, this left students to pay out-of-pocket fees while waiting for their financial aid. Edens said that was unacceptable.

"Our goal as a community college is to make college accessible," Edens explained. And the lengthy processes were impacting accessibility. "We wanted to make things easy for students," said Edens. "But we also wanted to balance it with the regulatory and compliance concerns that we had... with the US Department of Education and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board."

Going beyond verification: Using StudentForms to support SAP appeals and professional judgments

"What drew us to CampusLogic was the fact that the platform could do more than just verification. It was also Satisfactory Academic Progress appeals." Edens said.

He explained that the institution's process for appeals was also manual. That meant students often faced month-long appeals processes, and staff were left to manage yet another laborious process.

"CampusLogic makes [SAP appeals] very easy. All they have to do is fill it out and hit submit, and it's here," Edens said. "They can even upload their documentation along with the appeal. We've been able to drastically reduce the time that it takes to get students a result. These days, students know their status update within about a week."

In addition to SAP appeals, Austin Community College utilizes StudentForms for professional judgments. Edens explains, "It can take EFC (expected family contribution) appeals, cost of attendance appeals, dependency override appeals – and students don't have to print anything. It's easy and it's immediately available for our staff to review."

Hello StudentForms, goodbye 8-week cycle times

With StudentForms, ACC has drastically reduced cycle times, supports virtual learning and enhances student and staff experience while reducing compliance risk. Verification processing times have changed dramatically, too. With streamlined systems and compliance-friendly automation and e-sign capabilities, students aren't spending two months waiting to find out if they were verified. Now, the process typically takes a week.

"It's a huge difference for staff and students," says Edens. And year-over-year data shows that verification completion is rising steadily, up from 28% to 36%. Despite an increase in completed verification, review cycle times didn't rise. Turnaround time decreased from around six weeks to two, at the very most.

Staff spend time doing the work that matters most; StudentForms does the rest

Before StudentForms, ACC staff spent their time sifting through paperwork, where they attempted to reach students who needed to address some missing or inconsistent piece of information.

After implementing StudentForms, Edens says the staff experience has shifted toward personal advising and more 1:1 student support.

"Now, staff have time for personal development and student outreach. Our processes had to be reactive before CampusLogic. Now, we can be more proactive and take the initiative to contact students who need to submit documents or do more email and text campaigns to encourage students to contact the office and complete their applications."

Austin Community College, one of the nation's largest higher education institutions, was looking for a high-impact solution to support students, streamline work for staff and reimagine manual workflows. In partnership with CampusLogic's StudentForms, they drastically reduced cycle times for SAP appeals, professional judgments and verifications, all while seeing a 29% increase in verification completion.