

Award-Winning Innovation in Texas A&M Financial Aid Office Reduces Verification Time from Weeks to Days



It was the perfect storm for the financial aid office at [Texas A&M University](#). A huge spike in students selected for verification, driven by a new state requirement for all high school seniors to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) hit at the same time there was a surge of staff changeover, resulting in longer-than-ever verification times. But during a crisis, seeds of opportunity often appear—and the Texas A&M financial aid team is now in full bloom.

In a best-case scenario, it took about seven to ten days to complete verification, explains Heather Fountain, Associate Director of Financial Aid. “We got to a point that verifications were taking us anywhere from four to six weeks because we had so many students turning in documents.”

At one point, things got so bad that constituents were calling the office asking what was wrong. “We were doing a lot of damage control,” says Fountain. It was time to replace old manual processes with a better solution.

Homegrown Solutions Didn’t Solve Their Problems

The financial aid office had already tried to innovate and speed up operations by implementing electronic signatures and automating processes within their portal, Fountain explains. “But it was still a lot of hands-on activity for our processors. Students were able to upload documents instead of faxing or mailing them, but we were still reviewing every document that came in before we would allow it to go to the verification group to be processed. That really created a bottleneck for us, and we were trying to figure out another solution.” Texas A&M had StudentForms on their radar, and Fountain invited CampusLogic to demonstrate how it could help them. The rest, she says, is history.

The Solution: StudentForms 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.

Building on What Already Works

Fountain was adamant that their new solution had to keep some of the features that were already working for them. “We had a pretty robust process within our own financial aid portal, and we didn’t want to lose any functionality. We wanted students to still be able to upload documents and electronically sign things.”

Seamlessly integrating with the Texas A&M student information system, Banner by Ellucian®, StudentForms preserves all the functionality the team had while allowing them to further innovate and streamline. A huge selling point for Fountain

and her team is the optical character recognition (OCR) capability that allows StudentForms to pull information from submitted documents, eliminating time-intensive manual data entry and increasing accuracy. Communications are also simplified, automatically letting students know when they need to resubmit documents. And, resubmission is a breeze: Fountain has seen a student upload a document just three minutes after receiving an automated notification.

Automating with the Latest Technology

The streamlined, simple process means that Fountain's team not only banished crippling four- to six-week verification times, but they have dramatically improved on their previous best-case seven- to ten-day turnaround times. "I think we're at less than a two-day average time to complete verification once we get it. It's been a huge win for our office," she says.

StudentForms gets a round of applause from the office's 75 full-time staff members, who serve the university system's College Station and Galveston campuses, plus their law school and health science centers. "They were glad that we're finally in the 21st century! We're using modern technology that's with the times," Fountain says regarding employee adoption of StudentForms.

Pillars of Excellence Award Is the Icing on the Cake

Changes in the financial aid office haven't gone unnoticed by university officials. Their example of embracing cutting-edge tools and turning operations around in such a positive way earned them the prestigious Pillars of Excellence Team Award, which acknowledges outstanding service to Texas A&M's Division of Enrollment and Academic Services. Already celebrating less stress, more innovation, and shorter-than-ever verification times, the Pillars of Excellence Award is the icing on the cake.



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