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On many campuses today, providing "high touch" service to students means a phalanx of staff and administrators standing ready to field questions, offer answers, and shepherd students along the path from prospects to alumni. But for the more than 4,000 students at Spring Arbor University in Michigan, "high touch" means an easily reached, richly engaging Web portal that puts students directly in touch with all the vital information they want, whenever they want it, so they can take charge of their own academic careers with no office hours and paper forms standing in their way.

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> Reed Sheard
> Spring Arbor University
> Vice President of Technology
> and Chief Information Officer

Created by Jenzabar, a leading provider of enterprise software and services for higher education, Spring Arbor's cutting-edge system combines the power of Jenzabar CX–a highly customizable enterprise resource planning system, or ERP, used by colleges and universities worldwide–with the 24/7 accessibility of Jenzabar's Internet Campus Solution, a next-generation Web portal that offers students a single point of entrance to a host of online functions.

Says Reed Sheard, the University's Vice President of Technology and Chief Information Officer, for students

raised on the Internet, having such a Web portal through which they can manage their academic affairs is not just a request but a requirement. "Students are coming to us with an expectation of Amazon.com-like service from their university," says Sheard–that is, students want the ability to find personalized information and conduct transactions via a one-stop site. "That's a high bar, but meeting that expectation to the greatest degree possible provides a significant competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining students."

Managing Growth with Streamlined Operations

Located on a bucolic hundred-acre campus in the central Michigan town of Spring Arbor, the Christian liberal arts university plays host to more than 4,000 students spread throughout its main campus, online and at 13 satellite locations across the state, and a pioneering program recently established across the border in Ohio.

"We have four groups that we attempt to serve," says Sheard: "Traditional undergraduate, adult studies, graduate programs that are growing, and a healthy online presence." The combination of the four allows the University to reach out to an increasing number of potential students. And since the turn of the millennium Spring Arbor has experienced steady growth, with enrollment rising by 64 percent.

Efficiently managing Spring Arbor's expanding student population is the job of Jenzabar CX, the University's ERP system, which offers a complete suite of integrated software applications designed specifically for higher education. In its entirety, the system is capable of supporting a wide range of functional areas, including student services, institutional research, financial and business management, human resources and payroll, communications and development.

In administrative offices across the campus, authorized users of the ERP system enter and store information on a single integrated database and share that information in real-time, breaking down barriers between offices and departments. With everyone on the same system, the need to enter data more than once is eliminated–along with the potential pitfalls of basing future plans on outdated or incomplete information.

The system's powerful reporting tools provide University users with access to the data and processes that are essential to keeping the school running smoothly. And information is accurately tracked through all stages of a student's academic career, from application to graduation–creating a comprehensive profile that supports student success at every step. The enterprise system brings to campus a powerful functionality and flexibility that not only helps to facilitate the flow of information, but minimize costs by maximizing efficiency. Says Sheard, "Simplifying what it means to be in business as a university is critical to being competitive."

Connecting Technology to Institutional Goals

Jenzabar CX is a key component of Jenzabar's Total Campus Management™ (TCM) framework, which offers a comprehensive combination of software, services, and support to help institutions of higher education achieve their mission-critical goals. Each solution is custom-built from Jenzabar's fully integrated software, including constituent relationship modules (Jenzabar CRMs) and campus intelligence systems in addition to the ERP systems and Internet portal. Further, TCM solutions encompass executive services, technical services, and strategic insight, which directly connect an institution's technology to its objectives, strategies, and priorities, supported by a strong emphasis on customer care.

More than just a vendor, Jenzabar is committed to working in partnership with institutions of higher education, helping collegiate executives define their institutional objectives and developing tailored solutions

to help meet those objectives. With a long-standing dedication to higher education, Jenzabar provides the academic and business office technology needed to help a spectrum of institutions achieve and surpass their institutional goals–from community colleges, private liberal arts colleges, and state colleges; to graduate schools, including business, medical, and law schools; and multi-campus universities.

Extending the Power of Data Management

At Spring Arbor, the data management power of Jenzabar CX is extended outward and across the campus through Jenzabar Constituent Relationship Modules. Jenzabar CRMs link the administrative system to Jenzabar's Web portal, allowing institutions to offer online self-service to all of their various constituents: prospects and students, faculty and administrative staff, alumni and friends.

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By providing a single point of entrance to institution-wide applications and content, the portal creates a Web-based digital commons where authorized users can gather to plan, review, explore, interact and conduct University business. Further, the portal allows institutions to customize views for specific departments, offices or groups, or for the display of personalized information based on each user's defined role.

For Spring Arbor, the portal proved to be a unifying solution to the dilemma of having each department or office maintain their own Web sites, which forced the University into the challenging position of managing multiple connections to their constituencies.

Previously, explains Sheard, students had to log onto disparate sites and separate departmental systems to get the information required to register for courses, oversee programs, or manage accounts, for example. Now, with the Jenzabar solution, critical information is readily accessible through a single portal, reducing the burden of routine tasks for both students and administrators. "At times we were our own worst enemy. Students had to come to us for everything, whether it was important or not. We needed to get out of the way," says Sheard. "Now we provide students with one big door to get into everything. Many of our students comment that they just love it. They are tapping into our core data, making decisions, checking in, checking out, and driving reports for management."

Graduation Is the Goal

The Vice President and CIO comments that a main factor driving the system's initial implementation was the University's desire to put into students' hands the tools needed to answer two fundamental questions. "The first big question students have is, do you have what I want to study when I want to study?" says Sheard. "And the second biggest question is, can I afford it?"

Formerly, says Sheard, the model for addressing student needs was to have "lots of people students could call and interact with." Today, however, "students want to get to the information via the Web and make their own decisions. To them, all those administrative people are just in the way," he notes. "By putting in a system that has high usability, we gain ground."

With the Jenzabar ERP system already in place, implementing the Web portal was "painless," says Sheard. "And since a good portal depends on having good data, we didn't have to do a lot of building"—

the data was already there in the enterprise system. What's more, says Sheard, "the dot-net technology that JICS is built on gave us the necessary flexibility at the presentation layer." Plus, Jenzabar's solution offered a comprehensive system that was uniquely designed with the needs of universities and colleges in mind, "with a range of portlets we could use that are higher-ed specific."

Yet, while improving registration and financial processes may have been an opening online play, it was not the end game. "Helping our students to graduate is the goal," says Sheard, "and to the degree that students have a plan of what to do academically, the more likely they are to stay enrolled in school." Now, through the Jenzabar Web portal, students can reach the virtual advice and counseling they need to chart a clear course for academic success.

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"Our students appreciate the ease with which they can access anything related to their academic life," says Sheard. "It's all drag and drop, and any student who knows how to access the Web can jump right in. Students feel more in control and more responsible for where they're going, and that has been important as we try to serve more and more students."

Connecting the Present with the Future

Of particular interest to students is the Jenzabar-powered ability to create "what if" scenarios when contemplating which course of study to pursue. "Say a student is interested in changing his or her major to counseling," explains Sheard. "The student can easily

use the system to build a new potential plan of study," and therefore is able to explore the implications of switching both now and in the future. "That visualized advising component has really helped students to feel more in control," notes Sheard. "Now, students can manage their own academic careers more efficiently, whenever the need arises, 24/7. And that has resulted in much more cooperation between students and staff, with students taking increased responsibility while the University staff works in areas more strategic to the institution."

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For faculty, the integrated enterprise solution has been equally empowering, strengthening the connections between student and teacher and providing a powerful means of improving the planning of classroom instruction. "When faculty prepare for teaching new classes, they can simply go into the system and pull out their class lists complete with information about the students, including photos merged from the database of student ID photos," notes Sheard. "It's made the moving of information much more practical."

On the business side of the equation, Jenzabar's solution has enabled University administrators to plan for future growth with greater insight and reliability. "As with any other organization or business, growth can be risky for a university," says Sheard. "And when you grow rapidly,

getting the right resources in place is critical." With the Jenzabar campus portal, students can input their course of study for their entire academic careers, "so we know in advance if we will need four or five sections of a class, or if we'll need to get additional professors or adjuncts to accommodate the growth. It's a great resource that helps everyone know where we're going."

Jenzabar's Total Campus Management solution has raised the level of student services at Spring Arbor University to new heights, and has matched student expectations of the sort of Web-based resources a thoroughly modern university should offer. "It's an exciting time," Sheard says of the changes at his school made possible by the strength and flexibility of Jenzabar technology. "But we're still the same school we've always been. We just have a different way of doing things now that is more beneficial for our students." ∎

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