



The Informatica Platform Spearheads Cross-Campus Data Integration and Improved Academic Performance

Informatica Platform helps leading university easily extract intelligence from any of its systems and make more timely, accurate, and informed decisions

FAST FACTS

BUSINESS INITIATIVES

- Support academic business intelligence
- Optimize operational efficiency

TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

Implemented the Informatica Platform, using Informatica PowerCenter Advanced Edition and Informatica Data Explorer to access and integrate data from any business system, in any format, and deliver that data throughout the university as quickly as users demand

“We brought the new system to market within 6 months, but it would have taken as much as 18 months using traditional integration techniques. It meant we benefited from a whole extra year of fund raising.”

— Mike Wolf, Manager of Data Warehousing, The George Washington University

Executive Summary

Informatica has received top marks at The George Washington University (GWU) for the contribution its data integration technologies have made to the university's performance. GWU standardized on the Informatica® Platform almost a decade ago. During this time, Informatica's world-class data integration technology has become the backbone for multiple university systems, including a student management system, a student accounting system, and a grant maintenance platform. In one instance, it brought a new fund-raising system to market one year early, allowing an additional year of intensive fund raising. The Informatica Platform takes every integration challenge in its stride, including the exponentially expanding cloud of social media. All of this is helping to make GWU a vibrant and attractive university, uniquely positioned to magnetize the best students.

BENEFITS

- Helped university attract best students
- Supported prudent financial management
- Allowed accurate, balanced decisions more quickly and effectively
- Enabled university to excel at its academic and administrative goals
- Provided direct access to key measures of academic performance
- Facilitated an additional year of fund raising by bringing new system to market a year early
- Overcame data quality issues, resulting in trusted, reliable data for decision making
- Anticipated to deliver new intelligence and insight from social media

NUTS AND BOLTS

- Solution: Data integration to support business intelligence
- Products: Informatica PowerCenter Advanced Edition, Informatica Data Explorer
- Sources: Oracle Financials, SunGard SAP, flat files, spreadsheets
- Target: Oracle business intelligence data warehouse

Social Data Drives University's Data Integration Strategy

When Mike Wolf watched the election of Barak Obama on television back in 2008, something caught his eye. Wolf is the manager of data warehousing at The George Washington University (GWU), the largest institution of higher education in the District of Columbia, with more than 20,000 students. What he saw on the screen could ultimately influence the future direction of the GWU's data integration strategy. A large group, possibly hundreds, of GWU students were live on air, waving their placards and celebrating the Obama win. However, this was no mere coincidental meeting; it was an organized gathering created using social networking. The university's students had come together through communities such as Facebook and Twitter to coordinate their presence in front of the cameras.

Wolf explains, "It was a powerful display of the value of social media, and from that day forward I recognized that social data had become a vital tool for students. The GWU had to embrace it; and it became my goal to add social data to the structured and complex data we were already integrating."

In due course, social media will become a crucial aspect of GWU's strategy: combining the power of structured data for transactions with social data for interactions to gain new insights into the university's activities. In the meantime, the university needs to concentrate on more commonplace tasks, such as overcoming fierce competition for the best students, meeting diverse student needs, finding adequate funds to meet constantly shifting demands, and increased accountability from internal and external constituents. All of these issues have a direct impact on GWU's business processes—from student recruitment to financial management. However, the complexity of these challenges requires continual improvements in operational strategies based on accurate, timely, and consistent information.

Accurate, Balanced Decisions—More Quickly and More Effectively

GWU introduced the Informatica Platform, in this instance PowerCenter® Advanced Edition™, almost a decade ago to create a robust and flexible reporting infrastructure that provides key academic performance indicators and metrics to end users—on demand, wherever they need the information. And that information is used to make accurate, balanced decisions more quickly and more effectively. Ultimately, improved decision making helps all nine GWU colleges and nearly 100 associated research centers and institutes excel at their academic and administrative goals.

Prior to the arrival of Informatica on campus, data integration was as tough as a postgraduate astrophysics advanced examination. Historical data was buried in disparate data sources that supported transactional, day-to-day business processes. This data proved to be very difficult to extract and even more difficult to integrate into a single format, owing to inconsistencies inherent in distributed data storage systems and the ownership issues surrounding them. Moreover, the university's transaction applications did not store data in models that supported on-demand and ad hoc aggregations.

As a result of these integration challenges, programmers or specialized reporting analysts in various GWU departments were often asked to create reports using proprietary programs or

highly technical applications. Such imprecise and time-consuming tasks frequently produced compromised results due to the inconsistent application of business rules or an incomplete understanding of the relationships in the data.

Student Data Mart Holds Life Record of Students

The workhorse of GWU's data integration and business intelligence implementation is the Student Data Mart (SDM). By virtue of the Informatica Platform, the SDM integrates raw data into a unified data model to support a set of key academic metrics and create a user-friendly reporting environment for ad hoc reporting. Information is then delivered to end users on demand and through GWU intranet pages, in commonly used formats such as Adobe Acrobat PDF, text files, and Excel spreadsheets.

"The SDM represents a life record of the students," says Wolf. "It contains 10 years of recruitment, admissions, enrollment, registration, and grade-point average information for all students across all campuses. It supports a wide-range of academic metrics, including per campus and unduplicated enrollment counts, admissions selectivity, course enrollment data, student achievement, and individual program metrics."

These metrics are directly and systematically aligned with the academic goals of each department and with GWU's overall goals. And since its implementation, the SDM GWU user community has expanded significantly and currently extends across a number of GWU branches, including the university's Research Institute, the Registrar's Office, Graduate Admissions, and individual colleges.

The SDM also promotes the concept of reusable reports, which allow users to share and leverage useful reports without precious IT resources and technical intervention. For example, if a business user perceives that a newly created report can benefit others, the report is disseminated for public use. Reusable reports also enable GWU to shift its focus away from creating one-off reports, which are expensive to maintain in a cost-effective publish and subscribe paradigm.

"The SDM system, powered by the Informatica Platform, provides direct access to key measures of academic performance," says Wolf. "By integrating data into a clean repository and disseminating information over their intranet, the SDM gives users direct access to key academic metrics. Based on these metrics, users are able to make decisions in a timely manner and with more precision than before."

Unified View of Students' Financial Performance

The Informatica Platform provides the integration backbone for a range of other GWU services. For example, the integration technology supports a student account system, which supplies more than 400 staff with a shared, unified view of the financial performance of students. Connecting data from diverse, fragmented internal sources and third-party data from employers, sponsors, and collection agencies, it answers questions about whether students have paid their fees or how much they are paying for each course.

"Data integration has never been this easy," Wolf says. "We recently deployed the Informatica Platform to support the data integration needs of a new university fund-raising system. We brought the new system to market within 6 months, but it would have taken as much as 18 months using traditional integration techniques. It meant we benefited from a whole extra year of fund raising."

The university's data integration process has exposed many data quality issues that are the natural outcome of distributed data ownership. Without the university's business intelligence system, it would be difficult to investigate the nature and extent of data quality issues that are quickly detected using the Informatica Platform, specifically Informatica Data Explorer™. As a result, GWU has improved data quality standards and procedures.

Wolf explains, "Data quality is an inevitable problem in any higher education establishment, because you have so many different people—lecturers, students, and administration staff—all entering data. With the Informatica Data Explorer, we can find hidden data problems, wherever they are, and analyze the anomalies across all data sources. This helps build our trust and confidence in the data. It also speeds up the design phase because it overcomes the need to hand query the data to see what the quality is like."

Meanwhile, Wolf and his team keep a careful eye on the gathering clouds: in this case, cloud computing. As the data associated with social media continues to grow and intensify, he is comfortable that this social data can be integrated just as easily as the more traditional Oracle Financials, SunGard SAP, or flat files they're used to dealing with.

According to Wolf, "The Informatica Platform is agnostic—it doesn't turn its back on any type of data. By allowing the university to integrate data of any type, including social media, and data from any source, the technology is supporting key measures of academic performance, improving standards, and reducing costs. Ultimately, this is helping GWU maintain its position as a vibrant and attractive university, uniquely positioned to magnetize the best students."

Learn More

Learn more about the Informatica Platform. Visit us at www.informatica.com or call +1 650-385-5000 (1-800-653-3871 in the U.S.).

About Informatica

Informatica Corporation (NASDAQ: INFA) is the world's number one independent provider of data integration software. Organizations around the world gain a competitive advantage in today's global information economy with timely, relevant and trustworthy data for their top business imperatives. More than 4,280 enterprises worldwide rely on Informatica to access, integrate and trust their information assets held in the traditional enterprise, off premise and in the Cloud. For more information, call +1 650-385-5000 (1-800-653-3871 in the U.S.), or visit www.informatica.com. Connect with Informatica at <http://www.facebook.com/InformaticaCorporation>, <http://www.linkedin.com/companies/3858> and <http://twitter.com/InformaticaCorp>.



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