

Jenzabar Success Story

For Lancaster Theological Seminary efficiency matters: making the most of a powerful SIS

About Lancaster Theological Seminary

Lancaster Theological Seminary is a richly diverse and dynamic graduate school of theology located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Affiliated with the United Church of Christ, the campus is home to an engaged community of students and faculty from many Christian traditions and backgrounds.

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Teresa Benneian
Registrar and Financial Aid
Loan Counselor
Lancaster Theological Seminary



It's a common story in the Registrar's Office. There's that one person who has been with the school forever, does amazing amounts of work, and keeps a seemingly unlimited amount of data in their head. That person knows everything. They don't just know the system; they are the system. Things run smoothly. Then that person retires.

Teresa Benneian, Registrar and Financial Aid Loan Counselor at Lancaster Theological Seminary, knows what it's like to try to fill those shoes. She is the person who came next. "Coming to a small school was a little bit of a shock for me," says Teresa. "I came from a massive university in New York. Prior to this, I was with a large community college, and I've worked at other private schools as well. Here, we have about 100 students. We're a graduate school. But even small schools need automated systems. Sometimes it's even more important. When you've done something for so long, it becomes second nature, but you forget that there isn't a system you can pass on. The system is in your head. That isn't an efficient model. There are so many wonderful things about working at a small school, but it was surprising to see things still being done manually—I thought that was gone 20 years ago!"

21st century automation

Luckily, Teresa had a place to start. The Seminary was using a Jenzabar SONIS, a student information system (SIS) in its financial aid office. "When I first arrived, I saw that Jenzabar SONIS wasn't being used to its full potential. Our business office was creating manual reports to see enrollment and when people paid their bill. They showed me pages and pages of spreadsheets. I said, 'This is all in Jenzabar SONIS. I know we don't have that many students, but you are creating more work for yourself.'"

Jenzabar SONIS is a powerful yet cost-effective SIS designed specifically for smaller or specialized higher education institutions. Jenzabar SONIS connects Lancaster Theological Seminary staff and faculty to a centralized database with a simple web interface that allows all administrative tasks to be processed online.

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"When you do a lot of operations manually, it doesn't matter that you're small; you're still taking too much time to get things done," says Teresa. "These days it seems like every school has budgetary concerns and restrictions. We're all being stretched. Automating processes and electronically sharing data is essential."

Power to the people

Seeing the untapped potential of the SIS, Teresa called her Jenzabar SONIS support team to set up learning sessions. "We have this fantastic tool that we weren't fully utilizing. We started by turning on permissions. If you're in an area, you need to have rights to that area. If you're in Admissions, you get access to all the things you need in Admissions. Once the access permission is turned on, it's pretty easy to get everything you need to be self-sufficient, but I also made sure every division went

through training. Our Business Office, Admissions, Faculty Assistance, Financial Aid, and even our Dean's Assistant learned the system."

With the administrative offices connected and online, Lancaster Theological Seminary is seeing great gains in efficiency as they take full advantage of the Jenzabar SONIS capabilities. "Each office now has the reins to do things themselves," says Teresa. "Remember all those enrollment spreadsheets? Now the Business Office runs a simple report and they are done. People are saying, 'I was shown this but now I can also do this other thing, too. It's saving me so much time!'"

Teresa, in her financial aid role, especially appreciates the way the SIS easily interfaces with other systems. "Jenzabar SONIS has the ability to import and export things through EDEExpress, which is a huge time saver," says Teresa.

Connecting faculty with the SIS has also increased both accuracy and efficiency in managing student data. "Some faculty members would give me their grades on paper," says Teresa. "They didn't even realize that they can upload grades into Jenzabar SONIS. They can send communications and materials out electronically. They can manage their courses right through the faculty portal. We have seven or eight full-time faculty, 30-something adjuncts, and many other instructors and guest speakers from different schools. It's pretty important for us to have a unified system to keep everything aligned. That's where the dean and I are heading with Jenzabar SONIS."

Gaining insight

Once Lancaster Theological Seminary automated its operational tasks and connected to a shared database, generating accurate reports became quick and easy.

The seminary is accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, which requires denominational reporting. This used to be a painful manual process, but today Teresa says, "I can just pull up the Denominational Affiliations Field, get the list, and be done with it."

The seminary is also accredited by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, which requires demographic enrollment reporting. "The President's

Jenzabar SONIS

A powerful yet cost-effective student information system designed specifically for smaller higher education and vocational institutions. Our cloud-based, mobile-ready software connects students, faculty, and administration in one easy-to-use package.

Lancaster Theological Seminary



Office requests the ethnic breakdown of our students," says Teresa. "That plays into the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) and our accreditation. We have to report that on our website. We also have to provide information for endowments. Jenzabar SONIS makes it so simple for us to go into the query and run a perfectly clean-cut and clear report."

With Jenzabar SONIS, business intelligence has taken on a whole new meaning for the seminary's administration. Staff members make better decisions based on accurate and easily accessible data stored in a centralized database. "I like the fact that I can run a lot of reports now that I couldn't do before," says Teresa. "That's a tremendous help for us in the dean's office. The president's office is also always asking for information. Jenzabar SONIS makes it easy to generate whatever reports I need with highly accurate efficiency. I really like the precision. When you create reports, you're not writing on a spreadsheet and you're not redoing the work, so you are getting accurate numbers."

Building the future

Teresa and her peers at Lancaster Theological Seminary are enjoying their newfound efficiency as they continue to explore ways to enhance self-service and streamline operations through Jenzabar SONIS. "I'm still finding things we're underutilizing in Jenzabar SONIS that will make our jobs easier," says Teresa. "The Jenzabar support people have been extremely helpful in helping us reach proficiency. The Jenzabar SONIS User Conference was also an eye opener for me. I came back with all kinds of great ideas and things we can implement. I'm really looking forward to the updates and future releases. We are in a big transition place right now. Becoming more efficient will help get us where we need to go. Jenzabar SONIS has made a real positive impact on the way we do things around here."

About Jenzabar

Created out of a passion for education and a vision for technology, Jenzabar offers disruptive, innovative software solutions and services that empower students' success and helps higher education institutions meet the demands of the modern student. Over 1,350 higher educational campuses harness Jenzabar solutions for improved performance across campus and a more personalized and connected experience for the student.

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