

SAP Customer Success Story Higher Education and Research



“... we felt that SAP had a clear commitment to the higher education market. The relationship went way beyond SAP just being a vendor with which we worked. It was a real partnership focused on creating a successful solution.”

Kathy Gates, CIO, University of Mississippi

AT A GLANCE

Summary

The University of Mississippi, a leading research university, partnered with SAP to develop and implement the SAP® Student Lifecycle Management application. As a result, students have Web-based access to a variety of services, while student-related processes are more efficient. And, the university has a flexible IT platform for the future.

Web Site

www.olemiss.edu

Key Challenges

- Inefficient student-related processes
- Outdated, limited IT

Project Objectives

- Replace legacy mainframe systems with streamlined IT
- Provide Web access to student information and services
- Help develop a comprehensive solution for campus management

Solution and Services

SAP Student Lifecycle Management

Why SAP Solution

- The university's previous success with SAP software and its positive relationship with SAP
- SAP's commitment to higher education
- SAP's willingness to partner

Implementation Highlights

- Worked as development partner with SAP to create new solution
- Rolled out application across 3 campuses in 18 months – for use by nearly 15,000 students as well as faculty and staff
- Focused on knowledge transfer to build in-house SAP skills

Key Benefits

- Enhanced service to students and faculty
- Streamlined student support processes
- Helped reduce costs
- Provided support for ongoing evolution and improvement

Existing Environment

Legacy mainframe systems

Database

Oracle

Hardware

Sun Solaris

Operating System

Sun Microsystems

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Bringing Students Online with the SAP® Student Lifecycle Management Application

Before moving to state-of-the-art IT, the University of Mississippi was supporting its administrative processes with a variety of homegrown, mainframe-based systems – and finding that they were no longer enough. “The technology was limiting,” says Kathy Gates, chief information officer at the university. “We were not able to do the things we needed to do, and it was getting more difficult to support the university in its mission.”

The University of Mississippi – widely known as Ole Miss – serves almost 15,000 students on three campuses in Oxford, Tupelo, and Southaven. Among other things, the university is known for its research: Some US\$100 million a year in external funding supports a variety of projects at the university, which has more than 20 research centers focusing on areas such as acoustics, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, engineering, law, medicine, pharmacology, and physics.

In short, Ole Miss is an innovative, forward-looking institution, and its old systems were having trouble keeping up. “From a technical standpoint, we had reached a place where we were not able to do much more with our legacy systems,” says Gates. “When independent outside consultants were brought in to assess the situation, they said that we were going to have to change our computer system if we were going to be able to progress as an institution.”



The consultants recommended that Ole Miss get an enterprise resource planning solution. The university decided to implement an SAP® enterprise system to support a variety of back-office processes, including finance, purchasing, plant maintenance, and human capital management. It was a great step forward

“With SAP Student Lifecycle Management, we can offer unlimited Web self-service to our students – they can now do many things online.”

Laura Diven-Brown, Director of Financial Aid,
University of Mississippi

for the university’s administrative systems and part of a broader vision for Ole Miss. In essence, the school wanted to extend its computing capabilities out to the university community – and, especially, to students. The university’s student systems were still based on the old mainframes, which meant that students had to contend with mostly manual, paper-based processes.

To bring students online, Ole Miss needed more than the packaged best-of-breed software solutions it saw on the market, says Gates. “We didn’t want to just install something that met the basic needs,” she says. “We wanted to have an infrastructure that would truly set us up for the next phase – and for the future.”

Partnering for Success

To help ensure that it got precisely what it needed, Ole Miss decided to partner with SAP to develop a new solution – an effort that led to the creation of the SAP Student Lifecycle Management application, which gives universities the Web-based services they need to manage the full range of student-related processes.

Ole Miss weighed several factors in its selection of SAP. For example, SAP’s reputation as a global technology leader played a big role. “And, we felt that SAP had a clear commitment to the higher education market,” Gates says. She also says that

the development process was very interactive. “The relationship went way beyond SAP just being a vendor with which we worked,” she says. “It was a real partnership focused on creating a successful solution.” The project involved nearly a year of analyzing the school’s processes and academic structure and using those insights to develop the campus management system. Over the following 18 months, the project team implemented the application across all three of the university’s campuses.

Throughout the effort, Ole Miss focused on not only providing input to the development process, but also on the transfer of knowledge to ensure its in-house IT staff gained a deep understanding of the SAP technology. “We wanted to take a do-it-yourself approach to managing the system and really use the expertise we have in our computer center to our advantage,” says Gates. In fact, Ole Miss is known for its depth of supercomputing knowledge and was designated a Sun Center of Excellence by Sun Microsystems.

“With SAP Student Lifecycle Management,” says Laura Diven-Brown, director of financial aid at Ole Miss, “we can offer unlimited Web self-service to our students – they can now do many things online.” Through the Web, students can apply for admission, register for classes, check their grades, ensure that they have the prerequisites for a course, and make payments, among many other things.

Faculty members, too, are making good use of the system, which lets them access student data and manage the grading process online. “We even provide them with what we call photo reports. The reports give them the rosters for each class, along with student ID photos,” says Gates. “They love that.”

The solution also gives Ole Miss a variety of management tools. The university uses SAP Student Lifecycle Management to handle student administration, student accounting, and the entire student life cycle, from recruiting to graduation, using an accurate, centralized repository of student records. It can easily manage academic structure and schedules; oversee admissions,

enrollment, and registration processes; and measure and audit students' progress. And, using the electronic invoicing functionality, the university and students can manage payments and accounts and settle and reconcile transactions via the Web.

With its wide range of online tools and information, the SAP Student Lifecycle Management–based system is used by just about everybody in the Ole Miss community, says Gates. “When you implement such a system at a university, your constituents are not only students, but faculty and personnel working in academic offices, service units, housing, the financial aid and bursar’s office, and so on,” she explains. “So this is a very high-profile system here, and we’ve had a lot of success with it.”

Building on the Foundation

SAP Student Lifecycle Management can easily be integrated with other systems – and Ole Miss has taken full advantage of that capability. For example, the university has linked the campus management system with a financial aid solution (ProSAM) provided by Sigma Systems Inc., which is an SAP industry solution partner. Now students can view financial aid awards and accept, reject, or lower the award – all in real time and at their convenience.

Ole Miss has also integrated the campus management solution with a digital imaging system. Provided by Mobius, also an SAP partner, this system is used to capture incoming student transcripts and streamline the graduate admissions process. “When we get an admissions application, the student transcript is scanned in and attached to the student record in the SAP system, so the academic departments can see the application and transcript together online,” says Maurice Eftink, associate provost and dean of the Ole Miss graduate school. “We’ve been able to turn what used to be a totally paper-based process into a workflow-driven process using the SAP software and the digital imaging system.”

Overall SAP Student Lifecycle Management gives Ole Miss the tools and technologies needed by a dynamic institution – while allowing it to work in the way it deems best. “A big concern

universities have with technology is that they’re going to lose the ability to implement their specific business processes,” says Eftink. “In academic circles that’s very important, because the belief is that the academic processes should not have to bend to meet the

“We have been able to turn what used to be a totally paper-based process into a workflow-driven process using the SAP software and the digital imaging system.”

Maurice Eftink, Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School,
University of Mississippi

needs of the software. With SAP Student Lifecycle Management you can create your own rules and processes and easily configure standard processes to meet your needs. We’ve found that there has been very little that we’ve had to change in terms of our academic processes because of software.”

Just as important, says Eftink, the solution provides a platform that can keep evolving with the university’s needs. “With a lot of other software, you pretty much get what comes out of the box, and if you want to do more things, you need to buy another application or write new software,” he says. “With SAP software, we can use standard SAP tools to easily extend the solution and do additional things. When an academic department wants to do something new and interesting, we can implement those new policies or processes without a lot of trouble or without having to modify any code.”

Enhancing Services – Today and Tomorrow

For the university, working with SAP Student Lifecycle Management has meant greater convenience for students and faculty, thanks to streamlined processes and easy access to information. For Ole Miss, that streamlining has meant being able to keep costs down while enhancing service. “For example,” says Diven-Brown, “having students get their financial aid as a direct deposit and conducting business online is certainly more convenient for

them. At the same time, we reduce the administrative burden in the university. We don't have to have a person handling that, and you don't have to send a paper check through the mail."

The university's decision to build in-house SAP expertise has also paid off. For example, Ole Miss can handle maintenance and even major upgrades on its own and call on SAP Consulting when needed. That not only helps keep the total cost of ownership low, it also enhances IT's responsiveness. "We always felt like we were getting the most out of the SAP application by really embracing it and understanding how it works," says Gates. "That has really benefited us because IT can now listen to what the university needs, envision how that could be accomplished using the software, and quickly put that into practice."

Going forward, Ole Miss plans to continue expanding and enhancing its solution. For example, the school is thinking about including a self-service, degree-audit system based on SAP Student Lifecycle Management. "With that, a student or an advisor could go online and evaluate how close the student is to meeting all the requirements for a degree program – and perhaps explore different scenarios to help make decisions about what classes to take," Gates explains.

Ole Miss is also looking at ways to use SAP Student Lifecycle Management in its interactions with other organizations. "The whole issue of how universities exchange transcript data is evolving," says Gates. "Most transcripts come in now as paper documents, and somebody sits down and manually enters that data into the system. So far, most efforts to exchange transcripts use electronic data interchange technology. But with SAP technology, we could exchange those documents with a variety of outside parties using new XML-based standards."

Overall, the SAP Student Lifecycle Management system has brought Ole Miss – and its students and faculty – a long way from the legacy mainframe systems, says Gates. "I feel like we are sitting in a wonderful place in terms of being able to support our mission," she says. "The university is well situated in regards to our information technology, for both today and the future."