

Unified Student Platform: Business Case and ROI

Introduction

Universities often struggle with fragmented student systems where a student uses different links or site to access (Registration, Grades, Billing, etc.). Students complain about how complex and time consuming it is to access multiple services, an example would be The York University, where students have to open “50 different links” just to access basic services. Fragmented systems adds extra work on IT staff and end users, that being said, having a Unified Student Experience Platform would greatly reduce the stress on staff and improve the overall student experience. An integrated “unified portal” can also yield big savings for the institution, for example, North Shore Community College built a unified campus portal, the new system recovered its investment within a year. It has reported “substantial savings of time and money” – over \$1 million in cost savings and avoidances.

The **Unified Student Experience Platform (USEP)** represents a transformational opportunity for a single, scalable platform which will improve efficiency and long-term sustainability. Investing in USEP will deliver measurable financial returns, operational efficiencies, and long-term sustainability.

The Business Case

Market Problem

- A fragmented student platform: Students have to login to multiple sites, which is time consuming and a poor experience.
- Overhead costs: Maintaining multiple systems results in high maintenance costs.
- Student Retention Risk: Students frustration make it less likely for them to return to the institution, directly reducing tuition revenue.

Proposed Solution

- Develop a Unified Student Experience Platform that integrates academic, support, and community services.
- Seamlessly connect to existing LMS and HR systems.
- Provide inclusive design features (multilingual, accessibility-friendly and location specific).
- Leverage an AI chatbot for academic advising and student support.

Expected Value

- Financial Gains and Growth: The integrated system will improve retention which will generate more annual income in tuition and savings.
- Operation Efficiency: Reduced IT overhead, faster support and streamline processes.
- Strategic Positioning: A platform designed to last beyond 2025, showcasing the university as a tech-forward institution.

ROI Projection

Based on community case studies, universities implementing similar platforms have realized over \$1 million in savings within the first year and significant improvements in student satisfaction. Conservative estimates for USEP projects:

- **Development + Outsourcing Costs:** \$200,000
- **Annual Savings:** \$80,000
- **Annual Revenue Increase from Retention:** \$100,000
- **Payback Period:** ~2 years
- **Three-Year ROI:** >100%

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is when a company or organization hires another company or individual outside of its own team to perform tasks, provide services to save money and reduce production time.

Outsourcing Strategy

Options and Risks

- Onshore: High quality and compliance, but costly.
- Nearshore: Good cultural and time zone alignment, moderate cost savings.
- Offshore: Lowest cost, wide talent pool, but risks in communication and security.

Community experiences highlight that outsourcing although cheap alone often fails due to poor communication, cultural barriers, quality issues, delays and hidden costs.

Recommendation

A Hybrid Approach to balance the risks involved in Onshore and Offshore.

- Core systems and sensitive data (registration, financial aid): Developed in-house or onshore to ensure compliance and security.
- Selective modules (AI chatbot, community features): Outsourced offshore to specialized teams for cost efficiency and expertise.

Success depends on strong management and cultural integration. Teams must be treated as partners, with clear deliverables and security built into the pipeline using the DevSecOps approach.

Conclusion

The **Unified Student Experience Platform (USEP)** is more than a software, it is a strategic investment that will deliver measurable ROI, improve retention, and secure the university's reputation as a leader in innovation. With a hybrid outsourcing model, costs are controlled, risks are mitigated and an efficient system is created.