

IT Outsourcing from a **Board Member's Perspective**

In early 2019, the leadership team at Greenville University—a private, faith-based institution of approximately 1,000 students in Greenville, Illinois—faced a common problem with no easy solution. “We were struggling with too many programs that were not paying their way and we needed to have a headcount adjustment,” recalls Steve Ellsworth, the chairman of Greenville’s Business Affairs Committee (BAC) and a board member since 2018.

Ellsworth, his fellow committee members, and Greenville’s leadership team knew the decision to eliminate programs and faculty was not going to be popular, and they’d need rock-solid data to back up their case with the faculty, staff, and community.

“Information we felt like a normal IT system would have been able to produce for us was taking weeks, and systems contradicted each other,” Ellsworth said. “How am I supposed to have confidence to make a decision and then go out and defend it? It was frustrating.”

That experience put renewed emphasis on fixing what Greenville’s leadership considered a “sore spot for a number of years”: the institution’s IT capabilities.



At the time, GU employed eight full-time employees to support information technology, all of whom were skilled, engaged and had a great heart for the institution and its mission. But years of underfunding left the team unable to add staff to account for the institution’s growing IT requirements or invest in the training needed to match the accelerating pace of change in higher education technologies.

Suzanne Davis, Greenville’s President, recommended the leadership team consider outsourcing the university’s IT support to Dynamic Campus, a trusted IT outsourcing provider dedicated exclusively to supporting higher education institutions since 2002.



Making the Case

After speaking at length with Greenville's BAC and cabinet members, Dynamic Campus recommended a standard outsourcing engagement that would welcome the Greenville IT team to their own deep roster of higher education IT professionals deployed on campus and remotely across the country.

The Greenville team members would remain on campus, continuing to support the institution as before, often with better compensation and benefits than smaller institutions can offer.

Those team members would then be augmented and supported by Dynamic Campus's Shared Services roster of platform, system and functional experts that could be engaged on demand, based on the university's changing needs—essentially giving Greenville the IT capabilities of a large, public institution at a price that fit Greenville's budget.

"For me, the key was understanding the cost-benefit analysis and what the cashflow is going to look like in an outsourcing model like that," said Howard Costley, a member of the BAC and a Greenville board member for 10 years. "In the midst of significant financial pressure, we knew we needed this, but it was a huge cost, and what

was the return going to be? When is the payback going to occur?"

Once the BAC and Dynamic Campus totaled existing spending on IT—including personnel, contracts, hardware, software, other technology needs and human resources support—the modeling supported a 100% ROI by the end of year one of the outsourcing contract alone, according to Davis.

Satisfied with the projected cost/benefit analysis, GU's leadership turned their attention to the transition itself. "Not everybody's comfortable with outsourcing," said Ellsworth. "A lot of people think you should keep everything in house, so we had to struggle through that. We knew the fact that employees of Greenville were going to become employees of [Dynamic Campus], would not be a popular decision either."



Making the Transition

Once the BAC and Board of Directors voted to approve the engagement with Dynamic Campus, plans were made to conduct the transition in September 2019. Despite what Ellsworth characterized as having some "painful moments" getting GU's IT team transitioned over and getting them the skills training they needed to get up to date, the transition began paying dividends right away.

Ellsworth was on campus for a meeting a few months after the transition, and he came across a 28-year veteran of the IT team. "He pulled me aside and said, 'that was the right decision and I'm glad we did it.'"

Costley agrees. "I would say my eyes were opened after we had entered into the contract, and I think it was the first or second report that [the BAC] got from Dynamic Campus. They'd had enough time to look and see what the state of our systems and the process was. We knew there was work to be done, but it was even more extensive than I think we had anticipated."

The IT team had been doing the best they could, but they'd simply been overwhelmed by the crush of support needs across campus that had continued to grow. But 18 months later, it's a different story on Greenville's campus.



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Making a Difference

Ellsworth equates the IT function to refereeing a sporting event: They've done their job if IT's not a topic of conversation. "And that's the way IT is now with Greenville," he says. "It's not a topic. It's a completely different world. It's the world the way it ought to be. It just works."

The impact of having the nationwide Shared Services team of experts on call at any time hasn't been lost on Costley either. "The efficiency of having this larger group of people, the resources available that are *committed* resources—that's extremely valuable," he says. "You can always go out and hire a consultant and pay five times what you would a normal person, but they're not invested. Here there's a commitment, there's a relationship, there's a familiarity."

"There's much higher confidence, not just in the numbers and the reports that we get, but a higher confidence in the processes and the people," Ellsworth explains. "I think [Dynamic Campus] has done a good job presenting to the [BAC] and helping us to understand the issues that are still out there. We have a much higher confidence level in the entire IT operations because of that. I don't know that I would do it any differently, if we could do it all over."



Making the Right Move

Higher education is under unprecedented pressure from a variety of fronts, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. This pressure is shouldered by board members expected to use their own experience to help institutional leadership make the right decisions and mitigate risk, which can be difficult to do when you don't know where the issues lie.

Given the growing reliance of higher education on IT, Ellsworth would urge all board members to encourage their leadership team to conduct an outside audit of their IT processes and people to ensure they have an accurate and complete picture of where the challenges and risks may be hidden.

"You don't know what you don't know, right?" Costley says. "[Board members] need to realize the potential for efficiency and for risk mitigation [IT outsourcing] offers, because there's significant and increasing institutional risk today. They as a board member need to be thinking

very seriously about risk mitigation. Do they actually know where their institution is on the risk spectrum and the possible consequences of not identifying and addressing those risks?"

"A lot of these schools are in small towns that don't have the talent needed, or they don't have the knowledge," says Ellsworth. "I would almost say it this way: However bad you think it is, it's probably worse. They may think they're okay, but the chances are they're not. I would suspect most small schools are in the same category. They just don't know how bad it is."

To find out how IT outsourcing can help you minimize your institution's risk, maximize your existing technology investments and staff, and ensure you have all the IT scalability and skills your institution needs to succeed today and tomorrow, visit [DynamicCampus.com](https://www.DynamicCampus.com).



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