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Higher Education Profile:

Navarro College Pursues Campus-Wide Cloud Strategy with Oracle

Navarro College has embarked on an IT modernization project to move its critical software applications to the cloud. This far-reaching initiative, hailed by the president of the institution as one of the most strategic endeavors since the college was founded, places Oracle at the heart of an ambitious technology makeover.

Introduction: A Small College with Big Goals

The popular Netflix show *Cheer* brought Navarro College into the limelight when it introduced the school's award-winning cheerleading team and its high-flying achievements, which catapulted the squad to 14 national titles. This popular six-part docu-series not only made this small, rural school part of the national entertainment conversation, but also made national stars of the Head Coach and some of its key athletes.

The grit and determination that characterizes this cheerleading team extends not only throughout Navarro's vibrant student body, but also to its faculty and administrative staff, where approximately 500 employees are dedicated to fulfilling the aspirations of more than 15,000 students.

Many of the students within this diverse population gravitated to Navarro not only for the academic experience, but also to fulfill unique personal and professional goals. To help drive administrative efficiency and keep these students engaged, the college is implementing a broad set of software as a service (SaaS) applications from Oracle Corporation.

"Moving to Oracle Cloud is one of Navarro College's most important initiatives," confirms Dr. Kevin Fegan, President of Navarro College. "In order to pursue our vision to be a nationally-recognized institution, deliver innovative career pathways, and student-centered learning, our technology must be at the highest level."

"We're a small school, but we're very committed to our mission: To provide educational opportunities that empower students to achieve their personal, academic, and career goals," says Rich Miller, Administrative Services Manager at the college.

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About Navarro College

Navarro College is a two-year community college with four campuses in northeast Texas. Chartered in 1946, the college operates under the policies established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Mission Statement

Navarro College provides educational opportunities that empower students to achieve their personal, academic, and career goals and that promote life-long learning for all communities served.

"If you want to change the culture of an institution, you have to change the software. We could have revamped Ellucian Colleague, but it would have taken much longer to retrain our staff in comparison to starting fresh on Oracle."

Barry Sullivan
Director of Information Technology
Navarro College

Moving from Old Systems to New

Miller and the other members of Navarro's lean, 14-person IT department fill multiple roles as they provide and support the technology services that help make this mission possible. Going forward, the linchpin of their strategy involves a wholesale migration to Oracle Cloud.

More than 25 years ago, Navarro College standardized on an Ellucian Colleague enterprise resource planning (ERP) system for Finance, HR, and Student Information. According to Miller, this legacy information system has steadily evolved over the years, but its on-premises architecture has presented inherent limitations in the Cloud era. "Colleague has improved, but it is still miles away from where we need to be—especially since COVID pushed everything online," he admits. "Our goal is to make massive strides and to be nationally recognized, but our information systems did not allow us to meet that vision."

These limitations are particularly acute with the Ellucian Colleague financial aid process. Once students apply for admission, it takes a couple days before a Microsoft Active Directory account is established, and then a few more days before they can obtain the answers they need to make a decision. In some cases, it can take weeks or even months from the time students submit their financial aid applications and finally accept their financial aid packages.

"Ellucian Colleague is very batch-oriented, which doesn't allow us to be very responsive as students apply for admission and complete their financial aid applications," explains Kristal Nicholson, Director of Financial Aid at Navarro College. "It's not always clear what students are supposed to do next, and there are often delays getting information back from us."

Sixty percent of these students receive Pell grants, and many of them receive other types of grants, scholarships, and loans. "Their hope is that college will be paid for," continues Nicholson. "If we are the first school to get back to them with that news, they might be more inclined to come to Navarro. We are confident we are losing students because it takes too long to complete these basic tasks."

Better Financial Aid Processes

To reverse this trend, Navarro is deploying Oracle Student Financial Planning (SFP), a modern financial aid system that will allow the college to deliver a more efficient and accurate financial aid experience for students by automating more than 90 percent of the financial aid process.

For example, Navarro's current financial aid process requires periodic batch downloads from the Department of Education. Financial Aid officers manually submit corrections to the Department of Education during verification. With Oracle, instead of manually initiating 10 to 12 separate processes, these downloads will be automatic, which will save many hours for both students and staff. In addition, if a financial aid officer makes a change, the student will see it instantly. Oracle SFP personalizes the experience for every student and offers instantaneous feedback as they apply for financial aid and interact with the

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Kevin Fegan
President, Navarro College

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Rich Miller
Administrative Services Manager Navarro College

college. Instead of having to manually note when each student document is received, all student records will be automatically updated—with instant visibility for students.

Oracle Student Financial Aid Planning enables Nicholson and her colleagues to spend time on students, not on administrative processes. "Oracle automates the financial aid process," she confirms. "It's much more interactive. When students complete a task, they receive a response. That's going to be a game-changer for us."

Better Data Quality

The problems in Navarro's back-office information systems extend beyond financial aid. Navarro's IT team also wrestles with data quality, analytics, reporting, and cybersecurity issues. This is partly a result of the Ellucian Colleague data structure, which Miller describes as "confusing and nonsensical."

The IT team tried to resolve these issues by supplementing Colleague with a Tableau business intelligence tool. Unfortunately, Tableau wasn't easy to use with the Colleague data. According to Barry Sullivan, Director of IT at Navarro College, these data restrictions sometimes locked up records during query activities, forcing administrators to gather and manipulate data via spreadsheets. Some key reports took two to three hours to run, introducing additional delays into administrative processes.

The breaking point with Colleague came during the COVID shutdown. As students, faculty, and staff attempted to adapt to remote forms of work, the IT team faced serious hurdles trying to keep everybody connected, engaged, and productive. It was clear that the college had reached an impasse.

Barry Sullivan sums up their thinking at that crucial juncture. "Should we spend money trying to revamp a system that was created back in the 1980s? Or should we look towards the future to help the college move forward?"

Navarro College's strategic plan is to move nearly all their data and applications to the cloud. "We've done a lot of that already," Sullivan adds. "Our phone systems are in the cloud. Our email systems are in the cloud. Our learning management systems are in the cloud. Moving ERP to the cloud is going to be the next big thing."

"Oracle automates the financial aid process. It's much more interactive than our current system. When students complete a task, they receive a response. That's going to be a game-changer for us."

Kristal Nicholson
Director of Financial Aid
Navarro College

"Oracle was the only strictly cloud option. All other products were on-premise or hybrid, and wouldn't solve our biggest problems. Oracle does everything functionally that we would like to have it do. Cloud was the best move, and we would have the strength of Oracle behind us."

Barry Sullivan
Director of Information Technology
Navarro College

Selecting Cloud Applications

Navarro's IT team evaluated the full suite of SaaS solutions from Ellucian, along with cloud solutions from Workday and three other vendors before selecting Oracle as the best company to meet Navarro's current needs while anticipating the challenges of tomorrow. Oracle has a team dedicated to mid-market schools and it understands the issues facing higher education institutions.

"Oracle presented the most modern and forward-thinking technology," Miller says. "Their cloud applications utilize HTML5, which allows for identical experiences on computers, tablets, and phones."

Sullivan believes that moving key information systems to the cloud will improve the college's IT security and disaster recovery posture, and that Oracle will give the college a "tremendous advancement" in these areas.

"We looked at Workday, but their timeline didn't fit our requirements and the cost were not cost effective," Sullivan adds. "Oracle was the only strictly cloud option that had the functionality we needed. All other products were designed for on-premises or hybrid-cloud deployments."

Finally, Oracle's subscription-based business model presented the most viable financial option. "Oracle was our number one choice, but we thought we wouldn't be able to afford it," Miller says. "Fortunately, discounts available through the Mythics procurement contract made it financially possible." (See sidebar, "Cloud Migration Services from Mythics.")

Sullivan expects that, over the long term, the Oracle software will be less expensive than their current footprint for information systems. These savings will come, in part, through eliminating extraneous application software packages that the college no longer needs, such as a document management system that

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costs around $80,000 per year. "We'll be able to eliminate that system and move the data to Oracle, where we can store scanned images," he notes. "We now have a 10-year deal with Oracle, and by the time we get to year seven we should be spending less money overall than we are spending now."

Better Implementation Services

Navarro has embarked on a staged implementation of Oracle SaaS functionality, beginning with Human Capital Management (HCM) and the Student Financial Planning module of Oracle Student Cloud, followed by Payroll, Financial Aid, and Budgeting, and the remaining Oracle Student Cloud modules. Oracle Student Cloud will allow the college to support lifelong learning—from pre-collegiate through undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, and beyond—all on a single, extensible platform.

Navarro College hired an Oracle application specialist who is dedicated to rolling out and integrating the Oracle software across multiple departments, as well as to helping users understand its capabilities.

"HR and ERP are our top priority," Sullivan confirms. "Right now, payroll cuts off 20 days or more before the end of the month and we have to hand-verify everything [during that 20-day period]. Our Leave system is also very manual: you have to bring a piece of paper to a member of the team who scans it in. Oracle is providing us with an interactive, online Leave system, as well as more distributed data entry."

While Sullivan anticipates that a learning curve and cultural shift will be required to fully utilize these new information systems, he sees the advantage of a wholesale move to a more nimble, cloud-based platform. "We realized that if we want to change the institutional processes, we have to change the software," he reasons. "We could have revamped Colleague, but it would take much longer to retrain our staff. With Oracle, we have a whole new system, and everybody will be starting from the same point."

Better Integration

Oracle's agile, cloud-based enterprise systems not only simplify admissions and financial aid processes for students, but also eliminate manual work for Navarro's administrative staff, with automatic "handoffs" among student-facing systems such as Admissions, Recruitment, Financial Aid, and Student.

In the back office, Oracle orchestrates a smooth exchange of data among Payroll, HR, and other business functions—from human resources to talent management to workforce management. A self-service HR system empowers employees to enter and manage their own data. Whether people engage with the system via their computers, tablets, or smart phones, Oracle maintains one consistent source of data and ensures a consistent experience across all types of devices.

Better Analytics

Advanced Cloud Applications from Oracle

- **Enterprise Performance Management**: Model and plan across finance, HR, supply chain, and sales. Streamline the financial close process. Drive better decisions.

- **Enterprise Resource Planning:** Gain resilience and agility as you position your institution for sustainable growth. Easily adapt business models and processes to reduce costs and sharpen forecasts.

- **Human Capital Management:** Plan, manage, and optimize global HR processes with one common data source. Make better decisions, personalize employee experiences, and leverage highly configurable workflows.

- **Customer Experience:** Create, manage, serve, and nurture positive relationships. Empower your faculty and staff to deliver exceptional student experiences—from acquisition to retention to matriculation.

- **Student Financial Planning:** Spend time on students, not processes, by automating upwards of 90 percent of financial aid processes. Help students make stronger financial decisions and optimize academic outcomes.

- **Student Cloud:** Make the complex simple with a flexible architecture designed for line-of-business users. Deliver agile, insightful, and proactive experiences that delight students. Support lifelong learning on a single, extensible platform.

Whether analyzing an individual academic department or an entire campus location, Navarro's senior officers want to know which programs generate revenue and which ones don't. Unfortunately, systems often lack the granularity necessary to deliver these insights.

"It goes back to the way we set up Colleague in the beginning," Sullivan explains. "Ideally, each academic program, each sport, and each activity should have a GL number. With Colleague, we don't have that level of detail. The chart of accounts only has five segments. We don't have a detailed breakdown of costs beyond *in-district*, *out-of-district*, or *out-of-state*. We are setting up Oracle with 11 segments, which will make it easier to analyze costs. Also, Oracle has a more modern data structure. It enforces data-entry procedures so we are assured of obtaining complete and correct data."

He pauses, reflecting on their implementation strategy and anticipating new levels of efficiency in the years ahead.

"It was clear that moving our information systems to the cloud was the best way forward, and Oracle has the best cloud applications. Plus, we know that we have the strength and stability of Oracle behind us. That was another driving factor in our decision to standardize on Oracle software."

Contact Oracle To Learn More

With nearly three decades of experience in higher education and over ten thousand institutional customers worldwide, Oracle's charter is to help educational institutions use data to unlock new possibilities for students, faculty, and staff. Oracle's integrated suite of cloud-native solutions puts students at the center of the academic process with a connected set of digital experiences that improve academic outcomes and ensure student success.

To learn more about Oracle Cloud solutions for higher education, visit oracle.com/industries/higher-education.

Integrate Data in the Cloud

Oracle's connected information systems simplify nearly all aspects of campus operations while personalizing experiences for students, faculty, and staff. Standardize on Oracle Cloud to reduce costs, increase employee engagement, and improve student retention.

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Barry Sullivan
Director of Information Technology
Navarro College

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