

EDUCATING THE IPOD GENERATION

The battle to attract the best begins long before graduates enter the business world. Universities and colleges compete with each other to recruit the most promising students. With its attractive infrastructure and state-of-the-art information technology, Northern Kentucky University is a clear front-runner in the race for young talent.

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Author: Johannes Gillar

NKU



It's mid-August, and a new semester has just begun at Northern Kentucky University. The campus in Highland Heights, a suburb of Cincinnati, is teeming with students and professors. They hurry along paths that crisscross the wide expanses of lawn, passing impressive, modern faculty buildings. And they're all looking forward to their first seminars and lectures at NKU.

Jesse Cleary-Budge is running late. For his master's degree in business informatics, he has to sign up for courses in advanced programming methods and computer networks. He pulls out his iPhone, calls up the iNKU app, selects "my classes," and checks his schedule to see where his class is being held. A short time later, he's sitting in a seminar room, learning more about multi-paradigm design patterns.

Thanks to myNKU, the university's SAP solution, Jesse was able to use his smartphone to sign up quickly and easily for his courses. "SAP offers us a robust platform that is both Web-based and mobile-enabled," says Timothy C. Ferguson, CIO and associate provost for information technology at NKU. The solution is based on SAP Business Suite and SAP Student Lifecycle Management and gives students access to the university's campus management systems whenever they need it. "If they want to attract the best students, universities need an IT landscape that meets the needs of the iPod generation," says Ferguson.

NKU's legacy software, a DEC VAX system, offered neither mobile access nor high availability. The university badly needed to switch to a solution that would provide both industry-specific and standard business functions, particularly because it is one of Kentucky's fastest-growing educational establishments. A total of 15,000 students and 2,400 faculty and staff benefit from the SAP solution.

As part of an IT optimization program, NKU installed a significant number of self-service applications, including employee self-services and manager self-services, a user interface for lecturers and speakers, and a purchase requisitions function. The improvements were particularly noticeable in the area of human resources. "Before we installed the

new system, all our HR processes were paper-based – applications for vacation, changes to payroll, documentation for new faculty and staff members, and so on," recalls Ferguson. The volume of paper involved was slowly getting out of control.

Today, HR activities are processed electronically, speeding up processing and significantly reducing the quantity of paper used on campus. "Only one percent of faculty and staff still print their pay statement out; the other 99% look at it online," says Ferguson, adding that the organizers of the "NKU Green" initiative in particular have applauded this development. In addition to cost savings and green benefits, the new system

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offers high availability. "In the past, we worked with a batch-driven, transactional system. Now we have a real-time, online solution," says Ferguson.

NKU also profits from the business intelligence in SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse. "Our data was previously stored in several disparate systems. Updating and maintaining it was about as easy as herding cats," remembers Ferguson. Thanks to the new solution, all this data is now in SAP NetWeaver BW, which provides a single, trusted data source for payroll, faculty management, course management, grade point averages, and test scores for the American College Test. Yet this, says Ferguson, is just the beginning: "Right now, →

AT A GLANCE

THE SITUATION To keep pace with rapid growth and meet its vision for the future, NKU needed to replace an aging administrative system (financial, human resources, and student administration) that no longer made the grade. The strategic initiatives could not be achieved without the foundation of robust, efficient transactional and reporting systems.

WHY SAP? SAP offers a platform that is both Web-based and mobile-enabled. NKU now has a robust system for their HR, finance, and campus-management business processes that not only meets their current needs but is also a foundation for the growth of the university.

THE RESULT The solution is based on SAP Business Suite and SAP Student Lifecycle Management and gives students access to the university's campus management systems whenever they need it. Furthermore, employees and customer services have been significantly improved due to increased availability of the SAP system.

The Student Union
at Northern
Kentucky University



NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1968, Northern Kentucky University has become a leader in Greater Cincinnati and Kentucky by providing a private school education at a fraction of the cost. It is one of the fastest growing universities in Kentucky.

NKU offers 70 bachelor degrees, six associate degrees, 20 graduate programs, one Juris Doctor, and one Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, as well as more than 30 graduate certificates.

we're looking very closely at the SAP BusinessObjects BI portfolio." The options for data mining and higher ed analytics have sparked Ferguson's interest. "Analytical techniques like these offer a real added value because they allow us to predict how likely it is, based on certain criteria and historic data, that a student who applied to NKU will actually enroll."

Analyses such as these are a kind of holy grail for universities, explains Ferguson. "We receive up to 30,000 applications every semester. If BI can help us predict who will likely come to NKU, who are undecided, and who are unlikely, we can concentrate on winning over the waverers. This kind of insight is absolutely invaluable."

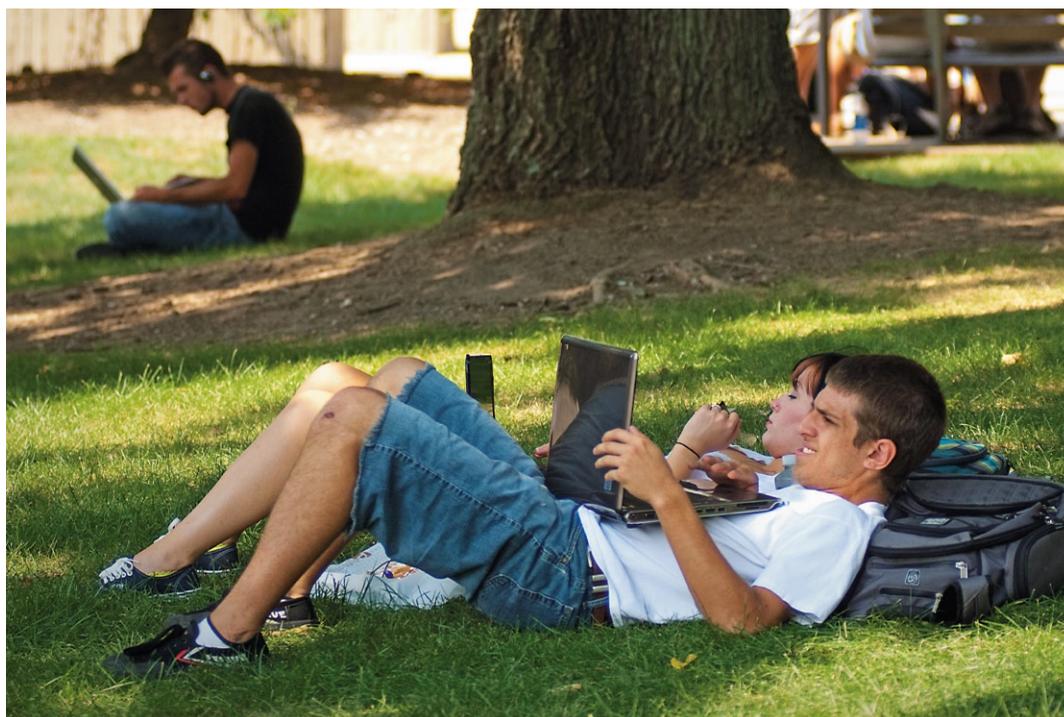
Jesse was one of the waverers. Initially unsure about whether to switch to NKU for his master's degree, he was impressed by what the university had to offer, including the iNKU iPhone app with its "Find It" function and information about campus bus routes and timetables. But this is by no means the end of the story: NKU's new system provides a wealth of additional data that helps the university's management team make better-informed decisions. Ferguson, who has a business background, knows that public institutions are just as open

to competitive forces as are private enterprises. University management, he says, needs to know what it costs to educate each individual student so that they can conduct cost-efficiency analyses and achieve solid growth. And when NKU changed its general education requirements, the SAP software showed its strengths. The change was strategically significant for the university, says Ferguson. "In the old system, we would have needed between 12 and 18 months; with SAP, the whole operation was done and dusted in just 30 days."

Ferguson's latest plans center on business intelligence, mobile learning, and mobile apps. "We are presently working on putting mobile technology into instruction," he says. An

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app will soon be deployed allowing faculty to create flash cards as supplemental study aids for students. This application will be useful across a multitude of disciplines. In addition, the university has extended the current offering for students and implemented an interactive map with navigation aids. "When students use our app to sign up for a course, they can get directions to the right building and room on their smartphone as well," he says. This past summer, NKU implemented func-



Preparing for lectures on a summer day

tionality for students to access their grades via iPhone or iPad. The students weren't even aware that they were accessing data in the SAP system, Ferguson says. "Our aim is to reach a point where students can perform a wide range of activities without first having to log on to a computer. We want to enable them to use their time as flexibly and productively as possible." Jesse Cleary-Budge, for one, welcomes such an innovation. Prior

to the new version of iNKU, he turned up late for one of his computer network courses because it took him a while to locate the Applied Science & Technology Center on NKU's sprawling campus. The new version of the app would have taken him straight to it. ■

MY NKU PORTAL

The iNKU iPhone app has diverse functions to help students.



Bus



GPA



Feeds



Athletics



Calendar



Find-it!



NKU: An ASUG Impact Award Winner 2010

Each year, the Americas' SAP Users' Group (ASUG) presents the ASUG Impact Award to installation members for successfully leveraging the user group and SAP to drive business transformation. The award categories are: large enterprise, small to medium enterprise, and public sector. A new award in 2010 is for significant contributions to the ASUG Influence program. This year's winner in the public sector category was Northern Kentucky University.

"Winning the 2010 ASUG Impact Award for the Public Sector is a tremendous honor because it recognizes the efforts of a large number of staff across campus who are dedicated to our project," says Timothy C. Ferguson, the university's CIO and associate provost for information technology. "We now have a robust system for our HR, finance, and campus-management business processes that meets our current needs and lays the foundation for the future as our university continues to grow."



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