Magic Act: Managed IT Services Helps Higher Ed Shine

by Michael Glubke
President & CEO, Dynamic Campus, Inc.

In a time when budgets are flat or shrinking while expectations are rising, higher education CIOs often feel like magicians expected to pull a rabbit out of a hat. In the face of rising expectations of students, faculty and other key stakeholders, CIOs and their teams are stuck devoting the majority of their resources to patching up legacy systems, completing complex integrations or securing campus infrastructure.

For more rural institutions, the situation is even worse: Without deep local talent pools to draw from, colleges and universities struggle to retain and recruit the talent needed to stay abreast of the latest technical skills.

This dire situation is reflected in the latest Campus Computing Project survey, where IT staffing is the No. 1 concern among higher education CIOs. That's one of many reasons 44% of higher education institutions, including the University of California San Francisco, have attempted a disappearing act used by CIOs in a variety of industries: outsourcing one or more of their IT operations to offshore organizations.[1]

Outsourcing is, of course, nothing new for higher education; in fact, *Business Officer* shared how institutions have successfully leveraged outsourcing to control costs of everything from parking and facilities management to daycare and food service[2]. However, IT is much more complex than concessions; many CIOs have found that like their counterparts in the business sector, the promised benefits of offshoring are often more of a disappearing act.

Offshoring a Misdirection

In fact, *CIO Magazine* reported "42 percent of IT professionals surveyed said outsourcing projects [to offshore vendors] ended up *costing more than originally planned*—16 percent claimed the costs were '*significantly more* [emphasis added].'" Moreover, the same survey found one-third "believe the quality of work performed by IT outsourcing consultants is lower than work by in-house employees, and 64 percent feel that their [offshore] outsourcing partners invent work to artificially inflate costs."[3]

Several factors unique to higher education increase the degree of difficulty when it comes to offshore outsourcing. Public colleges and universities especially operate within an environment of complex regulations and requirements not unlike a public utility. This web of regulations can be difficult for most offshore outsourcing partners to understand, much less abide by. This exposes the institution to unnecessary financial and even accreditation risks that far exceed any potential benefit.

Public and private institutions alike are woven into the fabric of their communities to a much higher degree than most businesses, particularly in more rural areas. Colleges and universities provide far more than just jobs to the communities that surround them—they provide a sense of identity, connectedness, broader cultural opportunities and an emotional rallying point for the surrounding area.

As a result, any proposed change in IT staffing, particularly to overseas partners, has been met by swift and strong criticism from faculty, the surrounding community and the higher education press.[4] In the face of certain and vocal criticism and uncertain results and benefits, an increasing number of institutions are considering partnering with domestic managed IT service providers to do more with less and deliver the technical support their vision and constituents require—without the need for mass layoffs and other draconian measures.

[1] *Campus Technology*, "Outsourcing IT in Higher Ed: A Necessary Evil?" Available online at https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2016/09/19/Outsourcing-IT-in-Higher-Ed.aspx?Page=2

[2] *Business Officer*, "New Adventures in Outsourcing." Available online at http://www.nacubo.org/Business_Officer_Magazine/Magazine_Archives/JulyAugust_2014/New_Adventures_in_Outsourcing.html

[3] *CIO Magazine*, "Is IT Outsourcing Worth It?" Available online at http://www.cio.com/article/2394886/outsourcing/is-it-outsourcing-worth-it-html

[4] *The Daily Bruin*, "Editorial: UCSF's outsourcing of IT jobs sets a dangerous precedent." Available online at http://dailybruin.com/2017/01/11/editorial-ucsfs-outsourcing-of-it-jobs-sets-a-dangerous-precedent/

Conjuring Success Through Managed Services

Comprehensive managed services partners typically support colleges and universities in one of two ways:

1 By augmenting and supporting the institution's existing team, staying on site for as long as needed and bringing in subject matter experts. By adding scale and skill on demand, these institutions get the IT expertise they need—often for a flat fee—without impacting existing staffing models or training plans and budgets.

2 As an institution's self-sufficient IT team, including IT leadership and all technical support needed to achieve institutional goals. This model appeals not only to new institutions lacking the time or experience to build an IT team from scratch or institutions in remote or rural areas, but also those struggling to launch all-digital platforms, get the most out of their investments in ERP and CRM platforms or complete other projects on time.

Additionally, providers specializing in higher education are able to offer customized services to meet an institution's unique needs, including securing federal grant money and researching alternative funding. Because they have extensive experience in higher education, these providers are also better able to accomplish the following:

Design infrastructure improvements

Managed services can help increase bandwidth, improve network security and provide redundant power and Internet connectivity to ensure institutions are up all the time. Providers are often able to do so using less network equipment, allowing IT resources to be dedicated to other priorities.

Implement projects quickly

Providers specializing in higher education know exactly what needs to be done, and how best to complete it using project management methodologies. As a result, they are able to seamlessly migrate data and systems, as well as rapidly roll out new installations and develop online capabilities.

Achieve cost savings

Beyond the savings resulting from infrastructure improvements and faster implementation, managed services providers are able to leverage existing relationships with vendors to negotiate fixed costs for services and licenses. The best providers are vendor agnostic, without any bias toward software and solutions that may not be in an institution's best interest. Furthermore, when they don't operate on commission, managed service providers are able to focus solely on ensuring institutions receive the greatest return on investment.

Align with organizational goals

EDUCAUSE recently stated, "Despite the many and disparate requirements of each user and each technology, a predominant focus has risen to the top for higher education information technology in 2017, and that focus is student success."[5] A managed services provider can serve as a strategic planning partner, assisting with benchmarking, auditing and assessing and governance needed to develop a road map that will ultimately increase student satisfaction, retention and graduation rates.

Develop and implement successful cloud migrations

As EDUCAUSE has pointed out, "Adopting a cloud strategy requires careful coordination among a variety of stakeholders, including IT and information security staff, legal teams, compliance experts, procurement specialists, and institutional leadership...Successful IT organizations will find ways to simplify and accelerate cloud adoption by reducing the barriers their campus partners face and by helping their institutions avoid pitfalls."[6]

Because moving to cloud services requires skills not commonly found on college campuses, partnering with an independent managed services provider saves time and money. Having helped other higher education institutions migrate to the cloud with minimal disruption, such providers are experts equipped to help CIOs effectively lead cultural transformation and select vendor partners.

5 *EDUCAUSE Review,* "Top 10 IT Issues, 2017: Foundations for Student Success." Available online at http://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/1/top-10-it-issues-2017-foundations-for-student-success
6 *EDUCAUSE,* "Preparing the IT Organization for the Cloud." Available online at https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2015/5/ewg1509-pdf.pdf

As IT moves from a utility to a strategic differentiator, CIOs able to focus on enabling student success will help their institutions flourish. EDUCAUSE said it best: "We need new models to replace the current practice of campus-based service delivery and reduce the costs of commodity services to shift investments to strategic, mission-based priorities like student success."[7]

Managed IT services is exactly such a model, allowing higher ed CIOs to wave a magic wand giving them the scope, scale and control they need while also staying within tight budgets. It's no illusion, however; colleges that rely on managed services are able to deliver unparalleled levels of service to their students, faculty and staff in these rapidly changing, technology-dependent times.

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Michael Glubke is the President and CEO of Dynamic Campus, a strategic IT services partner for higher education institutions.

Dynamic Campus provides a proven blend of managed IT services, on-demand technical capabilities and a vendor-agnostic approach to help colleges and universities maximize the performance of their existing technology investments and IT support teams.

Visit **www.dynamiccampus.com** to find out more.

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[7] *EDUCAUSE Review,* "Cross-Institutional Collaboration: Niche or Trend?" Available online at http://er.educause.edu/blogs/2017/2/cross-institutional-collaboration-niche-or-trend?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Email+marketing&utm_campaign=ER

sales@dynamiccampus.com   (888) 805-3022