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Denver-based institution goes 100% online amid COVID-19 pandemic with cloud-based CampusNexus Student.

Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design's Rapid Response Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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>
> Matthew Weitzel, IT Project Manager
> **Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design**

Challenges and Goals

• Maintain academics, operations and student engagement amid COVID-19 pandemic
• Extend full campus experience to constituents' smartphones/mobile devices
• Ensure data integrity during migration to cloud platform

Solutions

• CampusNexus Student built on Microsoft Azure Cloud
• Campus Management Mobile Portal powered by Ready Education
• Managed Services from Campus Management

Results

• Able to pivot to fully online operations when the pandemic hit
• Students and staff enjoy the full campus experience through their mobile devices
• Maintained data integrity across departments and systems

Preparing for Change in the Best of Times…and 2020

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, terms like "transformation" take on a special urgency. Even as many higher education institutions have recognized the value of moving their systems to the cloud over the past several years, "social distancing" was not part of the lexicon at the time.

For most institutions, it was the idea of serving a greater diversity of students, offering more program flexibility and online modalities, allocating more resources around student success, and having a platform that could easily grow with them. Now it's a critical factor in delivering education and training as an essential service, even as ground campuses remain closed and classroom chairs empty.

Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design (RMCAD) in Denver, Colorado is no exception. Since 1963, the college's mission has been to make RMCAD a 'community of creatives' that instills in all students a passion for creativity, innovation, and a desire for lifelong learning—both in the fine arts and applied arts. Offering on-campus, online, and hybrid programs, the college was nonetheless ready to pivot to fully online operations when the pandemic hit.

Moving to the Cloud

There was a time when RMCAD's staff and faculty workstations were configured to a thick-client platform, but issues started to arise when the IT team provisioned new personal laptops for them. RMCAD's IT project manager Matthew Weitzel recalled the challenges. "When we tried to connect the newly removed users over VPN, we started having browser-related issues, which had to be resolved on a case-by-case basis. Getting our systems and people to the cloud became a top priority."

RMCAD moved to the cloud with CampusNexus Student built on Microsoft Azure. "By the time the pandemic hit, the cloud platform was already live and we could move everyone online very quickly as on-campus operations came to a halt," added Weitzel.

"I CAN'T STRESS ENOUGH HOW CRITICAL CAMPUS MANAGEMENT'S MANAGED SERVICES TEAM IS TO OUR COLLEGE."

Matthew Weitzel, IT Project Manager
Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design

Delivering All Programs Online Amid the Crisis

By the time the pandemic hit, RMCAD's cloud-based SIS platform, CampusNexus Student, was already integrated with the college's LMS. "With integrations already setup, all we had to do was build a few more class sections in CampusNexus, fire them off, and the LMS picked them up," said Weitzel. "With a bit of dedicated work, the asynchronous ground courses had an LMS component to them. That was an advantage we had having already built out an online modality."

In the face of the health crisis, the college's on-ground/hybrid student experience was quickly converted to a blended learning model, combining online educational materials with traditional, face-to-face student/teacher interaction, albeit online. As of March 16, 2020, all students had made the transition from on-ground courses to fully online. It was a nearly seamless transition, with negligible difference in course content, assignments, or discussions.

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Extending the Full Campus Experience to Mobile Devices

To communicate effectively with students in the modern age, RMCAD made the decision in 2019 to extend the full campus experience to constituents' smartphones/mobile devices, from administrative functions for faculty and staff using CampusNexus, to academics and services for students through the college's LMS and portal. "With CampusNexus Mobile Portal powered by Ready Education, we were able to create a robust online community," said Weitzel.

Now amid the pandemic, RMCAD students and staff not only have access to all their apps and contacts, they get all the college's COVID-19 info and advisories pushed to their mobile devices. "They still have the full campus experience at their fingertips," said Weitzel. "Obviously, they wouldn't want to type an entire term paper on their cellphones, but they can easily upload files, including the huge multimedia files that our design students create as part of their assignments."

On the decision to work with Ready Education, Weitzel says that it would have taken much longer and been much more expensive to develop the mobile app in-house. "We only have four people on our IT staff for 1,500 students and several hundred faculty and staff, so we partnered with Ready Education to build the mobile app. With their fully built templates and years of experience integrating with CampusNexus, we went from nothing to a fully launched mobile app in six months."

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Benefiting from Guidance and Support from Campus Management

The RMCAD IT team also made the decision when first onboarding CampusNexus Student to take advantage of Campus Management's Managed Services option.

"I can't stress enough how critical the Managed Services team is to our college," said Weitzel. "Campus Management's SIS Service Delivery Manager is fully integrated into our environment, ensuring relational data integrity across all of our departments. She helps keep our data clean, knows all the modules and how the business units use them, and provides one-off training for staff. Everyone knows her and very much appreciates her here. She's basically a RMCAD employee, even cracking down on mistakes when necessary. Without Managed Services, we would not have had that safety net for our remote employees. We would have to hire a system administrator with twelve years of experience with CampusNexus and probably pay them more individually than what we are paying Campus Management for their entire Managed Services package."

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Staying Positive – and Creative

One of RMCAD's students recently tweeted this: "It is so important to create right now to keep your mind off of everything that is going on in the world and help bring a smile to someone else's face during these trying times." With the institution and the campus experience still at their fingertips, these current and future artists can continue to flourish in the best of times, 2020...and beyond.

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About Campus Management Corp.

We have a saying at Campus Management: "Every line of code we write should solve a higher ed challenge." As a partner to your institution, we share your passion for transforming communities, nations, and lives. Our CampusNexus solutions built on Microsoft enable you to serve a wide diversity of students and empower them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. With our singular focus on delivering higher education innovation and services in the cloud, you can optimize resources around your mission and transform challenges into opportunities for your institution and students.

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