

The College of St. Scholastica Grows Applicant Pool and Admissions Efficiencies with CAS

case study



Like many small, private schools, the College of St. Scholastica needed to reduce the manual paperwork handled by the admissions departments and increase the number of applicants to their programs—without adding marketing budget to support those changes. (The school currently enrolls 4,360 total students across multiple campuses, 1,516 of them in graduate programs.) The remote location of the small, Catholic college in northern MN made it difficult for St. Scholastica to reach far enough to maintain a healthy level of growth for their programs. “As a small private school with fairly big programs, we were reaching only a very regional audience,” recalled Chad Oppelt, Assistant Director of Graduate, Extended, and Online Admissions.

In 2009, Chad set out to improve efficiencies in an admissions department that was rapidly becoming overwhelmed with massive amounts of mail, including paper application forms, recommendations, essays, and stacks of official transcripts. With documents arriving separately for each applicant, the task of matching all the documents to create folders for each applicant was a complex and time-consuming process. According to Chad, as a result of their paper-based processes, “file cabinets were bursting with manila folders, and on the day after a big deadline, so many items had been slid under our doors to meet the cutoff that we could hardly make our way to our desks.”

ADOPTING CAS

That year, having learned about the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), Chad recommended implementing it immediately. He was able to overcome initial resistance from his deans, program directors, and IT team by describing the greater reach PTCAS would provide, with the potential for greater diversity and quality of applicants. The school quickly adopted PTCAS as the exclusive means of applying to their PT programs.

“The benefits were greater than we imagined,” recalled Chad. “We adopted PTCAS largely to streamline processes and reduce the amount of paper coming into the office every day. Today, our admissions department is a completely paperless environment. We also found that our applicants to PTCAS nearly doubled, and we saw a greater quality and diversity in those who were applying.” As a result, the school quickly brought on OTCAS (Occupational Therapy Centralized Application Service), then NursingCAS (the Centralized Application Service for Nursing Programs), and have now migrated all of their applicable programs to CAS, including CASPA (Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants) and ATCAS (Centralized Application Service for Athletic Training Programs).

Using the reporting tools in WebAdMIT—the administrative portal for each CAS—the admissions department was able to clearly demonstrate the value of CAS to the departments and the school leadership. In addition to increasing the number of total applicants to graduate programs by 30% (the applicants to CAS programs alone increased by 75% from 320 to 559 applicants), the implementation of the five CASs helped the school reduce the application processing time by 50%, from about six weeks to three weeks. With this data, the school was able to apply (and be approved) for a significant institutional grant to fund additional technology for graduate and online programs.

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Today, with close to 2,200 applications a year submitted to the Graduate department, 1400 of them go through one of the CAS systems. That's almost 2/3 of the applications that no longer require manual processing from the admissions staff. And even better, the College is now receiving applicants from other states. Previously, 30 out of 36 seats in the PT programs were admitted from St. Scholastica undergraduate programs. "Now, half of the students in the program are moving to Duluth from across the country, bringing a much broader perspective to our classrooms," said Chad.

"Our diversity has gone up, both in terms of culture and gender," Chad explained. "As a result of implementing NursingCAS, our minority and male acceptances to Nursing programs increased by 10%. And our quality—average GPAs and average GRE scores across all CAS programs—has gone up, too." In the first year of implementation, average GPAs for the applicant pool went from 3.25 to 3.6 for ATCAS; from 3.5 to 3.8 for OTCAS; from 3.67 to 3.75 for PTCAS; and from 3.2 to 3.49 for NursingCAS. (CASPA is in its first year.)

REALLOCATING STAFF TO STRATEGIC TASKS

In addition to the greater diversity and quality of the growing applicant pool, CASs offer integrated services and data. Chad noted that these services played a significant role in helping his department reallocate resources to other, more creative ways to help the school grow: "We have saved the equivalent of a full-time person through our adoption of these CAS systems. That's a 1.0 that we didn't lose—that we were instead able to integrate into more quintessential admissions counseling rather than typing, opening envelopes, and preparing folders."

Chad credits Liaison customer service (addressing applicant questions at hours that the school could not cost-effectively staff on their own) and Liaison GPA calculation and transcript entry services with freeing his staff for more strategic work. With each CAS application accompanied by about three transcripts, Chad observed that the transcript verification services save him and his staff from having to review several thousand transcripts each cycle. The time that they are not spending on these manual tasks is instead free for attending events and directly nurturing interested applicants.

FASTER DECISIONS

Perhaps most exciting to Chad is the ability to respond to applicants so quickly. With the CAS online review process, programs can evaluate applicants easily online, using WebAdMIT to see real-time applicant data and act upon it remotely. Once the applicants are ranked, decisions happen quickly. Because their admissions letters are uploaded into the system ahead of time, Chad noted that "we can have acceptance letters out five minutes after decisions are made, which makes us a powerful competitor for the more sought-after applicants. Because of the CASs and WebAdMIT, we are notifying students of acceptance and starting to get deposits before the other schools."

STREAMLINED ADMISSIONS WORKFLOW

Chad's IT department also improved their admissions workflow by working with Liaison to integrate each of their five CASs with their student information system, Banner. Previously, they had used the two systems independently, depending on WebAdMIT through the review process and then switching exclusively to Banner to manage offers, acceptances, and declines. To support the separate systems, student workers had to manually enter thousands of applications into Banner. Since the integration between Banner and the CASs was established, students are assigned IDs when they apply, and the necessary data from the applications is automatically moved into Banner from the CASs.

This streamlined workflow allowed staff to focus even further on strategic tasks. With better processes and tools, CAS has improved the school's efficiency and given it greater reach and power in recruiting.