

Organization

Davenport University is a private, non-profit, multi-location university with 11 campuses throughout Michigan and additional courses available online.

Davenport University**The Challenge**

Analyze, calculate, and distribute student data from a Banner ERP system to workers with varying needs in multiple departments.

The Strategy

Use WebFOCUS to create targeted reports and InfoApps™ that empower people to access and manipulate student data, with little or no assistance from IT.

The Results

The university reduced the time it takes to calculate financial aid awards by 80 percent and improved student retention by two to three percentage points per year for five years running.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS Reporting Server, BI Portal, Managed Reporting, ReportCaster, Active Technology, Performance Management Framework, and adapters for Oracle and MySQL.

Information Builders provides the industry's most scalable software solutions for data management and analytics. With one smart platform for integration, data quality, and analytics, we help companies manage their data, generate insights, take action, and deliver impact.



Davenport University Advances Students With Analytics

WebFOCUS Delivers Insight to Faculty and Staff Across Campus

Like most institutions of higher education, Davenport University – a private, non-profit university with 11 campuses throughout Michigan – expends a tremendous amount of effort attracting the right students, keeping them engaged, and helping them complete their degree programs in an expedient and cost-effective way. Founded in 1866, Davenport currently offers associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees, diplomas, and post-grad certification programs in business, technology, health, and graduate studies (MBA). The university has approximately 13,500 students enrolled across the Michigan campuses and many more students enrolled online.

In order to fulfill its goals of improving student retention and reducing the time it takes to calculate financial aid awards, Davenport University uses Information Builders' WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) and analytics platform to access, analyze, and visualize information in its Ellucian Banner ERP system, as well as to report against many other internal and external data sources.

"By providing current information to our various departments, especially the registrar, financial aid, and admissions, we are able to improve the student mix, boost student retention, and coordinate myriad administrative activities that help our students move forward," says Marylee van den Heuvel, senior data warehouse administrator at Davenport University. "Everybody loves getting information from WebFOCUS. They like being able to select and analyze precisely the data they want. Lots of people output the information into Excel so they can save their spreadsheets, color-code them, and sort them as they like."

“WebFOCUS has been phenomenal. It saves us hundreds of hours each year and my team no longer has to generate 10 to 15 pages of documentation for each student.”

**David DeBoer
Executive Director of
Financial Aid
Davenport**

Self-Service Analytics for the Enterprise

WebFOCUS has had a pervasive impact on the university. Some of the biggest gains have been in the financial aid department. “WebFOCUS is doing much more than just cranking out data,” says David DeBoer, executive director of financial aid at Davenport. “It gives us an extra layer of confidence by ensuring that our awards are calculated correctly. Award calculations used to take 30 minutes or more, per student. Now, with WebFOCUS crunching the numbers, my team can perform these calculations in less than five minutes.”

DeBoer and his team depend on a number of critical WebFOCUS capabilities to achieve great gains in efficiency. For example, if the university distributes financial aid to a student who withdraws from school midway through the term, the university has to return the unused portion of the aid package to the federal government. Calculating the balance requires analyzing numerous variables, including the mix of grants versus loans, the number of class days completed, and the actual charges for each student.

“The rules are incredibly complicated,” says DeBoer. “We use WebFOCUS to gather data from about two dozen tables, perform the calculations, and load the results into designated fields in an Excel spreadsheet.”

WebFOCUS considers charges, course codes, vacation days, and course adds/deletions, and then formats the information for easy review. This high degree of automation has allowed DeBoer’s team to progress from manually calculating awards to simply auditing the results that WebFOCUS generates automatically. “WebFOCUS has been phenomenal,” he adds. “It saves us hundreds of hours each year and my team no longer has to generate 10 to 15 pages of documentation for each student.”

WebFOCUS also notifies the financial aid department when students make changes to their status that necessitate corresponding changes to their aid packages. For example, if a student changes from an associate degree to a bachelor’s degree, they become eligible for certain aid programs and ineligible for others. “WebFOCUS instantly alerts us if there are problems or changes that we need to make,” says DeBoer. “These apps have significantly improved our accuracy and saved us a ton of time.”

InfoApps for Every Need

WebFOCUS can deliver information on demand through a simple report or InfoApp. InfoApps provide a convenient interface through which users can analyze and interact with the data. Intuitive and visually compelling, they give the business community instant insight into complex data sets. In addition, WebFOCUS sends dozens of daily reports to everyone from cabinet members to financial aid officers.

“We’ve done a great job of addressing people’s information needs with WebFOCUS,” says van den Heuvel. “Many of our reports and InfoApps have been running for years and doing exactly what we need them to do.”

Van den Heuvel cites the WebFOCUS student retention report as an example. This report identifies students who need interventions, such as more remedial classwork or one-on-one tutoring. “Ideally you want to see students return from fall to fall until they graduate,” she explains. “Thanks in part to these reports, our retention rate has risen two to three percentage points per year for the last five years.”

“WebFOCUS keeps the university going. It feeds information to people and systems in just about every department and it helps us monitor the activities that keep our school running smoothly.”

**Marylee van den Heuvel
Senior Data Warehouse
Administrator
Davenport University**

Persistence is another important metric. By identifying students who are close to completion and encouraging them to finish their degrees—perhaps by offering counseling services or extra financial aid—this metric has steadily risen. “These are big success stories for us,” van den Heuvel adds. “If the reporting server goes down we hear about it immediately. ‘Where are my reports?’ people say. ‘I can’t do my job without them!’ We have people who are absolute junkies for the information we provide.”

These “junkies” include the admissions department, which depends on WebFOCUS to track student applications as each semester approaches. Where is each student in the application process? Do they have all their paperwork in? Are crucial pieces missing? WebFOCUS summarizes all of this information into a daily report and sends it by e-mail to people who request it.

The HR department uses WebFOCUS to meet the reporting requirements of the U.S. Affordable Care Act. Davenport has a lot of part-time employees because the institution relies heavily on adjunct faculty to fill both online and on-campus positions. They are careful to keep part-time workers below the 30-hour-per-week threshold, because if they exceed this threshold the law requires Davenport to pay benefits to these workers, even if their contracts don’t require it.

“With 1,500 adjunct faculty, that would double the benefit pool,” explains van den Heuvel. “The HR department needs to know how many hours each adjunct is going to work each semester. WebFOCUS helps them determine which professors can teach which classes and which faculty members can take on additional work without exceeding these ACA thresholds.”

Head of the (Analytics) Class

WebFOCUS has moved to the head of the class as the analytics engine of choice in multiple departments, including registration, financial aid, finance, budgeting, HR, admissions, advising, IT, and institutional research. According to Brian Miller, chief information officer at Davenport, WebFOCUS has become popular because it can do what many other software products cannot: bring together a diverse set of data sources for unified reporting and analysis.

For example, Davenport’s Banner ERP system runs on an IBM UNIX server and stores data in an Oracle database. The call center depends on MySQL applications. Other departments store data in Microsoft SQL Server. In addition, Davenport uses the Ellucian operational data store (ODS) in conjunction with a multidimensional database called Blackboard Analytics. WebFOCUS can combine information from these diverse data sets to enable unified reporting and analysis.

Davenport has begun a new initiative in which it plans to use WebFOCUS predictive analytics technology to identify at-risk students and encourage them to come in for counseling. WebFOCUS will help the University track these students’ progress and compare them to similar students in similar situations, giving counselors the foresight to circumvent potential problems.

Miller's team is also designing WebFOCUS dashboards and balanced scorecards for the president and executive vice presidents, with top-line Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that reveal how the school is doing on a daily basis. In the near future, the university expects to use WebFOCUS Performance Management Framework to deliver strategic information to executives and university officers. It also plans to use WebFOCUS InfoAssist to extend custom report-writing capabilities to power users across the institution.

"WebFOCUS keeps the university going," sums up van den Heuvel. "It feeds information to people and systems in just about every department and it helps us monitor the activities that keep our school running smoothly."

Find Out More

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Corporate Headquarters

Two Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2898 (212) 736-4433; Fax (212) 967-6406

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