

# The Economic and Strategic Case for a Centralized Student Application Processing Service

“Our institution is unique.”

“Our program requirements are different.”

“We don’t do things like anyone else.”

In the complex world of higher education admissions, these common phrases are rooted in truth and are often used to justify a burdening web of technology and ever growing numbers of support personnel. Historically, to avoid stakeholder sacrifices and meet the individual needs of colleges and departments, the only seemingly available solution has been to acquire, customize and deploy siloed software and services, creating redundant overhead and disparate sets of data.

## A CAS Case Study: AACN's NursingCAS\*

STAFFING	TASKS	COSTS
FTE Administrative Assistant	Opens mail, processes documents, files, enters data, copies, prints and answers calls and emails	.5 FTE X \$30,000 = \$15,000
Temporary Help During Peak Times	Answer telephones and open mail	\$4,500
Personnel, FTE, Enrollment Manager	Calculate GPAs, quality control, prepare reports and notify candidates of status	.3 FTE X \$45,000 = \$13,500
<b>Minimum staffing total: \$33,000</b>		

\*cost estimates are based on processing 500 applications per admissions cycle

Whether a college has one admissions application that serves all populations, deploys multiple versions of the same application to serve different populations or has multiple application vendors, most struggle with an immense amount of waste that comes from the overlap of business processes, data flow and processing services. For example, a large college in New England deployed nine versions of a popular and outdated admissions application. In addition to the growing and redundant cost to support that many platforms, the

non-standardized approach means the student experience is varied and fractured, uncommon data is siloed and unreportable and duplicate back office services abound. These environments fuel budgetary concerns, while inhibiting top level strategic insights and the ability to support college initiatives. These business concerns drive the need to evaluate superior alternatives.

For decades, colleges and universities have relied on shared services when possible, relying on external entities

to more efficiently and cost effectively provide services or fulfill roles that fall outside the scope of the core institutional mission of educating students. This is common in the areas of food service, residence hall management, parking, bookstore operations and arena scheduling. These partnerships have enabled campuses to increase service offerings to students, improve customer service, reduce costs and, in some cases, increase revenues.

The benefits of shared services are numerous, including:

- ✓ Recapture or reposition of headcount for strategic student engagement and service.
- ✓ Reduction of costs by eliminating overlap through shared services.
- ✓ Increased service offerings and better customer service for students.
- ✓ Elimination of costly third-party solutions that no longer need to be maintained and supported.
- ✓ More efficient operations.
- ✓ Stronger data for in-depth analysis.

The scope of available shared services available to higher education continues to expand. Traditional areas of operation, once manageable because of smaller workloads and less complexity, have evolved into resource intensive operations. Opportunities exist to claim the benefits for these mission critical functions.

## The Challenge

Nearly all institutions have an admissions processing operation. Centralized processing (i.e., the collection, scanning and collating of application supporting documents such as transcripts, letters of recommendation, resumes, essays, test scores and other materials) is performed for undergraduate and graduate applicants. Because of the specialized nature of graduate applications, they are usually “shipped” across campus to the individual graduate departments that also employ staff to further process applications (i.e., recalculate GPAs, score applicants and package applications for faculty review and decision making). Other institutions have graduate students apply directly to individual departments or programs where all of the processing is performed within the department, thus employing separate admissions operations for each college within the institution in a decentralized processing arrangement.

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operations, all performing the same tasks at the same time. However, each staff is limited to standard work schedules, regardless of periods of peak application volumes, as well as personal time off, sick leave, holidays and weekends, when processing is not being performed. Many campuses address these resource shortfalls by employing temporary staff to augment existing staff during peak volume periods as application deadlines near. Temporary staff bring management challenges and additional costs to the institution in terms of wages and quality assurance related to the tasks they perform.

Most current admissions environments require that students apply to each college separately, fulfill requirements and provide additional sets of credentials for each – individually. Incredibly, many institutions require students to complete entirely different applications and provide separate sets of credentials when applying to more than one program on the same campus. The effect of these aggregated conditions is additional cost, additional effort and reduction of speed, making institutions less competitive.

Unfortunately, online college admissions applications, which operate as the front door to the institution, often leave much to be desired. Parents and students, expecting an Amazon or Google-like experience, are met with an antiquated application that reflects poorly on the institution's ability to convey itself as cutting edge.

## The Solution

For more than 20 years, Liaison has provided application and admissions processing services. Liaison's Centralized Application Services (CAS™) more efficiently grow enrollments, manage the application admissions process and improve access to education. Today, Liaison partners with nearly 40 professional associations providing more than 7,000 programs on over 800 traditional, non-profit campuses cost savings each admissions cycle and a streamlined admissions process.

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Most recently, The California State University (CSU) System, comprised of 23 individual campuses, selected Liaison as its system partner for application management across its undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs. The Liaison-powered CAS will manage around 1 million applications annually, providing the institution's Chancellor's Office a singular view of application activity, trends and outcomes across the system.

Regardless of the level of size or complexity, Liaison, by means of extensive configurability options, has mastered the ability for every

program within an institution or system to maintain its business rules, requirements and unique branding, while streamlining the application process for students, faculty and staff. In a single session, applicants can apply to multiple programs within an institution or across a system. The software as a service (SaaS) application is configured with built-in toolsets to meet institution and program requirements. Responsive design facilitates mobile access, ensuring the application renders

appropriately on any user device. Standardized test scores from ACT, SAT, GRE, TOEFL and others can be automatically imported to a student's application directly from the testing source. Letters of recommendation can be requested from within the platform, automating the reference process for providers and admissions staff. This level of automation reflects positively on the institution.

When applying through a CAS, students fulfill admissions requirements collectively by aggregating one set of credentials that is distributed appropriately to each of the colleges and programs to

which the student applies. This eases the burden for students, encourages them to apply to additional programs or colleges, reduces their need to order and pay for multiple transcripts from prior institutions and has a trickle down impact on high school counselors who will no longer need to produce multiple sets of credentials for each student.

While the benefits to students of a CAS are clear, there are significant and measurable benefits for the institutions as well. Liaison's clients experience up to a 70% reduction in time to decision and roughly a 90% reduction in manual administrative application processing tasks while avoiding the need to add headcount to manage growing application volumes. Because decisions are made quickly, Liaison's partners can make admission offers ahead of their competition, which has a dramatic effect on acceptance rates. Additionally, institutional leadership gains access to robust data for reporting with built-in Tableau visual analytics to comprehensively analyze applicant data and make strategic decisions. Having a common data set for the entire applicant pool and being able to analyze it with real-time visualization, will enable a new level of strategic short- and long-term planning.



## Supporting Data

Depending on their size and individual processes, colleges are currently spending anywhere from \$10 to \$70 to process undergraduate and graduate applications. Liaison partners have significantly reduced processing time, are making decisions quicker, have moved deadlines up, gained better insight into enrollment data, reduced errors and slashed costs by leveraging shared services for their application processing.

Take, for example, Midwestern University, which received close to 32,000 applications during the 2016-2017 cycle. "The associated cost and time savings were main motivators in our decision to launch numerous services on our campus," said James Walter, director of

admissions at Midwestern University's Glendale campus. "Before CAS, at least four of our seven admissions counselors spent the majority of their time on administrative tasks. When you consider their average salary of \$50,000, CAS is helping us save \$200,000 on application processing."

He continued: "The best part is that we still employ those staff members, but CAS allows us to reallocate their efforts. They have more time to focus on recruiting and responding to prospective students' inquiries — the work that actually helps us meet our enrollment goals."

### Potential Outcomes from Implementing a CAS<sup>1</sup>



**90%**

REDUCTION in manual administrative tasks



**10%**

INCREASE in diversity of incoming classes



**69%**

REDUCTION in time to decision

<sup>1</sup> Del Mar College; The College of St. Scholastica; University of Texas Health Science Center

## In Summary

Liaison's CAS solution combines innovative application technology with back office human services, providing greater efficiencies while making the process of applying to college easier for students. It's one of the reasons why over 7,000 programs on more than 800 campuses have chosen Liaison to streamline their admissions processes.

The stress associated with applying to college is a well-documented barrier to access. Graduate students often must overcome life issues like work and family circumstances that cause them to delay admission. These circumstances contribute to their becoming frustrated with the application process and abandoning the effort.

Providing an easy-to-use application portal will ease the stress factors and barriers associated with applying to college. Students can complete one application for all participating institutions and programs, check the status of their applications and supporting documents, pay application fees and be notified of decisions through a single platform. Liaison is unique in that it provides applicant support for inbound phone, email and chat inquiries. Today, the numerous status checks, requests for forgotten login credentials, reminders of upcoming deadlines and outreach to complete unfinished applications pulls admissions staff away from important student engagement and application evaluation activities.

By utilizing Liaison's centralized application and associated services, institutions can set the standard for simplifying the application process. They can remove real and perceived barriers, reducing the stress that students and families experience.

**In response to difficult higher education budgeting pressures, institutions are looking at shared services as a valuable alternative to in-house application processing.** Doing so can find significant reductions in such pressures while improving service levels to students, families, faculty and staff.

## Why Liaison?

### Expansive Reach

**7,000+** programs across  
**800+** campuses use  
Liaison's admissions tools.

### Quick Implementation

Liaison guarantees implementation of your CAS;  
It can **take just weeks**.

### Extensive Experience

Founded in **1990**, Liaison has spent over two decades serving higher education and processes **2,200,000** applications each year.