

# How to Drive Improvements by Using Data Effectively

**It's inevitable: Every campus, regardless of demographics, will need to solve a technology issue now or sometime in the future, to improve efficiency for faculty and administrators, and – most importantly – to enhance the student experience. Indeed, the concept of software is to pave the way to improvement by addressing challenges and automating work, enabling staff members to better apply their experience and knowledge to student-facing work.**

“No campus has purchased all the software they’re going to purchase, or implemented every solution they’re going to implement, because every year you’re going to find yet one more way that you can boost efficiency or deal with changes in the environment around you,” said Bill Filion, vice president of software development for Hyland, creator of OnBase and director of the company’s single enterprise information management platform.

## Eliminating Confusion

Simply adding software is not always a solution. And creating homegrown programs carries no guarantee that they will be future-proof. Noted John McGuthry, CIO of Cal Poly Pomona, “If monthly or annual maintenance fees, upgrades, integration and training were required, this would create a sense of urgency and a need for more ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions.”

Purchasing boutique departmental solutions most often isolates data with little or no interaction with other campus systems. The goal is to broaden capabilities rather than restrict them. Said Filion, “There are two choices: build something or go out and buy another new product that will add one more isolated data silo.”

Oftentimes, ECM systems are little more than glorified digital file cabinets, a means of storing information but falling short of the interoperability with other systems on campus that drives real value. It’s possible to integrate them with your student information system and automate some business process with a little workflow but this comes with the cost of writing a lot of custom code around some APIs. What’s needed is a development platform where management solutions are integrated with centralized data. Moreover, whatever solution is adopted must be assured to work on mobile devices as well as desktops – and can be

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upgraded to run on whatever technology becomes a part of the overall environment, configured with no headaches.

Said Filion, “OnBase is a solution that not only provides both a storage and development platform in a single system, but it allows upgrades to be performed on all components of the system at the same time.”

### Building Integrated Programs

At the development level, OnBase allows users to not only build integrated programs, but also configure (not custom code) every feature used in a variety of solutions – all within a single system. And every new release is tested to make sure that all the critical features work exactly as they did before an upgrade was installed.

Said Filion, “Schools today are starting to create solutions that augment what their student information system doesn’t do to create a 360-degree view of what’s going on with the student.” For example, noted Filion, “if you put in a counseling solution, then integrate it with an athletic solution, you can actually correlate this information to see if grades and dorm activity may be related to an injury during athletic play.” The goal is to bring the data together into one view to benefit student progress.

McGuthry explained the thinking behind his university’s search for a centralized, student-focused system. “To reach our online and mobile self-service goals, we need to decide which IT systems provide the right core capabilities. We evaluate how students engage with us and want to create a more unified experience across campus, not just within departments.”

With an integrated development ECM system, not only is the vendor count reduced, but it brings the data all into a platform where it can be shared or made visible, even as additional solutions are rolled out. “With OnBase, when we added workflow and case management, it became an entirely different product,” said Filion.

“Most campuses approach their needs by writing costly custom software or buying additional departmental products. We want all that data to be in one place. But you need to get your arms around this idea that solution development ought to be on a platform that can handle lots of things quickly and efficiently, putting in some sort of centralized governance,” said Filion. “OnBase results in a dramatically shortened time frame to get something stood up.”

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### Boosting Visibility

Many colleges and universities have some beginnings of centralized governance, but “they’re not thinking big picture,” said Filion. “What if all my data were under a single platform? That’s what OnBase offers.”

The best place to start moving toward that unified solution, said Filion, is “thinking what data shouldn’t be in its own silo, but be integrated with other data that it needs to participate with – and who has rights to modify the data.” The next step is to closely examine all new purchases that need to be governed. Some universities have more than one thousand systems on campus. And in addition to the management challenges of dealing with a plethora of vended software comes the danger of the vendor going out of business, requiring a school to retool with a new product. “What you build today ought to run every year,” said Filion. “What is needed is to remove the price of having to build the system all over again.”

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As the vendor count and number of software systems on campus shrinks, so does maintenance costs, staffing and training needs, integration requirements and licensing agreements. Explained McGuthry in a recent paper for EDUCAUSE, at his university, “if campus divisions had their own customized systems, those divisions supported the license expenses. As we move towards more centralized systems, the central IT organization supports the costs of these licenses. The initial license costs savings were only expected to be in the tens of thousands. However, we expect the largest savings from eliminating the need to purchase future systems which could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, not including support costs.”

Ultimately, Filion and McGuthry agree, the target of any endeavor should be the students, to use the ECM to better serve the most important campus component.

“Students are our focus and technology is our tool,” said McGuthry. “With the right systems and approach, we can accomplish our goals and provide the best experience for students, faculty and staff.”

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