

Meeting the unique needs of continuing education programs

Q&A with [Alex Arthur](#), V.P. of Sales and Marketing, Orbund

Why are more institutions emphasizing continuing education programs?

There is a growing need because of Generation Y and Z students. The number of students applying to traditional schools year-over-year is declining, so many institutions need to find a new way of attracting students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, prior to COVID-19, enrollments to post-secondary institutions was expected to drop by 6%. On the other hand, distance education in 2020 is expected to grow to 12.78 million, up from 6.9 million in 2018, almost doubling in just 2 years. So many institutions are looking to reach this new market.

Why are continuing education programs so appealing to nontraditional students?

Generation Z students are different than previous generations. These students want more flexibility and want to be able to progress at their own pace. At the same time, the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Y students need advanced education in specific courses to be able to progress in their careers. By offering a flexible way for students to take classes in a comfortable environment and at their own pace, continuing education programs appeal to each of these generations, hence the increase in the nontraditional student population.

What are the unique needs of continuing education programs when it comes to a student information system (SIS)?

One of the key characteristics of Generation Z is the desire for flexibility and having the ability to get information whenever they want it. These students want to have all the information they need right in the student portal connected to the SIS. The student needs to be able to register at any time for any class, for example. A system that can provide up-to-date information and a high level of flexibility is essential for an SIS supporting a school's continuing education program.

Why is it important that an SIS be cloud-based?

Generation Z students want to have immediate access to information. This empowers the student and helps them make better decisions. With Generation Z students being scattered all over the world, having the system in an environment that allows for easy access from anywhere



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makes a lot of difference. Secondly, using a cloud-based SIS enables the institute to focus on using the product, as the SaaS provider takes care of the means of delivering the product. With the school now just focused on delivering the product they can make sure they meet the needs of students.

If an institution already has an SIS, why should they consider implementing a separate unique SIS just for continuing education programs?

Most institutions have already invested millions of dollars in an SIS to serve the needs of the whole college or university. However in most cases, continuing education is a comparatively small department and certainly not the main focus of the school. Also, continuing education programs typically have unique characteristics and needs, such as attendance tracking and externship management, as well as compliance and other reporting requirements. These are features you will not find in the big student information systems, and replacing the entire SIS to add these features is expensive and time consuming.

A more effective strategy is to find a smaller solution that has the features required to support continuing education and that integrates into the parent system.

This way, the parent system can report the big picture of the financial outlook of the school, while the continuing education SIS tracks attendance and handles other specific functions.

What features should higher ed leaders look for in an SIS?

There are standard features all SIS systems have such as lead management, documenting of interactions with the student, ledger card management, enrollment management, retention and attrition management.

However, there are specific features that a continuing education program requires such as attendance tracking, externship management, and placement management and tracking. These features are key to the licensure of the continuing education program, so it is very important that an institution with a continuing education program have an SIS with these features as well.

