What You Need to Know

Submitting an application is one of the earliest interactions a student will have with a higher education institution. With changing educational models, user behaviors, and customer expectations, it is important to make a good first impression. More institutions are looking to upgrade their undergraduate admissions systems to support the changing environment. For this reason, based on the rate of new system implementations and plans to implement new systems, undergraduate admissions systems rank near the middle in terms of system rate of change (figure 1).

*Rate of change is an indicator of how rapidly a system area is changing. It is a composite score based on year of current implementation and on plans to implement new systems or replace existing ones. Systems with the highest rate of change typically have been implemented recently or are expected to be implemented or replaced soon.

Figure 1. Characteristics of core information systems
These systems are nearly ubiquitous (used by 98% of institutions) and, depending on the culture of the institution, may be run by central IT or another unit on campus (figure 2).

Figure 2. System provision and plans for change for undergraduate admissions systems
Market Share

With under one-half of the market (48%) using a solution from one of the top four vendors—Ellucian, 27%; Oracle PeopleSoft, 11%; Technolutions Slate, 8%; and Salesforce, 2%—the undergraduate admissions system market is fairly heterogeneous (figure 3).

Figure 3. 2015 undergraduate admissions system market
Management Strategy

Although most institutions (75%) still opt for an in-house implementation, one-fifth (18%) have a SaaS implementation, which may provide benefits such as scalability. Of the top 4 solutions (listed in order of market share in figure 4), Technolutions Slate is most likely to have a SaaS implementation (88%).

Figure 4. Management strategies in use for top 4 undergraduate admissions solutions
Deployment Strategy

With smartphone ownership among students at 96% and tablet ownership at 57%, the need for mobile-friendly student systems is apparent.¹ About one-quarter of institutions (28%) are using responsive web design, and one-sixth (14%) are using mobile apps. Among institutions using one of the top 4 solutions (listed in order of market share in figure 5), those with Technolutions Slate are most likely to have responsive web design, and those with Oracle PeopleSoft Campus Solutions are most likely to have a mobile app. More than half of institutions (52%) use another deployment strategy, mostly web-based applications.

![Diagram showing deployment strategies for top 4 undergraduate admissions solutions](image)

Figure 5. Deployment strategies in use for top 4 undergraduate admissions solutions
Case Study: Utah Valley University’s Admission System Enhances the Applicant Experience

The open admissions policy at Utah Valley University (UVU) accepts any applicant who has earned a high school diploma or GED, though some majors and programs have additional requirements. To support this policy, UVU developed an automated online admission process to create a prompt experience—university admission occurs the day after submission of a completed application. Currently the online process handles almost all of the 7,000–8,000 UVU students admitted per semester.

At the heart of this admissions process is a highly customized admissions system, jointly managed by UVU’s Office of Information Technology (OIT) and admissions-related functional areas—e.g., enrollment management, recruitment, and graduate and other university programs with specific admission requirements. OIT handles mostly operations; other areas manage functionality. The system automates as many admission steps as possible. For example, it determines an applicant’s residency status automatically in order to appropriately charge the resident or nonresident tuition rate. UVU customizes the system mainly because, as Ray Walker, associate vice president and chief information officer explained, “Most vendors are working with institutions that think differently about admissions. Most institutions have more manual steps in their admissions process. Vendors build that into their solutions and assume all institutions are the same. We’re not.”

Over time, UVU adopted different admission systems to support changing needs and market conditions. Two years ago, OIT replaced an in-house, university-customized Banner solution with Ellucian’s Recruiter system due to UVU’s emerging user requirements and concerns about Banner’s long-term vendor support. The switch offered these benefits:

- Recruiter utilizes newer technology that could further enhance UVU’s online admission process. The system is built on Microsoft’s Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, which fosters coordination and transparency of every student’s recruitment and admission activities across the university. Recruiter’s tools helped UVU update and enhance its admission system’s computer and smartphone user interface and capabilities.

- Recruiter interfaces with UVU’s other Banner systems and can access and populate information as needed—e.g., citizenship—into the automated admissions process.
Recruiter frees up OIT staff resources. For example, customization is easier. Previously, OIT had to reprogram the admissions system to support each customization. Now functional areas manage more customizations through system configurations. In addition, OIT is moving to an off-campus hosted solution. The functional areas will still have similar responsibilities, but OIT will now just manage the campus system’s interface, delegating most of the system operation and maintenance to the vendor.

Going forward, UVU plans to continue to enhance its online admission process to further support its open admission policy, with a long-term goal of offering an almost immediate response to a completed application submission. Consequently, the university began an undergraduate admissions process analysis in 2016, with system customizations and process redesigns to be implemented in 2017. Every element is scrutinized. For example, currently an applicant can pause the application process in order to retrieve high school transcripts. To avoid this delay, the team is determining whether transcripts should be a prerequisite before the applicant begins the process or whether to require it during the onboarding process upon acceptance.

The university is taking a holistic approach to admission process improvement, involving all onboarding functional areas—recruitment, admissions, OIT, financial aid, and registration—not only to improve the process itself but also to identify potential functional-area synergies. For example, if an applicant checks a box to apply for financial aid during the admissions process, how can any relevant admissions application information simultaneously populate a financial aid application—thus minimizing effort to fill out the financial aid form?

Finally, UVU wants to make it anywhere/anytime convenient to apply online. OIT continues to design screens and functions to fit a smartphone’s small footprint.

When reflecting on his experiences, Walker offered these lessons:

- **Have clear goals and outcomes in mind:** UVU’s long-term goal of almost immediate applicant response drives every automated function and every facet of the admission process redesign.

- **Don’t be afraid to shake things up to meet your goals:** UVU constantly reevaluates its system features and processes to identify areas of improvement. “The worse thing to do is implement technology in the way you have always done it,” stated Walker. “Then you wonder why everyone is unhappy with the new system. It’s because it works the same way as the old system. You have to rethink things.”

- **Local system customization highlights issues of coordination and governance:** For example, a graduate school may want to waive high school
transcript requirements. But that may conflict with university reporting requirements. For situations like this, UVU took several steps to resolve potential conflicts:

- The admission system’s look and feel is set at the system level, limiting functional area customization.
- Governance meetings are used to work through potential conflicts.
- OIT released configuration ability gradually to the functional areas, starting with admissions, and expanded to other areas only upon conflict resolution.
Conclusion

With a heterogeneous market full of systems with various management and deployment strategies, institutions looking to implement a new undergraduate admissions system have many options. As was the case for UVU, institutions will be successful if they have a clear vision for their customer experience. While UVU’s open admissions policy differs from that of most colleges and universities, its admission system experience offers insights for every institution. Its commitment to vision, user-centered design, and rapid applicant response can be applied to continuing education and nonacademic programs. Streamlining the admissions process and synergizing admissions-related information can help any institution improve both the applicant experience and institutional efficiencies.

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Note


About the Enterprise Application Market Series

The Enterprise Application Market report series from the EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research focuses on data from the EDUCAUSE Core Data Service (CDS) to better understand how higher education institutions approach various information systems. Market share and system rate of change are among the metrics highlighted in this series. Information provided for this series was derived from the Information Systems and Applications module of CDS. For reports in the 2015 series, responses from 510 institutions were analyzed. Only U.S. institutions are represented in this series.