



North Shore Community College’s Unified Digital Campus Improves Productivity, Enhances Communication, and Strengthens Relationships

Several years ago, North Shore Community College (NSCC), like many 2-year institutions, was faced with conflicting demands. Enrollment was growing yet public funding had not kept pace with the College’s growth. Non-traditional students constantly struggled to balance careers, family commitments, and transportation issues, all while attending college. For these students, accessing on-campus services during normal business hours (8am-4pm) could be a major challenge. The College had four campuses, with the two main campuses separated by a commute of more than thirty minutes. Campuses were separated further by differing institutional cultures (urban vs. suburban) and did not have equal access to resources. Spiraling budget cuts, space and scheduling constraints, increasing demands for services, and calls to strengthen community communications combined as an overwhelming challenge. Meanwhile, the College had no online courses, no online services, and a minimal web presence

To help address these challenges, NSCC looked to technology and began their path towards a Unified Digital Campus (UDC) to help meet the following objectives:

- maximize value and functionality of existing technology investments;
- keep up with or exceed evolving service expectations of its technologically savvy campus constituents;
- integrate multiple disparate systems to improve efficiencies;
- provide convenient self-service access to information, teaching and learning resources and campus services;
- make it easier to perform college administrative tasks; and

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Mission-critical challenges:

- To provide an integrated building path for enhancing communication (academic and administrative), instructional support and redesigning services
- Meet administrative needs of growing student population without increasing costs proportionately
- Provide enhanced one-stop student self-service to enhance the quality of the student experience.
- Unite operations and improve communications among four separate campuses

Result with SunGard Higher Education Solutions:

- Improved operational efficiency while achieving \$1 million in cost savings or cost avoidance
- Majority of students and faculty rate online services as “very good” or “excellent”
- Ability to execute rich communications plan with prospects, current students and targeted constituents has contributed to increased enrollments, retention and better overall communications

Located on the Massachusetts coastline about 30 minutes north of Boston, North Shore offers more than 100 associate degree and certificate programs on four separate campuses to about 10,000 students. More than half the student body fall into the category of non-traditional students, who struggle to balance family and work with academics. The College employs 140 full-time faculty, 450 adjunct faculty and approximately 250 administrative staff.

North Shore Community College
Danvers, MA
Enrollment: 10,000
www.northshore.edu

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- promote redesigned business processes while also generating cost savings for the enterprise.

The foundation of the College's digital campus is the Banner administrative system plus the Luminis Platform, which provides portal capabilities, collaboration, and communication tools, and a common interface to the entire digital campus. North Shore's multi-year project has resulted in a balance between access and cost with a unified digital campus that can facilitate seamless interaction for learning, teaching, and administration.

The path to the UDC began in 1998 when North Shore chose to take advantage of SunGard Higher Education's Managed Services by placing two of the company's employees in place as CIO and Administrative Applications Director. In 1999 North Shore identified the need to streamline outdated processes, expand the availability of student services, and increase the enrollment of non-traditional students. Due to fiscal restraints, however, hiring additional IT staff was not an option. As various solutions were investigated, use of the Web increasingly showed promise.

Gary Ham, SunGard Higher Education's CIO at North Shore, said that as administrators explored options, they realized the solution they picked would have to integrate with the College's student administrative system, Banner, and be compatible with other systems like their Blackboard course management system. The ideal solution also would deliver a strong return on investment.

After reviewing available options, the College chose the Campus Pipeline Web Platform, and later migrated to a next generation product, the Luminis Platform. The College took advantage of the portal's many features by integrating as much functionality into the software as possible. The result has been not only a vastly improved online experience but also substantial savings of time and money, and an opportunity for the College to redesign many of its business processes, thereby increasing productivity and efficiency further.

According to Janice Forsstrom, North Shore's Vice President for Administration and Finance, the portal investment has more than paid for itself. She estimates the College already has recovered the initial investment with over \$1 million in cost savings or cost avoidances as well as a measurable increase in student satisfaction.

One of the key factors that drove the institution to consider a Web-based solution was student registration. "We had registration lines the length of a football field," recalled Mr. Ham. "Students, some with children in tow,

Some of the cost-savings and cost avoidance outcomes that North Shore Community College documented include:

- Significantly reduced back-office support for basic administrative functions
- Returning and new students register much earlier
- Enrollment and retention increases
- Online Web admissions
- Web recruit (100% electronic), 5,000 collected prospects annually with targeted email communication plans
- Online registrations continually above 90%
- Online payment available through credit card and e-check
- Student schedules no longer mailed
- Financial Aid awards and book vouchers through portal
- Non-credit student services integrated into portal
- Faculty obtain class rosters, schedules and enter grades online as standard operating procedure
- Significantly reduced postal mail due to communication enhancements through portal, email, and Web services
- Advising (online degree audit) with what-if scenarios available to students and advisors
- Integrated and more efficient learning management system support
- Dynamic account generations (no manual account maintenance) with single sign-on
- In-house 24 x 7 services and consolidated helpdesk
- Course resource areas automatically created and available for every courses
- Automated class email distribution lists available to faculty for every course
- Personal Web Space dynamically available - supports curriculum, web projects and course resource areas
- Intranet with many online services and paperless processes, including:
 - o Room Reservation System
 - o Classroom Technology and Media Request System
 - o Federal Work Study System
 - o Departmental Information

would wait hours in line to register for classes, only to discover that the classes they wanted were filled by the time they got to the front of the line.”

North Shore also struggled with communication issues between its four campuses, most of which are separated by more than a 30-minute drive. Since it was not feasible for all of the College’s services to be offered equally at each campus, the Web seemed an opportune means to make many services available to all students. Today, the portal provides an equal common ground for all constituents, regardless of their physical location.

The vision for utilizing technology to redesign services and communications were first outlined in the College’s 1998-2003 Strategic Plan. The portal was initially piloted on campus during the fall 2000 semester. The overwhelming success and acceptance of these portal services rapidly led to a college-wide strategy to use this technology to deliver improved services. A rapid deployment of subsequent features was implemented during the following three years. Currently, North Shore’s fully integrated portal environment includes Banner and accompanying self-service applications, Blackboard learning management system, course resource areas, content management, and personal Web space available for all students, faculty and staff.

Because the College’s many services are integrated and dynamic through the system, a change made in one area is instantly processed throughout. “Before the portal was implemented, students and faculty were required to master and navigate multiple systems with multiple sign-ons,” said Mr. Ham. “Our two instructional technologists could spend nearly 30 percent of their time, during semester startup, dealing with questions about user names and passwords. It would sometimes take students three or four days to resolve basic account issues. It was horrible for the students and it was horrible for us.” Now, students activate their own portal accounts, have access to a robust FAQ area and can readily resolve account issues themselves with online tools.

Mr. Ham said one secret to the portal’s success is that it’s all based on “triggers” or basic rules. “For example, if I’m a student and I’ve just registered for a course that requires Blackboard, the system checks to see if I already have a Blackboard account. If not, it creates one. It also enrolls me in the course, and adds my contact information to my instructor’s roster. In essence this overall integration allows account access and roles to be completely automated and is based on data entry to our enterprise SCT Banner system. Furthermore, the integration with Luminis provides a seamless single-sign on approach to many disparate systems with a vast array of online services.”

Students adapted to the new system quickly. The first semester, after the initial pilot, nearly 50% of students registered online. Each subsequent semester resulted in a minimum of 80% of students registering online with over 90% being the current norm. The portals overall benefits can partly be explained through basic usage statistics:

- 2000+ unique users daily
- 5000+ unique users weekly
- 8000+ unique users monthly

The benefits to faculty and the learning environment has improved. “For example, when new instructors are assigned to courses in Banner, the system creates their portal accounts,” explained Mr. Ham. “If they are assigned to courses that use Blackboard, the system creates their CMS accounts and automatically enrolls them as the instructors; and it creates a complete resource area for their courses where the instructors can upload content or engage the students in threaded discussion. It also creates the gateway for their e-mails to that course with a dynamic email distribution list for every student in the class. And if a new student registers for that class at a later time, his or her e-mail address is automatically added to the list within several seconds.”

Besides registration, major services accessed via the portal include: (1) targeted announcement and messaging; (2) email & calendar; (3) discrete resource areas for every course including class email, announcements, link publishing, chat, and threaded discussion; (4) student services including class schedules, unofficial transcripts, degree audit, hope scholarship, and voting for student elections; (5) faculty services including online grade entry, class rosters, class schedules, and academic advising tools; (6) employee services including room reservation, media services requests, and work-study job creation (7) personal web space for all constituents of the College; and, (8) many paperless processes (9) content management tools that are tied to the public Web site.

Mr. Ham says the portal is also further improving our recruiting efforts. "The enhanced system enables us to carry out a full communications plan with students," he said. "Last summer, we probably sent out about 60 electronic messages to various audiences, with each message targeted to moving them to the next step. And we can track how many recipients opened those messages or clicked on a link that might be embedded in the e-mail. We're currently averaging about a 60 percent rate of effectiveness (messages opened during an initial four-day period)."

The integrated system also is proving helpful with academic advising. With a click of the button, students and advisors can access a one-page printout that summarizes their matriculation at the college and the credits required for graduation. They can then sit down with their academic advisors and discuss which courses to take.

Success of the portal can be measured not only in student satisfaction, but also by tracking enrollment statistics. Since implementation of the portal enrollments have grown and retention rates have increased by nearly 5%. Furthermore, online course and web supported course enrollments have dramatically

increased along with better service and support delivery. More than 80 percent of students regularly surveyed, over the past three years, rate the NSCC online services as "excellent" or "very good".

"The difference in how we're able to contact and communicate with students and faculty has been absolutely remarkable," emphasized Mr. Ham. "The portal serves as the virtual hub of the college. It has helped us redefine our processes in so many ways. So much that happens at the college and affects our college community now flows through the portal."

"Our unified digital campus has evolved to become a primary source for communication, online learning, administrative, and other services and is fostering a strong sense of community," added Ms. Forsstrom. "It has enabled us to achieve a balance between maximizing access, operational efficiency, and cost savings."