



Colleges See the Cloud as One Tool to Keep Higher Education Affordable

BY LINDA CURREY POST

Colleges and universities will increase their investments in cloud applications and infrastructure by 22.3 percent by 2023, according to the most recent five-year forecast from the research firm Ovum.

“Higher ed is a very collaborative community, and people love to share their success stories with peers. They’re finding out their universities can get real value from utilizing cloud-based systems and infrastructure.”

— JOYCE KIM
Education Technology Analyst
Ovum

The cautious nature of college administrators and professors may have caused them to hold off on cloud computing until it proved its value—but no more. “It’s no longer a question of ‘if’ institutions will move to the cloud, but ‘when,’” says Joyce Kim, education technology analyst at Ovum and lead author of the forecast.

Kim says that colleges and universities are anxious to reap the rewards of cloud, particularly in three areas:

- Financial systems that offer real-time and accurate accounting of expenditures against grants and other income, particularly in the face of recent, widespread cuts in state and federal funding;
- Human resources and recruiting systems that help attract top professors, who are drawn to the missions of the colleges even when they could earn more working in the private sector;
- Student information systems, of which the more modern systems have tools to help shepherd “nontraditional students” through the college experience, thus increasing retention and completion rates.

We talked with two higher education leaders about how the cloud fits into their strategies:

DePaul University: Attracting a Diverse Student Body

Two big financial trends are driving higher education to take a closer look at cloud-based financial applications: Public funding to colleges is shrinking, and tuition is hitting a ceiling as students are less willing to saddle themselves with a lifetime of debt.

“Institutions have been raising their tuition very dramatically compared with inflation and other measures. At the same time, student loans have reached an unsustainable level of debt for the students,” says Bob McCormick, vice president for Information Services at [DePaul University](#). “I think people in higher ed are now asking the questions around what can be done more efficiently, what can be done better.”

As part of continuous efforts to control costs and identify ways to cut spending, DePaul started implementing a cloud-based suite of finance applications, [Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) Cloud](#), six months ago.

Now the nation’s largest Catholic university, DePaul continues to follow the teachings of the school’s namesake, St. Vincent de Paul, with a mission to give more people access to education, including first-generation college students with diverse cultural, ethnic, and financial backgrounds. McCormick thinks the modern ERP system will help in that mission by improving financial efficiency.

“We tend to help our students a little more, both in the classroom and with navigating the higher education experience. Affordability is always central to our minds,” he says.



Students prep for final exams in Baylor University's Moody Memorial Library. (Photo courtesy of Carlye Thornton)

Baylor University: Recruiting Top Professors

For **Baylor University**, where hiring top professors is key to success, university leaders decided it was critical to have human resources and financial systems that talked to each other. That vision became the catalyst to move to the cloud. The university installed **Oracle ERP Cloud** for financials, and **Oracle Human Capital Management (HCM) Cloud** to handle the onboarding of new employees and then support employees with modern HR services.

Jon Allen, the chief information security officer and interim CIO, reflects on the scope of the changes: "Was it easy? No, because this was more than just buying a new system. It is a business transformation, and the level of change management required to execute this properly is significant. But because we're doing it as a holistic project, it will serve to support the next generation of what's happening here in our institution."

Higher education's embrace of cloud services is also moving into student-facing systems that aim to give students the information they need to stay in school and on track to graduate. **Oracle Student Cloud**, for instance, provides students with information about degree requirements, helps them choose their courses and plan their schedules, and reminds them about registration and payment deadlines.

Oracle Student Cloud was developed with input from actual college students who advised Oracle to, for example, build one student information system to replace the several different systems they now must use to register for a parking pass, say, or buy a meal card. And the students lobbied for an interface that looks the same and is easy to use from device to device and that works well on all forms of social media.

The students' real-world input, according to Jason Wenrick, vice president of Oracle's Higher Education User Group, representing 900 colleges and universities, is what today's students want and need to be successful during their college years.

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