University of Arkansas

Growing university makes transcripts an enrollment advantage

When a backlog of transfer credit evaluations kept the University of Arkansas from responding to and winning potential students quickly, they turned to Brainware for Transcripts, an intelligent capture technology, integrated with their PeopleSoft system, to speed transcript processing, accelerate transfer credit evaluations and get high school coursework data they didn't have before.

Challenge
Rapid growth and manual processes

On a picturesque campus in Northwest Arkansas, the University of Arkansas (U of A) is ranked the 7th fastest-growing public university in the country by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In 2015, U of A had an enrollment of 26,754 students from the U.S. and around the world.

Thanks to a state lottery bill that funded academic scholarships in 2009, the University has experienced an enrollment increase of more than 10,000 students over the last decade. An additional initiative passed a few years later, made it easier to transfer associate degree coursework to four-year institutions – as a result, U of A has seen transfers increase between 5 and 10% each year. While they continued to see a growth in student population, their staff numbers stayed the same, putting stress on the Registrar and Admissions offices and forcing staff to process more documents and transcripts with legacy technology and manual processes.

Incoming high school and college transfer transcripts were delivered to the admissions office for admittance review, manual calculations and entry into the University's PeopleSoft system. Transcripts were then hand-delivered to the Registrar for manual review and posting of academic credits.

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

CUSTOMER
University of Arkansas

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

SIZE
26,754 students
3,419 faculty & staff

LOCATION
Fayetteville, Arkansas

PRODUCTS IN USE:
Perceptive Content
Brainware for Transcripts

Brainware™
by Hyland

The University's typical turnaround time for a transcript was between two and six weeks, and sometimes final transcript evaluations were not delivered until one-month into the first semester. Staff was overwhelmed with time-consuming data entry. Delays in Admissions caused delays for the Registrar. U of A was losing potential students because they couldn't deliver admissions decisions fast enough.

The University could not deliver timely transfer credit evaluations, resulting in a strong effect on admissions of its transfer population. In fact, it made it difficult to even recruit a transfer student.

Solution
Transforming transcript processing

If the University of Arkansas was going to make faster admissions decisions, move into new markets, and actually start recruiting transfer students, Registrar staff knew it was time for a change. In 2013, when the Admissions office began looking to replace their legacy document management system, it was the perfect time for the Registrar's office to join the project and expand the scope to include a transcript data extraction solution.

The team at U of A knew they needed document management, capture and workflow that would integrate with their PeopleSoft system. Having seen optical character recognition (OCR) technology at various conferences, Registrar staff also knew they needed template-free data extraction. With U of A's large number of feeder schools, building and maintaining templates would be too difficult and time-consuming.

The University selected Perceptive Content, process and content management solution, and Brainware for Transcripts intelligent capture. Brainware's intelligent capture solution works without templates, zones or rules-based techniques. A proven integration with PeopleSoft was also a deciding factor for U of A.

After an accelerated and successful four–month implementation, the Registrar and Admissions went live with the content management and intelligent capture solutions.

Results
Faster decisions, faster admissions

Today, transfer students send transcripts directly to the Registrar office first and equivalency work can begin immediately. All transfer transcripts are batchscanned into Brainware, and while the Registrar office begins their work, the admissions file is automatically updated as received in PeopleSoft. Even if staff in Admissions hasn't seen the transcript yet, it is marked as received by the system and counts toward file completion.

"Instead of two offices having to physically touch and manually evaluate the same transcript, the Admissions office is able to use the work from the Registrar office to admit students much faster," said Robin Carr, Director of Academic Records. "The data extracted by Brainware and integration with PeopleSoft means we are not duplicating work and we're less likely to receive duplicate transcripts, too."

High school transcripts are still received at the Admissions office, but now they are batch-scanned into Brainware for evaluation and any college work is sent to the Registrar immediately for equivalency.

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University staff no longer pass paper between offices, manually enter data or duplicate efforts. Their new transcript turnaround time is an average of 24 hours and final transcript evaluations can now be provided before the semester begins. Delivering decisions much faster is helping the University capture students they might have missed before.

Targeting and recruiting like never before

Transfer credit evaluations are going so smoothly that the University is taking advantage of evaluating transcripts received as inquiries – before the students even apply. Once U of A receives a transcript and evaluates the transfer credits, a file is created for that potential student awaiting their application. The prospective student is entered into the Admissions communications plan and begins receiving recruitment material. The ability to provide a transfer credit report to an inquiry has become a powerful competitive advantage for the University.

U of A's admissions are up, specifically in the transfer population. Because the University can admit students quicker than the competition, it wins more students.

Brainware also allows the University to build transfer rules upon the receipt of a new transcript so the next time the same course is submitted the rule is already in the articulation system for automatic equivalency. To date, U of A has built 300,000 courses from 20,000 institutions, including foreign institutions. Their robust articulation system has resulted in faster turnaround for students.

"We're moving into new markets in an effort to make a national impact," said Carr. "Doing this much transfer equivalency work for this many new schools would not have been sustainable with a template-based solution."

Overtime is a thing of the past

The University is still short-staffed, but the Admissions and Registrar offices are more efficient and their staff is much happier. Brainware technology has helped eliminate the overtime employees used to need each year to process transcripts during peak enrollment season. The University is also able to repurpose staff to do additional equivalency work and help out in other areas to prevent backlogs.

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Brainware™
by Hyland