



Customer: Villa Maria College
Web Site: www.villa.edu
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Education
Partner: Three Rivers Systems®, Inc.
Web site: www.threerivers-cams.com

Customer Profile

Villa Maria College, a leading institution of higher education in western New York State, serves both traditional and nontraditional students.

Software and Services

- Microsoft® server product portfolio
 - Windows Server® 2003 Enterprise Edition
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2003
 - Microsoft SQL Server™ 2005
- Microsoft Dynamics™ GP
- Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003
 - Microsoft Office Excel® 2003

Hardware

- Gateway E-9510T computers

For more information about other Microsoft customer successes, please visit:
www.microsoft.com/resources/casestudies

College Cuts Costs 50 Percent, Boosts Productivity 75 Percent, Enhances Marketing

“With the CAMS solution based on Microsoft technologies, we cut our costs dramatically while expanding the ways we could support our administrators, faculty, students, and alumni.”

Christine Palczewski, Director of Computer Services, Villa Maria College

Villa Maria College tried both minicomputer-based and UNIX-based student information and administrative systems and saw high costs and inflexible performance. To solve those problems, it migrated to the Comprehensive Academic Management System® (CAMS®) from Three Rivers Systems®, based on Microsoft® technologies. CAMS has cut IT costs in half while boosting productivity and enabling more effective communication with students, faculty, and alumni.

Business Needs

In the late 1980s, Villa Maria College, a leading private college in western New York State, tried to manage its administrative and student information systems on a proprietary DEC minicomputer. Maintenance costs were high, every database change and custom report was expensive and time-consuming to obtain, and the system didn't integrate with the desktop computers of administrators.

In 1995, a move to a UNIX-based system running on the Sun SPARC platform and Sybase database made little improvement.

Custom reports were still slow and costly to obtain, and the proprietary database didn't integrate well with desktop software or other systems at the college. The time that the IT staff had to spend on customizations, updates, and reports took away from their focus on more strategic functions.

Meanwhile, college enrollment grew, putting increased demands on the solution. The UNIX vendor suggested a costly upgrade, but college administrators felt that an upgrade would only deepen their commitment to a problematic technology.

The college wanted a solution that would provide the administrative and student information functions of its existing system but do so more quickly and inexpensively; scale to support continued growth; integrate with the systems that the college was using or likely to use; and enhance communication with students, faculty, and alumni.

“We wanted a more efficient student information and administrative system—and more,” says Kevin Donovan, Director of Enrollment Management and Marketing at Villa Maria. “We wanted a solution that would better support our mission to serve our students and our community.”

Solution

To meet those needs, Villa Maria selected Three Rivers Systems, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner and full-service provider of solutions for higher education, based in St. Louis, Missouri. Three Rivers Systems' Comprehensive Academic Management System®—CAMS®, for short—was exactly what the college had been looking for. The college deployed CAMS Windows® in 1999 and upgraded to the completely Web-based CAMS Enterprise® solution in 2006.

CAMS Enterprise supports an array of services at the college, including student recruitment, registration, financial aid, billing, fundraising, student housing, job placement, course management, and integrated document management—all from a single, shared database that eliminates the need for synchronization among databases. A new faculty portal enabled through CAMS Enterprise records attendance and grading. A new student portal enables online registration and student-faculty interaction. A new alumni portal enables online donations to the college.

The solution runs on two Gateway E-9510T Intel Xeon-based computers. It is supported by the college's Microsoft SQL Server™ 2005 database, integrates with the Microsoft Dynamics™ GP financial software used for payroll and financial transactions and the Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 software used for e-mail and collaboration, and exports data to the college's Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 software.

The integration with Microsoft Dynamics GP software supports several features of the solution, including online student billing and financial aid reporting and the online donations capability. Integration with Exchange Server enables faculty and administrators to send e-mail from within the solution, rather than having to exit the software and open a separate e-mail program. Administrators use the data export feature to manipulate data in Microsoft Office Excel® spreadsheet software, where they can analyze information and perform “what if” analyses.

Benefits

Villa Maria College selected CAMS, in part, to reduce its IT costs while expanding its IT infrastructure—and it succeeded.

“With the minicomputer and UNIX system, our costs were extremely high,” says Christine Palczewski, Director of Computer Services at Villa Maria. “With the CAMS solution based on Microsoft technologies, we cut our costs dramatically while expanding the ways we could support our administrators, faculty, students, and alumni.”

Palczewski estimates that software licensing and maintenance costs declined by 50 percent after the college migrated from UNIX to the Microsoft-based CAMS. Because CAMS uses Microsoft technologies with which the IT department is already familiar—such as

SQL Server, which Palczewski says is virtually “trouble free”—the staff time needed to maintain the solution decreased by 50 percent, compared to the UNIX solution.

Productivity savings are being seen throughout the campus. The use of the CAMS faculty portal to record student attendance means that the college no longer needs to input the faculty's handwritten attendance sheets at the end of the day. Records office productivity is up 75 percent as a result.

The time needed to process financial aid applications has been cut by 50 percent, allowing counselors to provide financial aid packages to students more quickly. Through the student portal, students will be able to view their financial aid package and determine how best to complete the financial aid process.

Because business administrators and financial aid counselors can download data into Office Excel and create their own, custom reports—without having to wait for the IT department to run those reports for them, as they did previously—reports are produced 90 percent faster. Reports are also more useful because more up-to-date information enables better decision making. For example, at a recent open house for prospective students, the college gathered data on which forms of advertising had attracted attendees. As a result, the college confirmed that radio was its most effective advertising channel and it was able to expand and refine its radio media buys in time to attract more prospective students to subsequent events.

“CAMS Enterprise enables us to communicate more effectively with our entire community” says Donovan. “That makes our marketing programs more successful.”