

Implementations that span entire college and university systems in three states

IN 2001, SAUNDRA WILLIAMS was hired as vice president for administration of the North Carolina Community College System. When she arrived NCCCS was beginning a massive IT implementation, and she was its new overseer. "I came from a university system, so one of the challenges was learning the culture of the community college system and how it would be affected by the project," Williams explains.

With 800,000 enrolled students statewide, all 58 North Carolina community colleges were standardizing on Datatel's Colleague. Colleague was purchased to run their human resources, finance and student information systems. The implementation was considered fully complete near the end of 2007.

Patrick Opatz is chief operating officer of Minnesota Online. He became involved while serving on the Minnesota Online Council as the budget director of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU). Launched in 2002, Minnesota Online enables a student enrolled at any of the system's seven state universities or 25 community and technical colleges to take a course offered by any of the other 31 institutions. Today Minnesota Online offers more than 200 programs and 1,000 courses.

Robert Hails has been involved in distance education for more than thirty years. He is the distance learning coordinator for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). He oversees several system-wide applications, one of which are collaborative tools related to distance

learning used in some form on all 14 PASSHE campuses.

Getting everybody on board

Implementing the same technology across a multi-campus system is a combination of art and science. PASSHE, which enrolls 107,000 students, has been using collaborative online tools from Wimba for two years, but only with their most recent contract renewal do they have the participation of all 14 universities.

Now, consider 58 campuses. North Carolina Community College System has been rolling out Datatel's Colleague since 2001. Williams says enthusiastically, "We have completed the project! We are excited to say so." She credits much of that success to the support of all 58 community college presidents. Williams and her project steering committee made presentations at every quarterly presidents' meeting during the last six years, and Williams spoke to some presidents on a weekly basis.

"I wanted to help each president understand that the campus leader played a critical role in the project. Once they understood their role, several of them made structural changes at their campuses to better implement the system." More than one person close to this project can chuckle about North Carolinian attitude changes that progressed from 'Data-Hell' in the earlier days of the massive project to 'Data-Swell' as each successive campus came online.

Hails found that a byproduct of Pennsylvania's

The interviews begin on the following page.

Hear directly from the principals:
Saundra Williams, Robert Hails and Patrick Opatz.

By Florence Kizza

