How Microsoft and Anthology empowered Coppin State University's student engagement through digital transformation

July 7, 2021

Customer
Coppin State University

Partner
Anthology

Products and Services
Azure
Dynamics 365 Marketing
Dynamics CRM
Office 365

Industry
Higher Education

Organization Size
Medium (50 - 999 employees)

Country
United States

In a bid to better connect with existing students on a more personal level, while also expanding its appeal to potential future students, Coppin State University has leveraged software partner Anthology's suite of Microsoft products to great effect. In addition, the program has enabled Coppin to further its mission of providing educational opportunities while promoting lifelong learning in a more accessible way.

Situated in Baltimore, Maryland, Coppin State University is a Historically Black Institution in a dynamic urban setting. Coppin serves differently prepared students from a variety of cultural and racial backgrounds, with an age range from 17 to 65 and older.

Coppin embarked on an initiative alongside its partner Anthology (an independent software vendor specializing in higher education) to improve the student experience across the university. Coppin's IT and Academic Affairs departments has a unique and decades-long history of cross-collaboration and synergy using Microsoft technology. Expanding on that relationship, Coppin's College of Business was the first academic unit to leverage Anthology's suite of Microsoft-based solutions to expand its focus from academic preparation to ongoing career planning and lifelong learning.

Reimagining student recruitment, enrollment, and retention

As a diverse and commuter-based university, Coppin is using technology to tackle the challenges of boosting recruitment, enrollment, and retention – engaging with all its students (especially commuter students) and providing consistent communication across its colleges and academic units. One key factor in these initiatives has been the need to improve and personalize communication.

"The university conducted a lot of student study groups in an effort to find out how best to tackle our recruitment and retention issues," says Dr. El-Haggan, VP of IT & IA, CIO and Professor of Computer Science. "Throughout this process the same themes kept coming up: we weren't communicating efficiently with our students and our messaging wasn't speaking directly to them as individuals.

"We couldn't hire a counselor or admissions officer for every student, so we decided to use Microsoft technology to achieve scale. We needed a high-touch, high-impact solution that had artificial intelligence behind it to give the students the personalized guidance, advice, and support they were looking for.

The leadership challenged the university's IT and Academic Affairs departments to work together to design solutions tailored to student and staff needs, and to enable successful change management.

In response, Coppin implemented Anthology's Reach solution, including Apply and Succeed modules in July 2020. These solutions enabled the faculty to reach out to students in a personalized way as they moved through the acceptance and enrollment processes. "The power of Microsoft Dynamics and the ability provided by Content Blocks in Reach has let us create modified and personalized journeys," says Dr. El- Haggan. "Content Blocks enables us to upload content – videos, images and text – and then pull this content through so it can be used to personalize messages at a much deeper and more exciting level.

"Meanwhile, the Reach solution talks to the student, using high-relevance content throughout the admissions process. They get the sense that the university is keeping up with them, telling them to take action at important points and nudging them along the admissions process. This is so important considering the challenges we have around recruitment, enrollment, and retention."

Providing valuable career guidance

In 2020, Coppin's College of Business also began using a potent mix of Microsoft-powered solutions to ensure students' education matched the requirements of their future careers. This mix included Anthology's Occupation Insight (a platform leveraging Microsoft Azure (https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/) , Office 365 (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365) , and Dynamics 365 (https://dynamics.microsoft.com/en-us/)). Not only does Occupation Insight help determine expected job demands, it also provides guidance on salaries and projected job openings in locations where students plan to live.

"The potential we have with Occupation Insight is immense," says Dr. Sadie Gregory, Interim Dean of the College of Business. "It's not just about career development, but also the educational journey. What I really like about Occupational Insight is the fact it gives access to current, career-focused information. Sometimes, for example, students realize their target career isn't what they really want after all. If they get this information early they can take action and change majors before it's too late."

During open houses for prospective students, it is common for students and their parents to ask what kinds of jobs they can realistically apply for with certain degrees.

This can be a difficult question to answer, because it involves weighing up career information from a wide variety of sources. Thanks to Occupation Insight, however, Coppin can now give students, staff and faculty access to external data, which can help guide informed career decisions from day one of a student's freshman year.

Occupation Insight also enables Coppin's program directors and faculty members to continuously realign and refine programs based on market data and the latest skills sought by employers. Now, College of Business students can tailor their education to fit the most in-demand careers in their community. They can select the courses,

internships and professional development opportunities geared to make them more competitive in the job market.

And this service also extends to the institutions Coppin draws students from. For example, Coppin has a strong recruitment relationship with Montgomery Community College. Now, as soon as a student is accepted from the community college, they are given access to Occupation Insight, so they can immediately start researching career paths. Giving students access to this information, long before they even take a class at Coppin, is a powerful recruitment tool.

Delivering the support that Coppin's students deserve

There is a belief at Coppin that each student's educational experience is going to be unique and that some may need more financial, technological, and career-guidance support than others. For example, many students also have a lengthy commute to contend with on top of their studies, which limits their time on campus, creates a communications time lag and reduces the opportunity to share messages quickly.

"Our students face lots of challenges," explains Dr. El- Haggan. "Many are first-generation Americans, there's a high proportion leading single parent families, many also have to look after elderly parents and lots of our students have to juggle their studies with paid work.

"They may be intellectually very capable, but these pressures mean they are in a rush to get to their courses and in a rush to get back home to deal with their other responsibilities. Our goal is to use a blend of technology that adapts to support each student according to their needs so they can reach their full potential."

Enhancing the complete student experience

Following the success of the Microsoft/Anthology initiative at the School of Business, Coppin now plans to roll out the same solutions right across the university. Much of the success at Coppin can be credited to the collaborative approach between the university's IT and Academic Affairs departments and the way in which faculty and students acted as program advocates.

"We decided we weren't going to force faculty members to use this new approach. Instead we created an environment so exciting our people wanted to use it to collaborate," Dr. Gregory says. "That, paired with our student-led initiatives, has put the end-user in the driver's seat so they're key players in this process."

One such student-led initiative is TechKNOW Squad, a team of 10 to 12 Management Information System majors who run training sessions for fellow students on software such as Microsoft 365 and Blackboard.

By collaborating with Anthology and Microsoft, Coppin has been able to further its mission of providing educational opportunities while promoting lifelong learning in a more accessible way. Now, the university's leaders and administrators are committed to expanding their implementation of these solutions, to align to their mission of fostering a culture of sustained evaluation, data democratization, and, ultimately, student success.

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