Overview

Institution
The University of North Florida

Profile
The University of North Florida (UNF) is a public institution that provides education in the arts, sciences and professional fields to more than 16,000 students. The school takes a personalized approach, providing individual attention to learners.

Challenge
UNF used an internally developed legacy system to manage SACS accreditation and strategic planning, and to generate annual reports for Florida's Board of Governors. UNF sought a solution that would enable them to manage these processes reliably, while improving knowledge transfer among users.

Solution
TracDat enables UNF to centrally manage outcomes assessment, planning and reporting in 55 undergraduate and 29 graduate programs. TracDat is a multi-purpose solution with a configurable structure that accommodates a variety of uses and addresses the needs of multiple divisions. UNF also adopted iWebfolio to integrate evidence of individual improvement into their planning and assessment practices.

The University of North Florida Simplifies Continuous Improvement with Nuventive's Products & Services

"TracDat makes our assessment, reporting and improvement efforts more manageable and meaningful by consolidating them into a single platform."

-DR. JUDITH MILLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ASSESSMENT

Each year, the University of North Florida (UNF) submits a program-level assessment plan to the Florida Board of Governors (BOG), the governing body for the state's public universities. As part of their assessments, UNF and other institutions must provide evidence of student learning in critical thinking, communication, and discipline-specific content and skills that align with goals at the system level.

While UNF consistently met the annual reporting requirement, gathering and presenting evidence had become increasingly inefficient. UNF relied on legacy software developed in 2006 to support accreditation efforts and to manage BOG reports and strategic planning, but the system was inadequate in several respects. For example, it stored each year's data in isolation, requiring manual synthesis and presentation. In addition, contributors could not upload documents, making evidence capture cumbersome.

While UNF used the legacy software to complete a 2009 SACS reaffirmation successfully, administrators recognized that the existing process and technology made compliance efforts, reporting, planning and other data-based activities unnecessarily difficult and time-consuming. Creating a comprehensive demonstration of institutional progress required a more effective system to manage processes and present evidence.

UNF initiated its search for a solution in 2010. Looking ahead, they sought a system that enabled and supported assessment, accreditation, strategic planning and e-portfolios – and provided these capabilities through a minimal number of separate solutions. The search entailed a rigorous vendor demonstration process to verify functionality and value. UNF had prospective vendors put their solutions through mock exercises using actual information from the University's colleges of education and business – ensuring that the chosen solution met the real-world requirements of accrediting agencies and the Board of Governors.

TracDat Benefits

- Centralized repository for evidence of achievement

- Configurable structure for yearly progress reports, outcomes assessment and strategic planning

- Detailed configuration allows the software to serve a variety of departments

- Scalable structure permits expanded adoption in the future

- Custom reporting presents evidence of achievement in meaningful ways

iWebfolio Benefits

- Flexible configuration provides solutions for each division

- Rubrics can be attached and summarized to demonstrate progress against academic goals

Based on their comprehensive evaluation, UNF selected Nuventive's TracDat. According to Dr. Judith Miller, UNF's executive director of institutional research and assessment, "Of the candidates, TracDat came closest to meeting all our requirements. It's easy to use, has a role-based display and we can customize units, menus, summaries and reports." The University also selected iWebfolio, Nuventive's e-portfolio product, because it allows administrators to attach and summarize rubrics.

UNF launched TracDat in March 2011 and uses it to manage SACS accreditation in 55 undergraduate and 29 graduate programs, along with professional accreditations in a variety of disciplines including AACSB, ABET and sport management. UNF also uses the Nuventive Custom Reports Service to create targeted reports that demonstrate improvement to accrediting organizations. Many of these reports also are available for public viewing on the UNF web site.

Miller notes that faculty and staff welcomed TracDat's ease-of-use and comprehensive coverage, and the ways it enhances understanding of the assessment process. "I have found that training users on TracDat provides an excellent opportunity to engage them in positive discussions about assessment. Users report that TracDat makes the assessment process logical and almost intuitive."

UNF also will work with new state-level strategic plan guidelines, and will use TracDat to create an effective structure for broad-based strategic planning. The ability to customize TracDat, and to provide each division with a specific structure, cultivates reality-based planning and elicits meaningful contributions from academic departments and administrative units like Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Administration and Finance, and Institutional Advancement. "We can fine-tune the software to align with the structure and function of UNF's departments, to capture and enhance our improvement processes," explained Shawn Brayton, director of academic programs and accreditation liaison.

Because UNF's divisions have different priorities, procedures and review structures, the university configured TracDat in a decentralized way that enables them to focus on individual planning needs. TracDat accommodates everything from bi-annual strategy reviews to more frequent course-correction strategies, capturing budget requests, and distinguishing between strategic and operational actions.

The transition from legacy software to TracDat will be completed by 2013, enabling UNF to prepare for a 2015 SACS compliance review. Currently, the University's implementation team is finalizing its TracDat configuration and will begin to input data during the fall 2012 semester.

In addition to expanding TracDat's reach, UNF is rolling out iWebfolio to support professional development of third- and fourth-year students. A variety of customized templates will help students obtain employment and professional certifications, and support UNF's ongoing accreditation efforts.