

About Houston Baptist University

Houston Baptist University (HBU) is a four-year, private, not-for-profit institution. The university is known for its rigorous liberal arts education, taught with a distinctive Christian worldview. The university's highly diverse student body reflects the demographics of its urban location in Houston, Texas. HBU is dedicated to the development of moral character, the enrichment of spiritual lives, and the perpetuation of growth in Christian ideals.

Enrollment: 3,160

Objective

To align HBU's technology infrastructure, governance, support, and services with the university's strategic priorities

Solutions

- Ellucian Technology Management Services
- Ellucian Grants Services

Business benefits

- Technology infrastructure now supports enrollment growth instead of limiting it
- Effective IT governance ensures IT projects and purchases align with HBU's strategic plan
- Business efficiencies created significant cost savings
- Improved services for students funded with \$3.6 million in grants

Managing growth through technology

Ellucian Technology Management Services helped Houston Baptist University align its technology with its strategic plan to support enrollment growth and prepare for the future

Growing pains

To say Houston Baptist University (HBU) is growing is an understatement. Over the past four years enrollment at the university has increased 29.9 percent from 2,432 students in fall 2011 to 3,160 students in fall 2015.

HBU's growth, while extraordinary, is not unexpected. For more than eight years the university has been executing a long-term strategic plan designed to transition it from outstanding regional institution to comprehensive national university.

The plan, called *The Ten Pillars: Faith & Reason in a Great City*, is grounded in

the university's commitment to Christian faith. It visualizes improvements to the university's curriculum, facilities, technology, faculty support, student success, and student enrollment. "We have plans that are built around growing to a student body of 5,000 and then to 10,000," says Sandra Mooney, vice president for financial operations.

However, as the university began to grow, it came to a crossroads. The existing IT resources proved inadequate for enabling the vision spelled out in the strategic plan. "We knew we had not invested enough in our IT infrastructure and governance,"

Mooney says. “We realized that if we kept growing without addressing those issues, we would implode upon ourselves because of our inadequate technology.”

Why choose a managed services solution?

“Universities should know what they do best,” says Mooney, “and then find partners to work with for the functions that are not their core business.” HBU’s Board of Trustees and administrative team was open to considering a solution that involved outsourcing the university’s information technology operations.

The administrative team looked at several solutions before choosing to partner with Ellucian’s Technology Management Services in 2014. The university was already using Ellucian products, including Banner® by Ellucian, a student information system, and Ellucian Recruiter™ for student recruitment and enrollment. “It was a better use of resources to develop a strategic partnership with Ellucian than to make the investment that would’ve been required to have the same level of service with only internal resources,” says Mooney. “You really have to weigh that when you are looking at this type of decision. Just as there are reasons we outsource other functions in the university, there are good reasons to look at outsourcing technology as well.”

Immediate, campus-wide improvements

Any skepticism the university’s administrators, faculty or staff might have had about the decision to choose managed services vanished when Ellucian’s Technology Management Services transition team arrived on campus. “Within weeks of the team’s arrival we had established a priority list. We were having meetings, we were getting things done, and we were making progress,” says Cynthia G. Simpson, Ph.D., provost and vice president of academic affairs.

Critical infrastructure issues were addressed first, along with many other priority projects. In less than two years, the HBU/Ellucian partnership established an IT governance process that determines IT project priorities and facilitates transparency in decision-making, and modernized equipment in the university’s aging data center.

HBU and Ellucian also assessed hardware and software resources across the campus, from

enterprise-scale (Recruiter and Banner) to desktop computers and classroom technology, and developed a plan for replacements and upgrades. HBU and Ellucian also initiated process improvements, including automating data exchange and workflow between Recruiter and Banner.

Other accomplishments included: evaluating cloud resources (including resources embedded in existing contracts with Ellucian and other vendors) and creating a comprehensive cloud strategy encompassing both data storage and application management; developing SharePoint sites for each school and department within HBU; and establishing a 24/7 help desk support for students, staff, and faculty.

Finally, HBU and Ellucian also rolled out free access to Microsoft Office 365 for all registered students, and deployed Ellucian Mobile as *HBU Mobile* to provide students with access to registration, account balance, grade and schedule information via their smart phones.

“Before our partnership with Ellucian, we really didn’t know what we didn’t know,” says James Steen, vice president for enrollment management. “We didn’t know

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IT governance key to strategic alignment

One of the university's challenges was that processes for prioritizing and completing IT projects were not clearly defined. An early task for the transition team was educating the university about different types of IT governance models and helping to establish an effective IT governance system that was right for HBU.

"Without proper IT governance it can feel like IT is running the university instead of supporting the university," says Mooney. With Ellucian's assistance, HBU created committee structures and management processes to ensure stakeholder input into IT decisions; to align IT strategies with institutional priorities; and to provide transparency about when and how IT projects are completed. "Now, with effective governance in place, HBU is making strategic decisions about technology and IT is carrying them out," says Mooney.

Steen emphasizes that although Ellucian is a partner in the governance process, HBU is still in the driver's seat. "Ellucian brings options to the table and says, 'These are the outstanding projects. So, HBU, how do you want to prioritize them? What is most important to you?' and then we decide as an institution how to move forward."

The Ellucian team has also enhanced data-based decision making capabilities for the university at large, by optimizing software and processes to collect the information the university needs to make good decisions. "There is a lot of data collection happening on our campus now that wasn't happening before," says Simpson. "When you are looking at the budgeting process, it is really important to have data to support why you need additional technology measures put in place."

Depth and breadth in technology support

HBU relies on Ellucian's Technology Management Services for guidance and expertise in advancing the university's technology agenda. For some projects, Ellucian's managed services team partners with the on-site technology staff. For other projects that require expertise in specialized areas, Ellucian uses its vast



network of experts and brings them to campus for short-term consulting engagements.

"It didn't take me long to realize Ellucian hires really good people," says Steen. "I've been really impressed with the knowledge and skillsets of the Ellucian partners that have come to work here on campus in our IT area and those who consult with us. Our partnership with Ellucian is a huge win for the institution because of the depth of their expertise. The power and the breadth of what Ellucian brings to the table is infinitely greater than anything we could have done in-house."

An additional benefit: \$3.6 million in federal grants

Ellucian's deep bench of experts played a significant role in securing grant funding for HBU. As Simpson points out, "People tend to think of IT as just a technology issue, but it is really about the role of IT in supporting student success and student growth and what we are doing to serve our students."

When Ellucian's Technology Management Services team reviewed HBU's student demographics, they realized the university's high population of minority students, Federal Pell Grant-eligible students, and first-generation

students would qualify them for a number of significant federal grants. Technology Management Services then put HBU in touch with Ellucian's Grants Services team, which went to work immediately, helping HBU develop a U.S. Department of Education Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI-Title V) application. HBU received a \$2.5 million Title V grant award. HBU is using the award to increase support services for first-year students and to enhance retention.

A few months after submitting the Title V application, HBU reached out to the Grants Services team again for assistance in developing a U.S. Department of Education TRIO Student Support Services application. HBU also received that award, and is using the \$1.1 million in additional funds to increase support services for low-income and first-generation college students.

"Those grants are helping our students be more successful in their experience here," says Simpson.

A partnership for the future

Since the partnership with Technology Management Services began, HBU has realized significant cost savings. Savings have been achieved in technology operations due to increased efficiencies (for example, the modernized data center decreased energy consumption) and through the optimization of technology resources and increased leverage in contract negotiations with other vendors.

"The commitment of both HBU and Ellucian to developing a strategic partnership, rather than just a vendor/customer relationship, has been critical to our success," says Mooney.

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HBU continues to identify and implement technology improvements that will enhance the strategic aims of the university. Current projects include incorporating a document imaging solution into the workflow and redesigning the university's website, with the assistance of Ellucian's team of experts.

"It makes a big difference, having a great partner like Ellucian that you feel comfortable with, and that you have a good relationship with," says Simpson. "We know that when we need them, they are there to step in anytime. I am a real fan of this partnership."

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ABOUT ELLUCIAN

Ellucian is the world's leading provider of software and services higher education institutions need to help students succeed. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries rely on Ellucian to help enable the mission of higher education for over 18 million students. Ellucian provides student information systems (SIS), finance and HR, recruiting, retention, analytics and advancement software solutions. With more than 1,400 institutions subscribing to Ellucian's cloud services and SaaS offerings, the company is one of the largest providers of cloud-based solutions. Ellucian also supports the higher education community with a range of professional services, such as application software implementation, training, education, and management consulting.

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