

COLLEGE MAKES SMART MOVE USING SOA TO LAUNCH SELF-SERVICE STUDENT PORTAL

Challenge

Online enrollment at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) is doubling each year. That puts pressure on the college's enrollment system and advisory services. Additionally, the college's student profile is changing. Today's students are technologically proficient, accustomed to communicating, socializing and conducting business online. The college needed an innovative and efficient way of engaging this new generation of students.

Solution

FSCJ launched a new student portal – called Connections – based on Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) technology, providing a rich Web 2.0 experience and leveraging data housed in its ERP systems built on Adabas and Natural. Connections enables students to manage their entire educational experience online, from enrolling and selecting courses to measuring their success against goals.

Benefits

- Enrollment has increased 5% since implementing Connections
- Annual savings of more than \$250,000 as a result of increased online transactions
- Students save travel time and costs with 24/7 online access to services
- Students using Connections build stronger relationships with faculty
- Connections extends FSCJ's existing investments in the ERP system built on Adabas and Natural
- Upgrades are fast and easy – thanks to the flexibility of SOA



Florida State College at Jacksonville, one of the largest baccalaureate colleges in the U.S., serves more than 80,000 students a year. It has the largest workforce development program, IT curriculum and distance learning programs in Florida. FSCJ is also the largest provider of undergraduate education to the U.S. Navy. The college ranked first in the annual survey of Digital Community Colleges by the Center for Digital Education and the American Association of Community Colleges. In 2008, FSCJ also was recognized by the Computerworld Honors Program and received a Best Practices award from KMWorld.

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Dr. Rob Rennie | College Vice President and CIO | Florida State College at Jacksonville

Graduating to a new level of student service

FSCJ is a learning institution that believes in technology’s power to positively impact the educational experience. At the core of this belief are three guiding principles that drive every technology initiative:

1. Promote an educational technology focus achieved through investments in, and stewardship over, cost-effective and high-quality technology resources directed toward students with reduced emphasis on administrative systems.
2. Maintain technological leadership by providing ubiquitous access to the highest-quality technologies, resources, training and support.
3. Remain future-ready by actively forecasting and planning for the dynamic evolution of the technology landscape and the rapidly changing needs of students and staff as well as adopting open systems architectures that emphasize platform independence, scalability, flexibility and agility.

In keeping with these goals, FSCJ launched Connections – a 24/7, self-service portal for students that uses SOA as its underlying technology. FSCJ selected Software AG to provide tools and services for its SOA implementation. Connections was written in Java and is hosted on Sun Microsystems servers.

How Connections works

As the number of online students doubles every year, Connections helps assure the staff’s workload doesn’t double as well. Using Connections’ self-service capabilities, students can enroll, select courses, complete coursework and conduct transactions online. They can do all of this without ever having to step foot on an FSCJ campus.

Connections ‘connects’ with students right from the start by guiding them step-by-step through the admissions application. As part of this process, prospective students can access information on financial aid and apply for assistance. Prospects learn if they’re accepted to FSCJ through Connections. After acceptance, they can use the portal to access a suite of online degree planning and advisory resources.

The portal features six self-service modules, which students access using tabs at the top of a Web browser. For example, students use:

- My Home to access to their college e-mail accounts, as well as news feeds on upcoming deadlines and events.
- My Records to get grades, comprehensive transcript information and financial data.
- My Classes to research available classes and register for future terms.
- My Advisor to view a summary of the graduation requirements, to receive guidance on which courses to take and to reach out to an academic advisor.

The system leverages information from the college’s ERP system built using Natural. Adabas houses information tied to student services, such as registration and selection of schedules and classes.

Moving to the top of the class with SOA

FSCJ developed Connections from the ground up, making it the only portal of its kind. The college believes Connections is the first and most effective application of portal technology and SOA by a state college. It represents the most effective Web-enablement of self-serve student enrollment, registration and advisory resources.

As the underlying technology, SOA makes interchanging modules easy. SOA also speeds up development. For example, FSCJ launched a version of Connections optimized for mobile access in just three weeks. Without SOA toolsets, this project would have taken at least four months – or more than 500% longer.

Adopting SOA has allowed FSCJ to define and provision an IT infrastructure so different applications can exchange data and participate in various processes, such as enrollment, billing, class registration and progress audits.

The integration of Connections with administrative systems provides a single point of access management platform for the institution in all operational areas. This is particularly valuable in planning for academic offerings, facilities, budget and human resource requirements.

Achieving top-grade improvements

Connections creates additional value for FSCJ by:

- Supporting student recruitment and retention – since implementing Connections, enrollment has increased 5%.
- Enabling students to complete transactions online, such as making payments and requesting transcripts, which in turn has reduced administrative costs by more than \$250,000 per year.
- Improving how students engage with the college and manage their educational experience.
- Providing a better way for distance learners to access information and advisory resources – more than 25% of FSCJ students who participate in virtual degree programs rarely, if ever, set foot on campus.

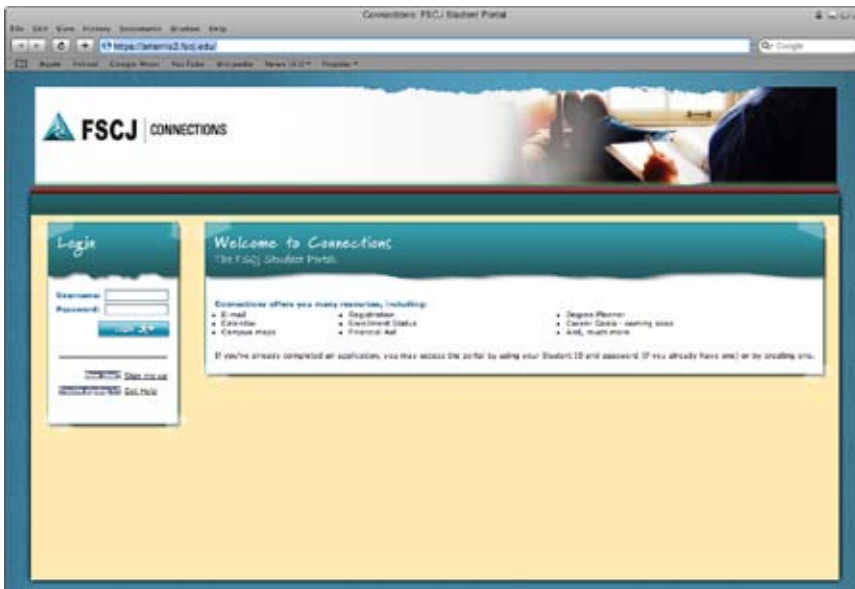
Connections also serves as a vital link between students and staff. Administrators can collect valuable insights from students on courses, instructors and curriculum. They can evaluate the numbers registered for specific courses to plan for larger classes or offer additional options. Also, professors gain real-time visibility and management capability for their courses.

KEY COMPONENTS

The college's ERP system was written using **Natural**.

Adabas houses all ERP data, including data on finances, human resources and scheduling, as well as academic records and the student information system – all of which are accessed easily via Connections with the **Adabas SQL Gateway**.

webMethods EntireX rapidly turned existing application functions into Web services.



FSCJ was recognized as a Computerworld Honors Laureate in 2008 for Connections. Computerworld Honors identify organizations from around the world whose use of information technology has been especially noteworthy for the originality of its conception, the breadth of its vision and the significance of its benefit to society.

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