



# Streamlined Student Registration Process

## ***"Betty Big on Student Success"***

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## I. Executive Summary

College of the Canyons (COC) is a place of opportunity and innovation. Our Student Services division is a big believer in both of these philosophies and works countless hours to provide many invaluable support services to current and prospective students. They help students get from the community into the classroom. Until the last couple of years, many of these processes have long been face to face, pen and paper experiences. Now however, as technology has changed, and so has our student population, we find that it is time for us to once again innovate our approach to student success, and bring our processes to the technological cutting edge.

In order to find solutions, we must recognize and analyze the challenges that students and staff are facing. Students struggle communicating consistently with financial aid; often not completing all of their required documentation on time thus delaying their financial awards. Students struggle with transportation to get to the campus to meet with a counselor and create their education plan. Students work full time and simply are unable to make it to campus when our departments are open and available to serve them. Students struggle with the payment screens when finalizing their registration; often believing they completed everything only to find out they did not and are no longer enrolled in their classes. In the background, our COC staff works countless hours to serve the students to their best ability but at times that simply is not enough. By COC standards, these challenges that students face are simply unacceptable. It is our duty as COC staff and faculty members to make our students' experiences the best we possibly can and continue to evolve with our ever changing student population.

In 2014, COC served 20,303 students. Sixty percent of that student population is under the age of 25 and thirty percent are coming from out of our district. Additionally, from 2009/10 to 2014/15, we awarded 4,000 more Board of Governor's Tuition Waivers. Over the next 10 years, we are projecting at least a 25% growth in our student population. (*College of the Canyons Fact Book 2015/16*). In order to efficiently and effectively serve our growing and diverse student population, and to compete with other community colleges, we need to provide more technological and online services for students. Services that students can access at any time of the day and where ever they may be; ones that aren't largely dependent on coming to campus. We need services that are intuitive, easy to understand, and quick for students to utilize. We have some solutions to make this possible.

### Mission

Our mission is to present and plan for solutions that reduce the challenges faced by students in registering, attaining financial aid, and paying their student fees. This mission will improve the students' ability to succeed at COC and create easier pathways for all community members to join the COC family.

### Primary Objectives

Our primary objectives are to make the following processes as streamlined and simple as possible:

1. Planning and registering for classes
2. Applying and receiving Financial Aid
3. Paying for registration and student fees
4. Understanding student balances and finances
5. Making our current Ellucian Colleague software system more functional for both staff and students

## Solutions

In order to try and streamline objectives one through four above, we must first make our Colleague software system as functional as possible. With over 3,500 customized screens, the constant maintenance and the ability to use the newest functions of the system are made exceedingly difficult. We need to have consultants come in, analyze our systems and propose ways to better utilize our current functioning system. This will help us remove and reduce our customizations with the goal of using newer standard functions of the software. This will cost approximately \$35,000 and will drastically increase the health and performance of our software system as well as make it more functionally fluid for new users of the system.

The other major piece of our project is to give our current and prospective students an enjoyable registration process, a simple and easy to understand financial aid process, and an up to the minute and easily accessible online statement and payment system. We need these functions to have a system that is available to students online to navigate through on their own time and at their desired locations. We have identified Ellucian's Self-Service Application system as a perfect fit. It provides three user friendly, student oriented tools: Student Planning, Financial Aid, and Student Finance. These tools will guide students seamlessly through the registration process and eliminate many of the challenges they are currently facing. This entire system will cost roughly \$98,000 between software purchases and Ellucian training to help setup and configure the software to get the most from it. When completed, these software modules will greatly increase our ability to serve our growing population of students to our best ability.

## II. Background

College of the Canyons not only works to provide the best education it can for students, but it also works to open new pathways and strives to be innovative. When dealing with current and prospective students, it is imperative that the pathway to education be as simple and straightforward as possible. The major processes that affect students are applying to college, applying for and receiving financial aid, planning and registering in classes and paying all necessary enrollment and student fees.

Unfortunately, many students face challenges navigating these processes which has created many barriers to entry for them. In order to improve the outcomes and make each process easy and an enjoyable experience for students, the problems must be addressed and solved. At the end of the day, a student's job is to focus and successfully complete each class they need to reach their completion goal. They often do not like dealing with all of the processes in between applying and graduating. It is our goal at the college to make every process as easy and streamlined as possible for students to quickly navigate through.

We have analyzed the various processes that students go through while trying to register. In order to truly streamline these processes, we identified four major areas with issues that will need to be solved and implemented.

## III. Improve Ellucian Colleague Software Utilization

### Challenge

College of the Canyons has been using Colleague for 18 years. When we purchased Colleague in 1999, we were way ahead of the information systems curve. We slowly began to create customizations to the system as it was not always able to meet the needs of the diverse student and staff populations. Customizations were created for purposes of functionality, reporting, and making the system work with the complex and ever changing sets of laws regarding priority registration, financial aid, and payment tracking. Today, our Colleague system has almost 3,500 customizations that are tracked and maintained by our MIS department. Unfortunately, what once made us ahead of the curve is now limiting some of our system use.

Primarily, as Colleague becomes more customized for our college, it limits our ability and knowledge of using new pieces of the software that are being released over time. We have grown accustomed to the customization work style and solution that we are now missing the features that the software already offers. In continuing to build more customizations, we increase the maintenance and create more challenges with truly keeping the system healthy and functional for our campus. Our MIS department works very hard to keep the system as functional as possible. However, the time devoted to that takes away the potential to work on new tasks and implement new projects outside of day to day usage.

### Solution

Our goal is to work with consultants to better use the newest functions of Colleague and reduce or eliminate a number of customizations in the system. This will help the staff use the system more naturally, and reduce the complexity that is encountered by both students and staff when using the

system. The biggest functions that we hope consulting can help with are Admissions and Records, Financial Aid, Communications Management, and Self Service Modules.

Another advantage of consulting is catching staff up on the changes of Colleague. The last formal training was over 10 years ago. Many screens have changed and had additions made to them since then. By spending a few weeks working directly with experts on each section of the system, we hope to gain the knowledge and wisdom of how best to use the system with the tools that they provide.

### Cost

The cost of this solution is approximately \$35,000. The training will take approximately three months and require the support of the Admissions and Records, Financial Aid, Student Business Office, Accounts Receivable, and MIS departments.

Below are the costs and implementation time:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Contract Svc</b>
Communications Management Consulting	\$ 13,500.00
Academic Records Usage Audit	\$ 7,200.00
A/R Cash Receipts Audit	\$ 7,200.00
Student Consulting	\$ 1,800.00
Student Financial Views	\$ 2,700.00
Student Accounts Consulting	\$ 1,800.00
Project Management	\$ 2,700.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 36,900.00</b>
<b>Time to Completion:</b>	<b>6 Months</b>

The costs above are listed at greater than \$35,000, however, we have already begun consulting on some items such as communications management. Currently, we have used fewer hours than expected, so the final cost will most likely be below the amount stated above.

### College Wide Benefits

1. Staff will be more proficient at their Colleague usage which will free up time to work directly with students.
2. Training and guide books can be shared and implemented so that other staff and departments can learn how to use the system better. This will not just benefit the people who are directly trained but everyone.
3. We can reduce the dependency on customizations. This will make updating the system easier and smoother. Also, this will allow our MIS department to devote less time to these unneeded customizations and more time to on additional new and needed projects.
4. We will pick up best practices from across the state and country. Ideally, we will learn how best to succeed with our students, and reduce the stress and challenges faced by the staff.
5. The reintroduction of Communications Management will allow the student services division to send out direct communications about financial aid, enrollment, and billing statuses to students.

## IV. Self Service Functionality

### The Greater Challenge

There are many processes in Colleague that are meant to be handled completely by the student. These processes include: planning and registering for classes, completing financial aid applications, and paying student bills. These processes can sometimes be simple, but they can also be complex. Many students have multiple disciplines from which to make their pathway, there are many documents required to submit for financial aid, and sometimes students have multiple types of payments to make at the same time. On top of this, some students are not as proficient with computers or understanding a process they have never seen before. This slows or even stops their ability to enter the classroom.

We have a solution to solve these challenges, Ellucian calls this “Self-Service Functionality”. The self-service system will give students the ability to submit and track all tasks involved in financial aid, plan their academic career based on their program, easily register from their plan, and pay their account balance by applying various forms of payments seamlessly. This system easily guides them through each tool which provides for a very pleasant registration experience.

## V. Self Service Functionality: Student Planning

### Challenge

One of the biggest goals of COC is to ensure students are able to complete their degree or certificate in a timely manner. A number of students take classes to test the waters in different areas, but when the time comes to plan their path to the next level, they often get lost. Students can declare multiple majors and take classes in many disciplines, but which way is the best, shortest, or accurate one to transfer? Or which classes are required to graduate with a specific degree?

This major process of actually getting into the classroom is registering for classes. Students are required to have a plan to achieve their academic goal. Many students come to COC with an idea of what they would like to do, but not always having a firm grasp on how to get there. This can result in classes taken unnecessarily or an attempt to register for classes that the student is not yet qualified for. Admissions and records as well as counseling work diligently to help each student meet their degree demands, but with thousands of students each semester, the counselors and staff are greatly outnumbered. Also, students may want to talk with their friends, family, and mentors when trying to plan their college pathway. This leads to them wanting access to their academic planning at all hours including the weekend and from locations other than just on the college campus. As we seek a better way to serve our students and help them succeed, we need to start searching for more technological solutions. Having an online solution that is available at all hours would allow students to be better served to reach their academic goals.

### Solution

Our goal is to bring students an online solution with which they can plan their career for the next year and beyond. This will be achieved through the self-service tool: Student Planning. Student Planning is an online student education plan. The system talks to My Canyons and pulls the students active academic program. It outlines the required courses for their program, general education requirements and allows

students to plan their entire academic career at COC. From their planned semesters, students will have the ability to seamlessly pull in current course schedule sections and register very easily.

In order to implement Student Planning, the following tasks will need to be complete.

1. Install and configure the student education plan as an attachment of the Colleague system. This is a serious commitment as the system needs to be programmed with the classes that are required for each certificate and degree, as well as knowing what classes are prerequisites of others. The system also has to be updated periodically with class schedules as that will allow students to pre-plan their courses for future semesters.
2. Then work to train multiple student services departments (Admissions and Records, General Counseling, all counselors, and peer advisors) with the ability to use and guide the students through the planning tool. While we expect the majority of students to be able to use the plan on their own, we know that there will always be some students who look to our staff and faculty to guide them through. Having a well-trained and helpful staff will be key to getting all students to use the tool.
3. Introduce and create a guide (document and video) for the Self-Service Student Planning. This application allows students to plan their courses for the entirety of their COC career. The software pulls their academic program from My Canyons and tells students what classes are required to fulfill their program. It shows them a progress bar to know how much they've done and how much is left – detailing classes completed and those that still must be fulfilled. It provides them with a timeline of completion and also makes registering for classes easier. Students are able to go from the semester planned in their education plan to being registered in them with one simple click.
4. Create a marketing campaign to increase awareness of the student educational plan and how to use it. This plan will help students gain awareness and grow in their understanding of how to use the system. Even if the plan doesn't reach all students, the ones who learn it well will share it with their friends and classmates and allow the knowledge of the system to grow and perpetuate itself for years to come.

### Cost

This solution will require additional software modules, some training and some videotaping. The expected cost is approximately \$45,000. The majority of this cause is purchasing the student online plan module from Ellucian and the consulting services to configure the software to the college needs. This will also require some time and training for Admissions and Records, Counseling, and other members of the Student Services Division. We will also work to create videos and documents that help both students and staff understand this new software. That will be staff created and thus require some time from a couple departments.

Item	Cost
Online Student Education Plan Software	\$ 31,700.00
Online Student Education Plan Consulting	\$ 12,000.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 43,700.00</b>
<b>Time to Completion:</b>	<b>3 Months</b>



## College Wide Benefits

1. Students will be able to navigate the most complex aspects of their majors and changing degrees with greater ease. This will increase their ability to enroll and reduce their challenges of trying to set up a schedule on their own and plan out multiple semesters into the future.
2. Staff will have an easier time demonstrating processes to students. They will be able to teach students about the Student Education Plan, help the students get started in creating a plan for themselves, and then give them the tool to continue on their own. This allows students learn the knowledge once and continue to succeed in following semesters. This will reduce the amount of time that staff needs to spend with each student individually and will increase their ability to serve with more students.
3. The college will continue to be innovative and viewed as easy to enroll in and achieve an academic goal. Additionally, this will help the college to serve more students as the population continues to grow each year.

## **VI. Self Service Functionality: Financial Aid**

The financial aid process allows students to apply to federal, state, and college specific waivers, grants, scholarships, and loan programs. The programs are processed by the financial aid office and the funds are distributed to the student after the last drop deadline of classes has occurred. This process is long and complex because there are many regulations that come from many government levels that a student must abide by. Also, students must have not only their own information but information about their parents, school history, and taxes to successfully complete a financial aid application.

### Challenge

The second major process that many students work through is the Financial Aid process. It requires the submission of several legal documents as well as filling out one or maybe even multiple applications depending on the student situation and semester enrolled. Some of the forms are college specific, some are state specific (BOG Application) and some are used nationally (FAFSA). The challenge across these forms is that there is not always a common definition of phrases and some require that the student sign, write a statement, or enter a pin number. By the end, the student submits a pile of documents to our financial aid office for processing and then waits to hear back. The Financial Aid office sends emails and updates to students but the message is not always received or understood. This leads to many students calling or having to wait in line to talk to a counselor to understand what they still need to do. This can lead to repeat visits and sometimes create bigger challenges when some of the information needed is from a family member who is not with the student at the time of their visit. More often than not, this leads to very frustrated students and can even delay their award.

### Solution

Our goal is to install Self-Service Financial Aid. While most documents still need to be turned in by the student, they will be provided a checklist of their required documents, they can easily see what items are missing, check for updates to their financial aid status, as well as understand the schedule for their financial aid process and disbursements online from anywhere. This software will update nightly with any updates to a student's progress in filling out their financial aid documents. A student will not need

to wait in line to get their status, documentation or award questions answered. They will be able to do it themselves; easy and efficiently. This will reduce the wait time for students as well as allow staff to focus on complex student issues and serve them more efficiently.

Tasks to successfully implement the Financial Aid tool are:

1. Install and configure the Self-Service Financial Aid tool. This includes setting the system up to display the forms and their status so that each student who applies for financial aid can check their status. It also involves rebranding the website to match College of the Canyons look and the information appropriate for our college and the financial aid policies.
2. Introduce and create a guide for the Self-Service Financial Aid tool. This software piece allows a student to log in and see what they need to do, the real time status of their financial aid documents, and the amount of financial aid that they will be receiving. We need to help demonstrate to staff and students how to use it, and create a document and perhaps user video to walk them through how to best understand the program.
3. Create a marketing campaign to increase awareness of the student financial aid service and how to use it. This campaign will help students gain awareness and grow in their understanding of how to use the system. This plan will filter through the financial aid and student services division and hopefully reach all students who have or are interested in financial aid.

**Cost**

The cost of this solution will be roughly \$25,000. The contract costs are listed below but it is expected that as we have begun customizing and testing the software without using the entirety of our consulting budget. This setup and training will require primarily the Financial Aid and MIS departments to work together and adjust the software to work with the College of the Canyons approach to financial aid.

Item	Cost
Financial Aid Self Service Software	\$ 23,625.00
Financial Aid Self Service Consulting	\$ 3,000.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 26,625.00</b>
<b>Time to Completion:</b>	<b>6 Months</b>

**College Wide Benefits**

1. Students will be able to navigate having to complete complex forms and meet varying deadlines with greater ease. This will increase their ability to apply and reduce their challenges of not knowing what documents or information is missing from their financial aid applications.
2. Staff will have an easier time letting students know the status of their application. They will be able to have the system update automatically nightly so they only need to worry about processing the applications. Each night, the system will update and could send updates to the students to advise them of the new status of their financial aid application. This will reduce the amount of time that staff needs to spend with each student individually and will increase their ability to serve with more students.

3. The college will continue to be innovative and viewed as easy to file and acquire financial aid assistance. Additionally, this will help the college to serve more students as the population continues to grow each year.

## VII. Self Service Functionality: Student Finance

Students handle some long and complex processes to attend classes. They need to figure out their classes for the semester, enroll in them, and then pay for any classes, fees, parking permits, and other items associated with that semester. This can sometimes lead to confusion on amounts owed which can sometimes cause the students to pay an incorrect amount, or forget to pay entirely if their internet crashes or they have some other form of connection error. The student finance module is a simple online portal that allows students to check their balance for the term and pay right there.

### Challenge

After registering in classes, students need to complete their enrollment by paying their registration fees. If they fail to complete the payment, or close out the web browser or lose connectivity, they will fail to complete the registration process. If the student does not log back on and complete their payments by the end of that same day, they will be dropped from their classes. One other challenge faced is that our current payment provider, PayPal, does not provide clear explanations on failed payments. This means the student can attempt to pay, incorrectly enter some information on the card, and not know what went wrong. This can lead to students having their money held by their banking institution for weeks which then leads to other personal challenges for the student.

### Solution

We plan to rework the payment aspect of registration. We want to make it similar to an online shopping cart check out; like a check out on Amazon.com. This should make the process simple and easy to understand for both first time students and returning students alike. We also plan to add an online module that tracks charges and payments for the student. Immediately after registering, it shows them their bill so that they can easily see what they owe and with the click of a few buttons are able to submit their payment for processing. This ensures students pay immediately and on time which will reduce the number of students dropped from their courses.

In order to implement this Student Finance tool, the following tasks will need to be completed:

1. Take Parking out of the equation and make it a separate process. Parking is an additional fee and currently it can cause a student to not have paid in full for their semester. Staff has agreed that not paying for parking should not prevent a student from enrolling in their classes. We are looking to separate the parking process from the registration payment process.
2. Change our current payment vendor from PayPal to a vendor that specializes in working with higher educational institutions. PayPal has become a business gateway, but they have not worked to improve the understanding of failed payments for our students. As they appear to not be updating their responses to failed payments, the college is looking to find a new third party vendor. Our goal is to have a vendor that works with students and provides clear

explanations if errors occur during the payment process. This process would require the coordination of the MIS and business services teams.

3. Implement and configure the Self-Service Finance tool. This means installing the software on the college ERP system and working with Ellucian consultants to help make the detail screen as helpful and easy to understand as possible. Branding the page and giving the student direct links to their financial aid, class listings, and a link to the payment system will allow students to fully read, understand their finance situation and payments applied, and pay any outstanding debts.

### Cost

The solution will cost of this process will be approximately \$27,000.

Item	Cost
Student Financial Views Software	\$ 25,000.00
Student Financial Views	\$ 2,700.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 27,700.00</b>
<b>Time to Completion:</b>	<b>4 Months</b>

### College Wide Benefits

1. Students will be able to check their student balance and accurately pay at any time. They won't have to worry when submitting their payment or rush to get to campus and pay in person at the Student Business Office. This will greatly increase the chance of them making timely payments and not being dropped from any classes. It will also increase the amount of information available to the student at all times.
2. Students and staff alike will be able to understand what a student's balance is made up of and what payments have been applied. This should help simplify the conversation and reduce the amount of time it takes for a student to get help from a staff member. Also, if the student is able to log in to their My Canyons, than anyone in the student business office or a counselor can help explain the situation, which gives the student more avenues of success. We want to raise our chance at success to the highest point possible.
3. The staff at the Student Business Office should have more time to work on complex processes such as grants and scholarship funding for students. Currently they help out every student who has a billing question. With the information available online, fewer students will be coming to the SBO and this will free up staff to help students with more complex issues and dedicate their time to other important tasks to give all students a strong chance at success.

## VIII. Conclusion

We began serving students through the Ellucian Colleague system almost 18 years ago. Since then, the software, the processes, and the students have changed. Students are now more connected to the campus through technology than an actual physical presence. Additionally, there are many more students trying to work through each process than at any other time in the campus history.

In order to effectively and efficiently handle this growth, and to leverage changing technology, we believe it is in the best interest of College of the Canyons to add new technological services and systems. Systems that can help improve student services and provide new ways for the students to connect to the campus. Self-service modules that can be accessed any time and from anywhere will give all students a chance to get ready for school from the convenience of their home and on their own schedule. It will also allow them to update their classes, financial aid process, and their billing status in real time to reduce their waiting time, and reduce the time that is needed by a staff member to process these changes. This helps the student get a more responsive and positive service experience, and it frees up staff time to help students with more complex issues and provide the best college experience possible. By implementing the solutions presented in this paper, we believe that student registration will be much more streamlined and create a more positive and enjoyable experience for each student at College of the Canyons.