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CampusCruiser Communities Enhance New Student Experience at Suffolk Law School

Numerous research studies over the last three decades confirm that students' decisions to withdraw from college or graduate school are significantly affected by the degree of their intellectual and social integration into the life of the institution (see study references). Those students who integrate well into the higher education environment are more likely to successfully complete their studies than those who do not. Studies have found that a much higher proportion of students who had considered deferring had not made close friends at the institution, kept to themselves, and were not interested in extra-curricular activities.

Orientation programs, peer mentoring, learning groups, and faculty/student programs have been developed to overcome such obstacles and help students integrate into university life once they reach campus. But what about the time that lapses between being accepted at an institution of higher learning and the actual beginning of coursework? Can technology help bridge the gap? In the following case study, you will learn of a university that uses CampusCruiser technology to integrate new students into campus life starting the moment they are accepted to the institution.

Challenge: Helping New Students “Socially Integrate” Themselves into the Suffolk University Law School Environment

Five-hundred first-year students from across North America and from up to 24 foreign nations are admitted to Suffolk University Law School each spring. Most begin classes the following autumn: three to four months after their initial acceptance.

Making the transition to law school can be difficult. It's easy to become overwhelmed and discouraged. No doubt, each student has their own unique set of trepidations relative to attending law school and living in the bustling city of Boston.

Before the introduction of CampusCruiser, the chances were high that Suffolk students would have some difficulty immersing themselves into the university and metropolitan area. That was before the Suffolk University Law School Registrar's office and CampusCruiser® stepped up to the plate.

CampusCruiser is a comprehensive college portal that provides an on-demand solution for campus-wide communication, community development, and learning management.

Solution: Integrate New Students via CampusCruiser® Communities

Suffolk gives new students access to CampusCruiser soon after they are admitted. The single sign-on (SSO) feature gives students access to a range of resources that they have been granted rights to use by Suffolk administrators. With this universal access to the “New Student” community, first-year students interact with one another and with university personnel well before they arrive on campus. And it has become one of the most vital and active communities within the CampusCruiser portal at Suffolk Law.

New students, located anywhere in the world, can tap into the community features of CampusCruiser months before they report to campus. These students can:

- Learn about the campus from current students.
- Find student groups, such as communities for specific areas of concentration, personal interests, religious and ethnic affiliations, as well as legal associations.
- Inquire about housing and the cost of living in Boston.
- Discover the best, local late-night coffee shops.

“CampusCruiser is a great facilitator for Suffolk Law School and our incoming students. The electronic ‘orientation’ for new students is available 24-7 – anytime they want it. The single sign-on (SSO) feature allows new students not only into communities, but also gives them seamless access to their own records and class schedules,” says Lorraine Cove, Assistant Dean and Registrar.

Cove also monitors the new students' posts. If a question goes unanswered, or is answered incorrectly, she sees that the proper information gets disseminated.

Results: Students Hit the Ground Running

Law school is a challenge even for the best and brightest students. If they can hit the ground running on their first day, their chances of success rise dramatically. CampusCruiser and its community features allow students to begin their law education focused on learning, far less distracted by transitioning to an entirely new environment.

Luke Goldwork, a second-year law student, attests to the benefits of CampusCruiser. "Before coming to Suffolk, I was living in New York, attending a local university. Having immediate access to Suffolk through CampusCruiser allowed me to quickly get acquainted with Suffolk. Instructors posted initial reading assignments ahead of the first day of classes, which allowed me to get a head-start on my class work. That's important, especially for me as a night student holding a daytime job, too."

As an established student, Luke appreciates the pre-registration process. "Through CampusCruiser, I can pre-register for classes online. I sign up for the classes I prefer, along with some back-up courses, days ahead of the official registration. Then it's simply a matter of submitting my request on registration day."

Cove adds, "Our mission is to continually improve our product, an exceptional legal education. We call CampusCruiser our PIP, or Portal in Progress, because we are able to build and expand our services through the Portal's flexible user interface. In this way, the technology helps us respond to and address our students' needs."

Communities Function Like Departments

Suffolk Law School doesn't have multiple departments as would a large, undergraduate university with thousands of students. However, they do have many groups of people with common interests and goals. CampusCruiser's flexibility allows Suffolk to create communities that function in many ways like departments or divisions. If a message needs to be sent only to a select group, or community, then it can be accomplished simply and efficiently. No need to send a broadcast email to each interested party.

"Department heads are empowered to communicate when they need to, and in a timely manner," adds Cove.

Examples of successful communities include –

Faculty advisors. Faculty communities are created for student advising, enabling groups and a one-to-one interaction.

Concentrations/majors. Students band together in CampusCruiser communities based on their concentrations or majors.

Sweden Summer Student. Students can participate in a summer session at the University of Lund, among the most prestigious universities in Europe. CampusCruiser is a key communication tool that enhances the experience.

International Interns. The faculty coordinator of international interns communicates with students worldwide deployed throughout the globe via CampusCruiser communities.

Rappaport Center. The Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service provides opportunities for as many as 400 students to engage in public service and pro bono activities through a weekly community newsletter.

It doesn't stop there. Communities also exist for graduating students, Master of Law (LLM) students, joint degree students, transfer and visiting students, as well as for faculty and staff.

Student Bar Association Leverages Community Feature

Luke Goldwork has high expectations for CampusCruiser's community features as the incoming Vice President of the Student Bar Association (SBA). "There are numerous committees and organizations within the SBA, and CampusCruiser allows us to reach the various groups – using communities – as best meets everyone's needs. CampusCruiser's community features will allow us to better communicate with fellow students."

Sample Studies Related to Students' Social Integration

Excerpted from "Student Retention Literature Review" by Eileen Trotter

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