Happy Campus

University College of the North

When Technology is Students' Lifeline, Picking the Right ERP System is Critical to Their Future

University College of the North (UCN) serves the educational needs of Indigenous and northern Manitobans to enhance the economic and social well-being of northern Manitoba, Canada. In recent years, UCN's legacy enterprise resource planning (ERP) system became an impediment to its mission. Most processes were conducted outside the system, making it difficult to share, retrieve, and leverage data. The geographical location of UCN, its remote setting, and its significant Indigenous student population, many of whom are first-generation university college students, added layers of complexity to their operational needs.

Since technology had become a vital lifeline between the institution and its students, UCN's leadership partnered with CampusWorks to conduct a comprehensive ERP Evaluation & Selection initiative to illuminate the best path forward. The project aimed not only to find a new ERP solution that could better support UCN's unique needs but also to streamline processes to improve student success and engagement.

Setting the Stage for Transformation

To prepare for the changes ahead, CampusWorks hosted a "Trends in Higher Education" workshop to educate UCN's campus community about key trends impacting academic institutions and their implications for the future. CampusWorks also facilitated a "Student Experience Workshop," in which participants co-created a vision for the ideal UCN student experience. This vision aimed to position UCN as a transformative, life-enhancing educational experience that promoted qualities of well-being, connectedness, equal access, and preparedness for academic and future career success.

UCN
University College of the North

The Tri-Councils—comprised of the Governing Council, Learning Council, and Council of Elders—work together to advance UCN's mission while embracing Indigenous and northern cultures and values.

- **2 main campuses in The Pas and Thompson and 12 Education and Training Centres in northern Manitoba, Canada**
- **Enrolment: ~2,000 students**
- **Staff: ~320**

CHALLENGE

At UCN, technology is a vital lifeline between students and the institution; however, the legacy ERP system was burdened by manual processes and inefficiencies that impeded success and engagement.

CAMPUSWORKS PARTNERSHIP

CampusWorks led an inclusive, transparent ERP Evaluation & Selection initiative to help UCN determine the future of its ERP system and streamline the student experience.

OUTCOMES

- **Reimagined and redesigned** future state processes that support an **optimized student journey**.
- Unanimously decided to move to **Ellucian Colleague**.
- **Gave stakeholders a voice** in the process, setting the stage for **implementation success**.

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Next, the CampusWorks team conducted an ERP Readiness Assessment that evaluated technology users' overall satisfaction with the current core set of enterprise systems, the alignment of current business processes with deployed legacy modules and third-party applications, and how much of the current legacy system UCN was utilizing. Focus groups were then conducted among a dozen faculties/departments and areas across the institution.

The feedback confirmed that UCN's legacy ERP system was inadequate for their needs. Functionality gaps and integration issues were impacting operational efficiency and customer service. Data governance and integrity issues were preventing data-informed decision making, and manual processes were creating unnecessary administrative burden. For example, Human Resources and Payroll data was stored on spreadsheets across the HR, Payroll, and Finance teams. This fragmented approach prevented staff from answering basic strategic questions, such as how many employees UCN had budgeted for.

On the front end, much of the student intake process was manual and disjointed, which delayed student processing and negatively impacted the student experience. The lack of internet connectivity in the region posed additional challenges, forcing many students to rely on outreach centers for basic tasks like enrolment and application submission.

Another example that stood out impacted Continuing Education and Workforce Development. UCN's mining and associated training programs, which are in high demand, often required hours of struggle to register for a one-day seminar. Obstacles like this can end an individual's educational journey before it even begins.

Reimagining a Technology-Driven Future

CampusWorks conducted a comprehensive Process Reimagine & Redesign (PRR) initiative, which evaluated current and future needs across Human Resources/Payroll, Finance, and the full lifecycle of processes that supported the student and employee experiences. This work identified opportunities for a more streamlined and efficient operating environment with a focus on adapting to UCN's unique financial structures and the need for robust alumni and continuing education support mechanisms.

The resulting vendor-agnostic future state process maps created a framework for transformation. CampusWorks leveraged them along with the insights gathered from the assessment to develop a requirements list that reflected UCN's unique needs and became the cornerstone of an ERP procurement request for proposal.

A Unanimous ERP Selection Decision

CampusWorks led the procurement proposal evaluation and scoring process, which yielded a short list of two vendors.

The inclusive, transparent selection process that followed emphasized the need for a solution that could address UCN's specific challenges, including its remote location, the need for improved connectivity and system integration, and support for its large Indigenous student population. Campus community members had an opportunity to view software demonstrations from each of the short-listed vendors, which included specific use-case scenarios that reflected UCN's operating realities.

The Selection Committee was unanimous in its decision to adopt Ellucian's Colleague as UCN's new ERP system.

Transformative Results

The partnership with CampusWorks has set UCN on a path toward significantly improved operational efficiency, data management, and student support. By selecting Ellucian's Colleague and moving into the discovery phase of implementation, UCN aims to enhance its service to students, particularly in facilitating easier access to educational resources and support services.

As part of this initiative, UCN will implement Ellucian's Elevate, a robust, easy-to-use system with a familiar shopping cart feel, enabling Continuing Education and Workforce Development to effectively respond to the needs of adult learners and local businesses.

This strategic approach to ERP selection and implementation underscores UCN's commitment to leveraging technology to overcome geographic and connectivity challenges, supporting their mission of providing accessible education to a diverse and underserved student population.

> "Everyone we have collaborated with at CampusWorks has extensive experience and knowledge in their respective fields. This has allowed us to gain a better understanding of the potential benefits that a new ERP system could provide and helped us to identify our specific requirements. With their guidance, we were able to explore new possibilities and think creatively about how improved functionality could positively impact our work processes."
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> **Deveny Zahayko**
> *Policy and Project Manager*

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