



A Private Liberal Arts College Upgrades Its Financial Aid Software



About Five Towns College

A liberal arts college located on Long Island, New York, Five Towns College offers undergraduate and graduate degrees to approximately 1,350 students. The college's programs primarily focus on media, arts, film and television, music education, and business management.

Among its enrolled population, 95% of Five Towns' students receive financial aid, with around 70% receiving Title IV federal financial aid.

Five Towns' financial aid office required a student information system (SIS) with a robust financial aid module to efficiently manage its operations and provide the best support for its students. The system needed to offer advanced reporting capabilities, seamless integration with other departments, built-in communications and a student self-service portal.

Location	Long Island, NY
School Type	Private, Liberal Arts
Student Pop.	Approximately 1,350 students
Accreditation	Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) National Association of Schools of Music National Association of Schools of Theatre Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation New York State Department of Education
Credit Types	Undergraduate and Graduate
Old System	CampusVue (now Anthology)

95% of Five Towns College's students receive some form of financial support, including Title IV federal loans, grants and work study, and private awards.

Approx. 70% of students receive Title IV federal financial aid.

The Challenge

Financial Aid Software to Simplify Operations and Improve Communications

Previously, Five Towns deployed an older version of CampusVue's SIS, and the financial aid office used its built-in financial aid module.

In CampusVue, it was difficult for Five Towns' financial aid officials to manage multiple types of aid within a student account. Five Towns College's Director of Financial Aid, Jason LaBonte, explains that a typical student receives a combination of Title IV funding and school-provided aid, which could result in a student having more than six forms of aid.

Because of this, staff had to input information from each financial aid source into separate spreadsheets, resulting in a complicated, error-prone and time-intensive process. LaBonte felt that having a single spreadsheet for each student account would significantly improve efficiency and data accuracy.

Moreover, CampusVue had limited options to communicate directly with students from within the SIS, so staff had to send individual emails and calls to students. That was a timely and labor-intensive process for managing student accounts and information.

Finally, another source of frustration was that Five Towns' staff and students couldn't access financial aid information remotely or from mobile devices. They were eager for an option where students could manage their personal information and accounts.

"Getting students to provide their financial aid information, complete forms, and get the information that we need in a timely manner has always been a challenge. That's the case for a lot of financial aid offices around the country," notes LaBonte.

Faced with the system's overall limitations, the administration opted to upgrade to a new cloud-based, integrated SIS with financial aid software that would improve efficiency, expand access and produce reliable data.

“ It saves a lot of time having the ability to upload the awards to a student when you're giving so many scholarships and funds to students.”

-Jason LaBonte

Director of Financial Aid,
Five Towns College

The Solution

A System With Advanced Features and Integrated Data

After evaluating other options, Five Towns College determined that Campus Cafe offered the solutions it needed. Most importantly, it included an integrated financial aid module, which is a critical component for managing the school's operations.

Since Campus Cafe has a financial aid module built right into the system, it streamlines the school's financial aid reporting and communications processes. This enables the financial aid staff to process aid and produce documents and generate internal and government reports more efficiently. Also, students can access their accounts and submit documents on a user-friendly portal, while the financial aid staff can send auto-notifications and individual communications within the system.

“Campus Cafe has just the right amount of functionality that you need to properly run a good financial aid operation,” LaBonte says.

The Results

Improved Operations, Efficiency and Communications

Since adopting the Campus Cafe system the financial aid team and students have improved access to key reporting features, workflows and communication tools. Now the financial aid process is more streamlined with improved transparency.

Key benefits include the following:

Loan packaging

Campus Cafe's SIS with integrated financial aid software has significantly improved the Five Towns' financial aid department's efficiency and security of its loan packaging. Several key functions are now automated, pre-built or bundled, saving time and improving data accuracy.

For example, in the past, the financial aid staff had to manually input sensitive personal information, like parents' Social Security numbers, to package a Parent PLUS loan. Such a manual process could lead to errors, like mistyping data or confusing a parent's Social Security number with the student's information.

With Campus Cafe's SIS, manual data entry is eliminated by assigning each student aid recipient a student account number and attaching all of their information.

If the student already has a PLUS loan in the system, there's an ID number attached to their account, and all other PLUS loans are automatically attached to the account.

This function not only saves time and reduces errors, but ensures the security of students' and parents' personal information.

Additionally, Campus Cafe's system allows financial aid staff to bundle aid for multiple students receiving funds in one program simultaneously. This eliminates the need for individual data entry and processing each loan.

Furthermore, staff can package and upload multiple funds and awards for an individual student to their account using a single spreadsheet. That is a significant improvement compared to the previous practice of manually entering each funding source and student data into separate documents.

LaBonte says this feature is an essential time saver, particularly when dealing with numerous student scholarships and funds.

“Now we can just quickly type them all into a spreadsheet for that one student and hit a button and upload, and they’re all in there. And it only takes a couple of minutes per student,” he explains. “It saves a lot of time having the ability to upload the awards to a student when you’re giving so many scholarships and funds to students.”

Reporting

According to LaBonte, Campus Cafe’s internal and government reporting capabilities have been game-changers. He can easily access pre-built reports, including filings and verifications, which are frequently used for disbursements and federal reporting, such as IPEDS and FISAP.

The financial aid staff can also create, edit and save student groups for easier reporting.

“We like that we can utilize the base reports for federal requirements, and the ease of running a filter to get a group of students for packaging and disbursements. That’s very easy,” LaBonte noted.

For Title IV federal financial aid reporting, Campus Cafe’s SIS is integrated with EdConnect and transmits data from the Department of Education. LaBonte reports that the integration with EdConnect is seamless.

“ Auto notifications have helped us speed up the financial aid process as well as the texting and communications built into the system.”

-Jason LaBonte



Communications

Campus Cafe's built-in CRM enables Five Towns College's financial aid administrators to communicate quickly and easily with individual students or a larger student group. They can also configure automated email and text notifications triggered by a workflow or event.

For instance, when students submit documents, the system sends an alert that their requirements are complete or notifies the financial aid counselor of any outstanding items. It also sends notifications when funds are available, ensuring students stay informed and updated about their accounts.

Efficient communications within the SIS further enhance the process. The financial aid office can directly send emails or texts to individual students without the need to locate contact information and switch to a different platform or device. This streamlined approach helps staff respond to more students in less time, improving the quality of their communications and response time.

Interdepartmental Coordination

To streamline operations campus-wide, Campus Cafe facilitates communication and collaboration between departments, particularly admissions, the bursar's office and the registrar. Working in the same integrated SIS provides access to a single source of truth and real-time data, leading to more accurate results and better cross-department coordination on projects.

"The capability helps us and other departments, and it works very well when we do projects together," LaBonte says.

During a recent Title IV financial aid audit, the utility of Campus Cafe's integrated system became evident. LaBonte says the integrated system played a crucial role in a smooth audit process. The financial aid office needed to pull records on 75 students and coordinate with other offices. The student filter tool proved invaluable as representatives from the financial aid office, the registrar, admissions and the bursar's office could quickly access the same information by entering the student ID number into Campus Cafe.

Auto packaging	The system is capable of managing federal aid, non-federal and private awards.
Integrated data	The full system integration ensures that student ledgers, records and program data remain synchronized with the Department of Ed.
CRM functionality	The built-in CRM automatically notifies students of verification, rejection, packaging and other financial aid statuses, streamlining communications and updates.
Mobile responsive portal	Both school staff and students can conveniently manage document requirements and view and accept awards, which streamlines the back-and-forth communication.
Training and support	The Campus Cafe team assists in configuring the financial aid setup and provides extensive live training and support.
Robust system security	Campus Cafe's cloud-based system offers state-of-the-art security measures to safeguard sensitive records and financial information.

Student Self-Service Portal

Campus Cafe's SIS includes a student portal where Five Towns students can now access their financial aid accounts. Importantly, students can accept their financial aid awards and federal funds, a feature that was lacking in CampusVue.

The portal also allows students to manage their financial aid documents by uploading required documents placed on their account from verification or comment code flags on their ISIR. They can amend award amounts, accept awards and print award letters that include the cost of their tuition.

Student Filters

Five Towns' financial aid department relies on Campus Cafe's student filters to quickly and easily access a student account. By inputting a student's ID number, they can retrieve financial aid account information and records and upload spreadsheets that are attached to the account.

When financial aid staff, administrators or colleagues in another department need information, they easily find the student ID number in a single location. LaBonte says this is one of his favorite and most-used features.



photo courtesy: Nelson + Pope



Contact us for a DEMO today!

800-906 7226 x 135

sales@campuscafesoftware.com

CampusCafeSoftware.com/Demo