

Enrollment Management

At the University of North Texas (UNT), the resolution of delinquent accounts is critical to helping students stay on track for graduation. However, communicating with students regarding those accounts can quickly consume extraordinary amounts of time, as well as significant financial- and labor-related resources. When traditional methods of account and collections outreach became too costly, UNT turned to Blackboard Connect to deliver timely, targeted enrollment-related voice and e-mail messages. In one week alone, the university recovered 800 of 1,400 accounts. According to Steven Collins, collections specialist, “The Blackboard Connect platform enabled us to directly notify students of important, timely account information through a single message, saving significant costs in manpower and long distance telephone charges.

CHALLENGE: Keeping Students On Track

Located in Denton, Texas, the University of North Texas is the flagship school for the UNT system and has an enrollment of more than 36,000 students. A public research institution, the university employs more than 4,700 faculty and staff and was added to The Princeton Review’s Best of the West list. UNT serves a variety of student populations, including recent high school graduates, returning adult students, and veterans. Because of the university’s comprehensive understanding of the educational issues veterans face, veteran enrollment has boomed in recent years; to meet the demand, the university just opened a veteran’s office directly on campus.

Delinquent account follow-up for any university can be costly. For the University of North Texas, notifying students of potential class cancellations as result of delinquent account status consumed significant financial and human resources, including temporary employee salaries,

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Collections Specialist
University of North Texas



office space acquisition, long distance phone charges, and staff hours. Every year, the university makes an average of 10,000 calls to students regarding delinquent accounts; \$15,000 was spent on actual phone calls alone. The need to recover accounts, however, had more than monetary relevance. Keeping students paid up and in class is a key factor in the university's ability to ensure on-time graduation; graduation rates directly affect the university's standing, funding, and potential to attract new students.

SOLUTION: Blackboard Connect

To both recoup costs and keep students on the track to timely graduation, UNT administrators needed a way to clearly and consistently communicate with students. Critical, too, was the capability to obtain delivery confirmation, key to avoiding later student rebuttals if a class was subsequently cancelled. Any communication service would also have to show both a short-term and long-term return on investment—first in the form of monetary recoupment and later in consistent enrollment numbers.

UNT administrators selected the Blackboard Connect notification service to facilitate collections and delinquent account outreach. The university found the implementation process, as well as training on the system, simple and straightforward. According to Randall "Joey" Saxon, the university's director of Purchasing and Payment Services, "Blackboard Connect is easy to use and intuitive: we had the service up and running without needing much training."

RESULT: Significant Return on Investment

The university immediately began employing the service to manage enrollment cancellations. On December 7, 2006, 1,400 students were notified that their classes would be dropped unless they remitted payment by December 11th of that year. Results demonstrated an immediate return-on-investment: within one week, UNT had fully recouped 800 accounts. Before implementing Blackboard Connect, it would have taken days and substantial resources to deliver the same message—all

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with less return. "The response Blackboard Connect generates is incredible," Saxon stated. "In addition, we can go in and analyze our results."

The service allowed the university to contact thousands of students in minutes and eliminated the need for the costly hiring, training, and management of temporary staff. Because the Blackboard Connect service includes unlimited calling, the university also avoided incurring thousands of dollars in long-distance charges. "It would take 10 people one day to complete the calls to more than 1,000 overdue accounts," said Steven Collins, the university's collections specialist. "The Blackboard Connect platform enabled us to notify students directly of important, timely account information through a single message, saving significant costs in manpower and long distance charges."

The service continues to be an important component in both the university's collections and enrollment management outreach strategy. In early July 2009, the university used the service to contact 1,018 students as part of a collections procedure. In two weeks, 400 accounts were recouped. During the same time period, 1,114 calls went out to remind students that classes would be cancelled if payment was not remitted. After only one round of calling, 471 accounts were settled. "Blackboard Connect is a fast and easy way to get messages out to students," Collins added. "We get actual results from it."