



Reinventing the Student Service Experience

Ivy Tech Community College | ivytech.edu | Indianapolis, Indiana | Founded: 1963

Ivy tech community college's virtual student success / help center delivers an immediate, personalized, and connected level of service

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It's our responsibility to ensure that students get enrolled and retained in school. And our core competency is what takes place in the classroom. So we decided we needed a partner whose core business focuses on exceeding students' expectations for admissions and financial aid support. That partner is Blackboard Student Services.”

Jeff Fanter

Vice President Communications,
Enrollment and Marketing
Ivy Tech Community College

A Familiar Challenge: Budget Limitations, Increased Demand, and Process Constraints

From an operational standpoint, administrators at Ivy Tech Community College will be the first to volunteer that its challenges aren't that much different from those of its peers in other states. "Between changing funding models and cut-backs in state appropriations, we needed to find more efficient ways to serve our students and manage growth," says Jeff Fanter, Vice President for Communications, Enrollment and Marketing with the College.

Changes to the state funding model and budget challenges left financial resources falling behind the growth that Ivy Tech had been experiencing as a community college, and staff resources were stretched thin. They simply couldn't keep pace with responding to the increase in the number of students interested in the school and increased applications, while also managing the needs of its large current student body. "We were finding that some of our students may have been choosing not to enroll in the college or, frankly, stay retained in the college, because they couldn't get information in a timely manner," continues Fanter.

In addition, Ivy Tech's processes weren't making it easy for the students or for the institution itself. It's common for a student to be based in one location, but take classes at another. And since some processes are built off of the geographic locations, students were susceptible to getting an inconsistent and confusing service experience when they called into the College's various campuses.

Compounding the issue was the complexity of trying to provide consistent, quality service to traditional, online and hybrid students. Trying to serve everyone with an outdated service model just wasn't working anymore.

The Solution: More (Volume), Faster (Responses), Better (Service)

Ivy Tech had a vision for the solution:

- Provide a consistent experience to students
- Enable access to information at a faster pace, during more hours of the day
- Engage students who expressed an interest in Ivy Tech and support them throughout the enrollment process
- Address retention through proactive measures
- Reallocate staff resources to focus on unique student needs and more strategic tasks



Quick facts:

- Indiana's largest public post-secondary institution
- The nation's largest singly-accredited statewide community college system
- Serves nearly 200,000 students per year
- 31 campuses across 14 degree-granting locations

Challenge

Ivy Tech Community College's challenges are familiar to institutions nation-wide: changes to state funding models, budget cuts, substantial growth, retention and completion concerns, limited resources, and increased competition. Along with their "good problem" of increased enrollments came the associated administrative challenges of creating a consistent, efficient student service experience at 31 campuses across 14 degree-granting locations.

A fragmented customer service experience, long call hold times, and high abandon rates were the norm. The lack of personalized attention and inconsistent processes across campuses resulted in prospective students enrolling elsewhere, and current ones dropping out. Ivy Tech knew something needed to be done.

Solution

Improved customer service was the key. Together with Blackboard Student Services, they launched the College's Virtual "Student Success / Help Center," a multi-faceted solution which combined to deliver on the promise of a central, consistent resource for all student questions, and includes:

- An online Self-help Portal
- Extended live support
- Proactive outreach
- Interaction Tracking

With this solution in place, Ivy Tech is now able to provide the personalized attention students need to successfully progress through the student lifecycle—with measureable results.

Knowing "what" to do was the first step, but figuring out "how" to do it was the challenging part. There were two alternatives: to build it themselves, or partner with an outside company.

Ivy Tech's experience with setting up an interim call center had provided them with a great foundation from which to assess prospective partners. "We knew which questions to ask, what to look for in a solutions provider because we'd had a chance to test it out," says Fanter.

With a Blackboard call center only a few hours away, a group of delegates from various departments within the College decided to tour Blackboard's Student Success Center in Somerset, KY. Says Fanter: "We knew that they had experience in a call center environment, which clearly was important to us. But there were people there who also had experience in higher education, including a former financial aid director—these were people who knew what our students were going to be calling and asking about, and who also appreciated what our world was like, what we were all experiencing. That was extremely important to us."

What Blackboard also offered, beyond traditional call center support, were self-service options. Where the call center plays an important role in providing personalized attention to students, self-service solutions such as online status trackers, instant chat, and IVRs provide instant (and cost-effective) relief to both students and the College.

Partnering to Reinvent the Experience

After weighing the pros and cons of an internally built vs. an outsourced approach, Ivy Tech decided to leverage the expertise of Blackboard.

Ivy Tech's brand promise and core competency is delivered in the classroom. Their students are their customers, and their students expect the same personalized service that they receive from other high-performing companies. Students were demanding a level of support that the team at Ivy Tech simply couldn't manage on its own.



A smaller institution might say, 'Outsourcing something of this scale is only for big schools.' But I think if schools can be strategic in their approach, Blackboard can help them put something in place that can scale to their specific needs. If your institution is in need of excellent customer service on a students' watch, then this is a resource that makes sense for you.'

Jeff Fanter

Vice President Communications,
Enrollment and Marketing
Ivy Tech Community College

Together with Blackboard, the College launched a virtual “Student Success / Help Center,” a multi-faceted solution which combined to deliver on the promise of a central, consistent resource for all student questions through:

- **An online self-help portal** with access to over 700 knowledgebase articles; financial aid, admissions, and student accounts status trackers, and online chat.
- **Extended live support** delivered by trained professionals—focused solely on the student—using an integrated middleware solution to streamline the support experience.
- **Proactive outreach** to prospective and current students at key milestones.
- **Interaction tracking** that continues with Interaction Tracking that continue to build purposeful connections with prospective and current students.

Ivy Tech is now able to provide the personalized attention students need to successfully progress through the student lifecycle – with measureable results.

Key Elements of Success

When asked what guidance and best practices he'd like to share with institutions contemplating a shift to outside resources, Fanter offers this:

- **Engage internal stakeholders and subject matter experts early, and be transparent.** Identify an executive sponsor and find subject matter experts in the key areas (student accounts, student records, advising, admissions, financial aid, etc.) in which you'll need support. Leverage their input and expertise to understand implications, like impact to institutional culture, and to identify the best solution—and then leverage them as advocates during the buy-in process and actual implementation. “Openness and transparency also went far in getting the team on board,” offers Fanter.
- **Strive for consistency.** If, like Ivy Tech, your institution has multiple/independent campuses that each have different ways of managing processes and data, standardizing them will help streamline the student experience—such as enrollment, orientation, assessment, etc.—regardless of where they apply (or transfer) to.
- **Engage students to help define the desired experience.** Engage students to better understand their needs to ensure this would truly improve their experience. Then, leverage trained professionals who are focused on the student experience and can answer questions on the first call; empower students with self-help options (like online portals and knowledge centers) so they don't have to call/email/wait in line to get their answers; and conduct proactive outreach to students through calls, emails and texting.
- **Get the word out.** Once you do launch your call center and self-help options, make sure your students and faculty know about it. Ivy Tech features a prominent banner on its website directing students to the Student Success / Help Center, and include messages about the resource in every communication vehicle including Facebook and outbound emails (in the College's case, this comprises over 1.4 million mentions per month). Ivy Tech even ran a contest where students who answered questions about the self-help portal correctly were entered into drawings for bookstore gift cards.
- **Don't spend too much time dreaming up “the perfect model” because you may never get one in place.** Ivy Tech's transition to Blackboard Student Services took six months from contract-signing to going live. Fanter credits the speed-to-implementation with securing internal buy-in and delivering an immediate impact on student and staff satisfaction—within weeks—at the College.

Benefits and Results

Before	After
Fragmented student support	One call center with one phone number
19-minute wait time	30-second wait time
31 different campuses	One community college
49% abandonment rate	1.46% abandonment rate
40%+ transfer rate among departments	1 phone call for all their questions
Inconsistent student satisfaction	“Wonderful” experience
Low retention rate	Increased enrollments during fall to spring periods
Challenging semester transition	“Smoothest transition in years”

What’s Next for Ivy Tech

Early results have been strong and encouraging, and the College is keeping a close eye on key performance indicators, including financial aid packaging and enrollments. The ripple effect of redirecting Tier-1 student calls to Blackboard means that College’s staff is now able to focus on more strategic initiatives such as:

- Faster follow-up during the financial aid process
- Focusing on students with unique situations
- Providing help to students in academic difficulty
- Launching a face-to-face one-stop model
- Increasing recruitment efforts with more direct contact
- Conducting targeted surveys of various student audiences
- Integration with Starfish for proactive advising

The momentum from the launch of the virtual Student Success/Help Center will serve as a springboard for further enhancements to the entire student services lifecycle, including a greater focus on outbound enrollment campaigns and retention efforts—both of which will be in partnership with Blackboard Student Services.

“The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs commented that it was the smoothest enrollment period in many years, and he attributes it in large part to the Student Success Center,” concludes Fanter. “I think that says it all.”

Learn More

To learn more about how Blackboard Student Services can design and deliver scalable solutions to help your institution, district or system deliver a more immediate, personalized, and connected level of service for students, visit blackboard.com/student-services or contact your Blackboard representative.

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