STEVENSON
U N I V E R S I T Y

Customer Story

Stevenson University Uses Informer to Accelerate Ellucian Colleague Processes

Conversation with Jen Brechin, Senior Programmer Analyst, Stevenson University

Pain points

- Ellucian Colleague programmers becoming increasingly difficult to find
- Inefficiencies and lack of standardization in university processes such as financial aid award letters and reporting
- Needing to quickly create COVID-19 reports for monitoring of health, testing, and class distribution

Results

- Users are empowered by Informer's automation of Colleague's manual processes
- Establishment of single source of truth through consolidating many reports into 1 Dataset
- Comprehensive COVID-19 Informer reports assisting in health monitoring and institutional logistics

Stevenson University

Challenge

Stevenson University in Baltimore County, Maryland is a private university with 3,600 students. The university uses Ellucian Colleague for their institutional processes. Jen Brechin, Senior Programmer Analyst, works in the IT department and is the administrator for Informer. Informer is used university-wide by over 200 users in nearly every office including Financial Aid, Residence Life, Admissions, Registrar, and Advancement just to name a few. Brechin noticed that over time, Colleague (Unidata) programmers were becoming increasingly difficult to find, and Stevenson had lost over 50% of their Colleague developers in the past few years. This was an issue as IT intervention and programming knowledge was necessary to perform tasks, and those without Colleague training struggled immensely.

Brechin also found that many of the university's processes were not as efficient or consolidated as they could be. The generating of financial aid award letters was a manual three-to-six-month process. Stevenson had many disparate reports from different sources containing conflicting information, making it difficult to determine which data were true. Users in differing departments like the Registrar and Admissions were utilizing different fields in Colleague for enrollment information causing a lack of standardization. Reports delivered to the president would sometimes contain different numbers.

On top of these normal university processes that required improvement, Stevenson needed a way to quickly create COVID-19 reports for the monitoring of health, testing, and distribution of classes.

Solution

Stevenson University is in the process of a successful migration to Informer 5 that has delivered immediate results. When asked about Informer's migration support, Brechin noted, "AMAZING! Their customer support and migration teams really go the extra mile to help me utilize Informer to accomplish our goals and objectives."

Stevenson was very successful in using Informer to solve their challenges, particularly related to Colleague. It is far easier to find programmers well-versed in PHP language, which Informer uses, as opposed to Colleague.

 "With Informer 5 we have been able to eliminate some custom processes and avoid writing new processes in Colleague. We also have moved many processes outside of Colleague including data that doesn't need to be stored forever and can very easily merge data from multiple Informer Datasources with relative ease," mentioned Brechin. "Prior to using Informer 5, we relied on our Envision programmers to create Colleague calculated columns that could then be pulled into an Informer report. Now, we can create custom columns inside of Informer to extract the same information for our users. If placed inside of a Dataset, these fields of data can be used in various reports and not impact the load on our Colleague server." Brechin noted that she often sees two multi-valued fields that are joined inside of Colleague being used in tandem to extract a value. One example are email addresses that have various types associated with them, including LO for local address and INT for internet address. Brechin uses Flow Steps in Informer 5 to loop through the related multi-valued fields, find the LO entry, and display the corresponding @stevenson.edu address that she needs.

COVID-19 reports in Informer present several health factors from faculty and staff screenings. These reports are sent daily to human resources and weekly to assistant vice presidents within functional units to show health summaries. COVID-19 reports were also used for the remote Spring 2020 semester as well as the hybrid Fall 2020 semester to show how many students were attending in physical classrooms versus online. Additionally, these reports were used for random surveillance testing. These reports can tap into Colleague just by using student IDs. "Everything COVID-19 related we needed yesterday, and Informer was our go-to to quickly get the information we needed." noted Brechin.

Results

Brechin previously had a report that was merging data from Colleague (Unidata) and SQL. The data collected saved into a MySQL database where only the identification number was stored. In

order to find additional details about a student such as name or student type, Brechin had to link to Colleague to extract the information. This report in Informer 5 took only two to three minutes without the need to limit the result set. With Informer 5, Brechin can use remote links or can add fields from another Datasource with a much faster connection. "Informer 5 has made it possible to join two databases together to retrieve data," commented Brechin. Using a Dataset and data view reports, Brechin has been able to provide the same data to users in a fraction of the time.

Informer has significantly streamlined Stevenson University's wide variety of operational processes. The university has turned their numerous reports into one Dataset, providing a single source of truth regardless of who or which department produces the numbers. Brechin created the Dataset using all the fields contained within these varied reports. She constructed filters based on the same reports and then created data view reports. The Informer 4 reports have been migrated to Informer 5 data view reports based off an extremely large Dataset, rather than having the user connect directly to Colleague and jump to all the linked fields of data.

Development and testing time of financial aid award letters was reduced from several months to several days and it took only thirty-six hours to replicate these letters in Informer. Benefit information for retirement contributions is now in three automated, self-service reports that are sent to TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association), several times a month. This process previously required an Envision programmer to make changes and send the file. Now, little to no IT intervention is needed. Brechin has replicated a Colleague report on RRAV (Residence Room Availability) in Informer 5, which highlights vacant housing assignments for a given semester, providing the Residence Life team with the data they need to make decisions.

The Entrinsik team has extensive experience with Colleague and has been supporting its users since 2006. Informer integrates natively with Colleague, automating Colleague processes to make them more efficient for the user.

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Jen Brechin, Senior Programmer Analyst, Stevenson University