

San Jacinto College


Graduates to Business Intelligence

WebFOCUS Extends Information to Hundreds of Users on Three Campuses

Institutions of higher education are bastions of knowledge, but not all of them are able to manage information effectively. Today's colleges are deluged with data – from admissions to student enrollment and human resources to finance – and these schools can't fulfill their charters without storing, summarizing, and distributing that information in the most expedient possible way.

At San Jacinto College in Harris County, Texas, providing reports in a timely manner to a wide constituency spread out over three different campuses was a challenging and time-consuming process. Suzanne DeBlanc, director of Data Management, relies on Information Builders WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) platform to make sure all departments on campus can access the information they need in order to carry out their tasks in the most efficient way.

San Jacinto College uses the Banner ERP system from SunGard HE to automate finance and HR activities, but before they deployed WebFOCUS, college staff members had a difficult time using the associated information. "While entering information into Banner's Human Resources, Accounts Receivable, Finance, and other databases is a relatively straightforward process, getting the data out is a different story," admits DeBlanc. "Whenever someone needed specific information on a topic, we had to create a report manually to suit the user's needs. This consumed a substantial



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Snapshot

Organization

San Jacinto College offers technical and academic transfer programs to 25,000 students residing in Harris County, Texas.

Challenge

Automate the process of extracting data from Banner ERP and disseminating that information. Enable users across three campuses to access and analyze enterprise data in a consistent way.

Strategy

Create a Web-based reporting system, providing instant end user access to information. Visually represent information via secure, role-specific dashboards. Integrate the environment with existing tools.

Results

A new reporting portal eliminates paper-based reports, frees IT from fielding custom requests, and strengthens decision-making.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, Performance Management Framework, Education, and Professional Services.

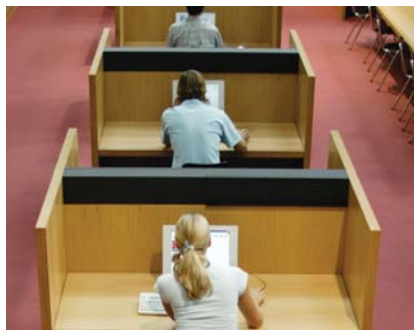
amount of IT resources, a problem that was compounded any time someone needed to change reporting parameters.”

If changes were requested, the IT team had to write a new program to sort out the data, or tweak an existing one. “We are often dealing with questions regarding enrollment, student retention, funding from the state, or forms of boosting income from outside donors,” continues DeBlanc. “Knowing what we can learn from this data and how that can help us make the right decisions is a key factor in our ability to succeed. In a time of tighter funding it is imperative that we have a good grasp on issues regarding student retention, graduation success rates, and what students do after they leave the college. We need to know how we are doing as an institution. We have the data, we just need to be able to extract the right information from it.”

As San Jacinto College looked for ways to optimize the data handling and reporting process, they discovered it was a common problem facing the educational community at large. “We found that several schools were using WebFOCUS and we wanted to know how it was working for them,” says DeBlanc. “We called Tarleton State University and learned how the implementation of WebFOCUS had solved some of the same issues we were wrestling with. We decided to give WebFOCUS a try.”

Delivering Comprehensive Data in a Highly Visual Way

San Jacinto College wanted to do much more than simply create standard reports. They wanted to empower faculty and staff members with the ability to drill down into the information on their own. After reviewing proposals from SAS, Cognos, SunGard HE, and Information Builders, the committee decided WebFOCUS had the most complete and user-friendly set of capabilities for their needs. “We were very impressed by both the people and products from Information



SunGard HE Banner environment, which dovetailed perfectly with the college’s needs. DeBlanc adds, “WebFOCUS enabled us to get an immediate return on our investment.”

BI 101: The Fundamentals of Self-Service Reporting

Information Builders provided the necessary training, teaching San Jacinto College’s IT department to work with the templates and create custom dashboards, as well as providing a good operational foundation in the use of WebFOCUS. The college especially liked WebFOCUS InfoAssist, a



Builders,” says DeBlanc. “They demonstrated what their software could do for us and it was quickly evident that WebFOCUS had the capabilities we needed. It made extracting data based on a given set of parameters very easy to do.”

San Jacinto College was also impressed with the customized templates provided with WebFOCUS, a feature no other vendor offered. With three modules and 15 different sets of templates, WebFOCUS provided out-of-the-box functionality that allowed San Jacinto College to get a reporting system up and running in about eight weeks. Furthermore, the templates were designed for the

graphical report-development tool that enables users to generate reports and run queries with little or no technical knowledge.

Other useful solutions include WebFOCUS Magnify and integrated geographic information system (GIS) mapping capabilities from ESRI. WebFOCUS Magnify is an integrated search engine that can handle both structured and unstructured data sources throughout the enterprise. The GIS/mapping capabilities of ESRI, combined with the analytic power

of WebFOCUS, allows users to toggle between geographic maps and standard graphical and tabular reports to visualize data in a location-based format on interactive maps.

“With WebFOCUS InfoAssist and the integrated search index and mapping features, I can easily visualize all types of information, such as where Hispanic students are coming from, where the college donors are located, as well the location of college contractors with whom we work on a regular basis,” explains DeBlanc. “We can get the

sense to each situation. For example, users in Student Services can find out how students are doing in each campus and drill down to a particular class to see how effective that class is and how well students are responding. “We can find out if students are having financial problems or whether they need more options with payment plans. Do we need to offer certain classes more often? These are the sorts of operational decisions we can make with WebFOCUS.”

The college appreciates the flexibility afforded by its new

consistent information no matter who runs the report. This greatly increases work efficiencies and reduces the stress associated with trying to get information from a variety of departments, or of relying heavily on IT to provide all the answers.

“WebFOCUS empowers users directly, saving the IT team a considerable amount of time,” sums up DeBlanc. “Reports that used to take the IT department 15 to 20 hours to complete can be run instantly by the user community. Parameterized reporting gives them

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WebFOCUS not only delivers the data people need, but also puts it in a useful context via dashboards. For example, users can see enrollment data displayed in a chart or compare current figures to figures from last month or last year. This enables a wide variety of people – from the college chancellor to the head of Student Services – to obtain information in a form that makes

self-service reporting environment. WebFOCUS can reach into just about any type of database, extending the reporting options to many different information systems, from institutional data sources to private Excel files. “People can run reports at 3:00 AM if they need to,” DeBlanc notes. “We remain stewards of the data and can determine which types of people can view which types of data. From there, casual users can submit queries and create reports on their own.”

All of this translates into tangible gains for the college, such as more consistent, reliable enrollment numbers for upper management. WebFOCUS presents accurate,

tremendous flexibility in accessing and manipulating the data. This frees us up to work on other issues and to make sure we are ready for whatever challenges come our way.”