



California Institute of the Arts: CalArts Extended Studies

Making Scale a Reality



CaLARTS
EXTENDED
STUDIES



How Destiny One created autonomy and gave Extended Studies the space to grow

California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) Extended Studies has plans to scale and grow its main areas of programming while also plunging into new markets and serving new demographics. Unfortunately, with their existing back-end infrastructure, they were unable to deliver the kind of experience they wanted to the students they were already serving—let alone expand.

They solved this issue by turning to the Destiny One Student Lifecycle Management software platform, developed by Destiny Solutions. The out-of-the-box system allowed them to take control of their back end, improve the student experience, become more flexible and gain the breathing room needed to grow.

California Institute of the Arts is a unique university nestled outside of Los Angeles in Valencia, California. CalArts, as it is widely known, was founded by Walt Disney and is internationally renowned for its programs spanning the visual, performing, media and literary arts.

The Extended Studies division extends that mission to a wider audience, creating access to CalArts' high-quality programming in both credit- and non-credit-bearing options across a variety of modalities, from in-class to off-campus to online.

They serve pre-college students looking to beef up their portfolios in anticipation of applying to art schools, students enrolled at full-time programs at CalArts looking to earn additional credits during the summer, and students from other arts institutions looking to earn additional credits while also developing skills unique to CalArts education, like hand-drawn animation and design. They also serve working professionals and individuals looking for personal enrichment and skill development.

The programming offered ranges from five-week intensive and immersive to open-learning courses—including Massive Open Online Courses—and includes almost everything in between.

While they had dreams to scale and grow, their back-end systems and reliance on the main campus student information system made serving the students they already had a challenge. To realize their goals of expansion, the team at CalArts Extended Studies turned to the Destiny One Student Lifecycle Management (SLM) software platform developed by Destiny Solutions.



The Administrative Challenges Facing CalArts Extended Studies

CalArts Extended Studies division had a few major obstacles that stood in the way of delivering the kind of experience that today's traditional and non-traditional students both expect.

The chief obstacle they had to overcome was the fact that their own back-end system was a “patchwork dinosaur of systems,” according to Hilary Darling, director of the Summer Institute at CalArts. Everything from student applications and enrollments to the design and content of the website was managed, at some level, by main campus staff who were already stretched thin.

“Our office is pretty nimble and we could handle a huge work load, but the drain our processes were putting on the main campus processes was problematic,” Darling said. “It was taking energy away from serving the matriculated students.”

This complicated administrative environment contributed to an array of issues around market visibility, administrative efficiency and the student experience that created significant obstacles for the Extended Studies team.

Lack of Market Visibility

While CalArts is a well known entity in the art world, the Extended Studies division faced some significant challenges in defining its unique work to their prospective and current students.

“We have a different focus from the main campus at CalArts, which offers residential matriculated degree programs,” said Lisa Barr, director of Project Development in the Office of Global Initiatives and Extended Studies at CalArts. “We faced the constant challenge, both internally and externally, of explaining what we do and who our target audience is because there’s confusion.”

What’s more, since the Extended Studies website was under the purview of the main campus, it became difficult to develop messaging and branding that specifically appealed to the wider audience who might not be attracted to the more traditional, residential education experience.

“When we were solely relying on the main institute website, we would have other people making decisions about our marketing strategy without necessarily understanding the work we do,” Darling said. “They’re definitely supportive but they just don’t understand what’s at the heart of what we’re trying to do.”

Administrative Inefficiency

Unfortunately, the structure of the Extended Studies back end also contributed to a number of administrative inefficiencies that negatively impacted students and staff alike.

The application and registration process students had to go through was multi-tiered and confusing. Applications with portfolio submissions are critical in arts programs—be they credit-bearing or non-credit—to ensure students coming into and paying for the course are able to succeed in that offering. Unfortunately, all applications and application fees were submitted through the main campus.

This affected registrations as well. The main campus system was designed for students to sign up and pay for a full year, which meant prospective Extended Studies students had to traverse a number of steps to apply for and register in their chosen courses. It also meant Extended Studies and main campus staff had to do a lot of legwork to get students registered.



“One thing that I found frustrating with our old system was having to have go through all these gatekeepers to do what we needed to do,” Darling said. “Our main campus colleagues tried really hard to help our office but the fact of the matter is they had other work that they had to get done before us often times, so we would end up waiting.”

Additionally, given the timing of main campus graduation and summer session registration periods, every spring created a significant strain for the registrar’s office.

“One of the crunch times for us is in spring when graduation for the matriculated students occurs. People are scrambling to make sure their transcripts were in order, to make sure they have the credits they needed,” Darling said. “The registrar’s office is busy processing grades for people who are graduating and making sure everyone’s academic progress is in order. That was happening right when I needed my summer students to complete their registration and payment. It became a really problematic registration bottleneck.”

A Student Experience Left Wanting

Today’s students are experienced consumers and expect to receive an experience from the institution that matches what market leaders like Amazon deliver. This means offering an easy shopping experience, knowledgeable customer service, as much relevant information as possible, and self-service functionality.

However, in many cases, the prior two challenges combined to create a customer experience that did not meet the standards students have come to expect.

“Our audience, which is not the four-year matriculated degree audience, really wanted more of a shopping cart experience,” Barr said. “They wanted a quick and easy way to make the transaction.”

The restraints of the system in place didn’t just impact the application and enrollment process, according to Project Director for Online Education and Research Jennifer Hutton—it impacted the students’ experience after they were enrolled as well.

“We were working with a group of students who did not have access to their grades or have an understanding of what their course schedule was,” Hutton said.

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Ultimately, the limitations of the system in place made it difficult for CalArts Extended Studies to follow through on its mission to expand access to programs offering creative exploration in the arts, and students began voting with their feet.

“It took me a huge amount of time just to process enrollments, and it got to the point where I know we were losing students. Why would you want to sign up for a technology-based class at an institution that could not manage to sell a class in one fell swoop? It’s not a good sign,” Darling reflected. “People would get frustrated and I understand why. Buying one of our classes should be as easy as buying a book online.”

“We couldn’t grow anymore,” Barr continued. “We really couldn’t expand our offerings because the way we were doing things wasn’t sustainable or user friendly.”

Breaking Free: How Destiny One Is Helping CalArts Extended Studies Scale and Grow



Extended Studies at CalArts offers non-credit- and credit-bearing options for creative exploration in the arts, on the ground and online, and on and off campus. With offerings that are developed with the same artistic flavor and integrity of the curricular courses at CalArts, Extended Studies offers rich experiences to learn creative skills and concepts.

Program Offerings:

Summer Residencies

Open Learning

Summer Courses

Online Education

Professional Training & Workshops

Program Areas:

Acting & Theater

Animation

Creative Writing & Critical Studies

Film & Video

Graphic Design

Visual Art

In 2017, CalArts Extended Studies went live with Destiny One. By implementing the SLM, the Extended Studies team created a level of autonomy that allowed them to improve their back-end processes, transform their customer engagement and prepare to serve new demographics and grow.

While the improvements facilitated by the Destiny One implementation were wide-ranging, the most significant were:

- Facilitating the design and ownership of a state-of-the-art website
- Simplifying the administration and management of Extended Studies
- Modernizing the student experience
- Creating greater agility and flexibility

Facilitating Design and Ownership of a State-of-the-Art Website

As an arts school, it was uniquely important for CalArts Extended Studies to have a website that reflected the technological and artistic innovation embedded in their programming. With Destiny One, it became easy for the Extended Studies team to launch a fully responsive, mobile-friendly website where they could define their colors, logos, branding and styling at the touch of a button.

“One of the things that we like about Destiny is the ability to control the look and feel of our outwardly facing site,” Barr said. “The fact that we could, out of the box, create something that was visually pleasing and easily understood was a huge benefit.”

Since Extended Studies serves a broad and non-traditional student demographic, controlling the content of the website and ensuring the accuracy of all information is central to meeting the needs of their target audience.

“There’s power in having a public view where we control the look and feel, so if we’re going to add a division within Extended Studies—like classes for kids—we can do it quickly,” Darling said. “We have the power to make decisions about how our public facing pages look to market more effectively to each specific audience”

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That nimbleness—the ability to quickly and easily update the website to reflect new offerings—is matched by Destiny One’s capacity to help divisions like CalArts Extended Studies leverage their websites to serve more students. The Destiny One SLM ensures all pages are SEO-optimized so they’re easy to find, whether someone is looking generally for a subject area or specifically for your offerings.

Additionally, the SLM captures all information related to offerings—including rich media, fee information, prerequisites and more—and connects it to the institutional website, course calendar and LMS to ensure the right information is being presented to the right audience.

Simplifying the Administration and Management of Extended Studies

Many of the issues CalArts Extended Studies were grappling with stemmed from the inefficiency and complexity of their back-end management environment. Sharing responsibilities on many fronts with the main campus registrar's office created bottlenecks, confused students and caused headaches and stress for staff on both sides.

Implementing the Destiny One SLM created autonomy for Extended Studies and provided them the capacity to manage their division and maintain information sharing with the main campus without relying on—or burdening—the registrar and accounting offices.

As a starting point, applications processes are simplified in many ways. For example, by leveraging the capacity of Destiny One to accept applications with portfolio submissions, the Extended Studies staff can process incoming applicants without waiting on the registrar's office. Additionally, since their Destiny One-powered website has a shopping cart and the ability to process payments, it allows students to drive the application and enrollment process themselves and creates space for the Extended Studies team to manage the rest independently.

Additionally, under their old infrastructure, Extended Studies staff were reliant on their main campus colleagues for all reporting and data. This meant the development and analysis of a report could be greatly delayed, as main campus staff were juggling their regular responsibilities with these additional requests from Extended Studies.

“Under the old model, we had to request very specific existing reports, or we would receive data in a way that wasn't useful to us, or made it very difficult to migrate it into the forms that we needed for our own purposes,” Hutton said.

Destiny One, however, comes pre-loaded with 150 standard reports while also providing access to all divisional data. This allows Extended Studies staff to make data-driven decisions, in real time, without placing any additional burden on main campus. The SLM system also makes data sharing with the main campus easy for divisional staff.

Ultimately, by implementing a SLM that unifies Extended Studies' back end, the administrative team has minimized their reliance on main campus to gain autonomy in managing their division and delivering the kind of experience that students expect. What's more, by taking advantage of process efficiencies and automations, staff have the time to focus on more high-value and difference-making work.

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Modernizing the Student Experience

Delivering a customer-centric, Amazon-like experience is the gold standard for all businesses, and higher education institutions are no different. However, for postsecondary divisions like Extended Studies—who serve non-traditional students—the delivery of a great experience is critical to enrolling, retaining, winning back and driving a great experience for students that they tell others about.

Implementing the Destiny One SLM software platform has allowed CalArts Extended Studies to transform and modernize its student experience across a number of channels. First, the implementation went beyond simply simplifying the admissions process—it made the CalArts Extended Studies website a machine designed to convert prospects into enrolled students. With



at the right times when their input is required.

All this automation and increased flexibility is designed to get new offerings to market as quickly as possible, which is of critical importance to an institution like CalArts, where subject matter is constantly evolving. And, since Extended Studies runs on its own schedule and is not tied to traditional terms, the capacity to launch new courses and programs at any time of year through Destiny One helps ensure students have access to new offerings as soon as possible.

Preparing for the Future

Achieving scale was a persistent problem for CalArts Extended Studies. Though their mission pushes them to broaden access to arts programming, they were facing an array of back-end challenges that made it impossible to grow.

By leveraging the power of the Destiny One Student Lifecycle Management software platform many of those issues have been addressed. They gained back-end autonomy and the ability to process students internally. They also gained the ability to offer students the Amazon-like experience they're looking for.

Working with Destiny Solutions lets Extended Studies gain control of their data and their website as well, meaning they can take real steps towards defining new markets to grow into, and then dominating in those new spaces.

What's more, with their scaling issues all but solved, CalArts Extended Studies now has the capacity to focus purely on innovation and creativity—the key ingredients to their unique DNA.

About Destiny One

Destiny One is student lifecycle management software for higher education administrators serving non-traditional students. It integrates with main-campus systems, engages students with an Amazon- like experience, optimizes staff efficiency, and provides business intelligence empowering data-driven decisions. Destiny One lets schools unite, understand and control all aspects of their business at once.

Destiny One manages the entire learner lifecycle.

Curriculum

Plan and manage courses, certificates and programs

Marketing

Target marketing campaigns and define consistent branding

Finance

Govern accounting transactions and manage financial information

Enrollment

Increase registrations by engaging learners and automating the enrollment process

Reporting

Leverage dashboards and reports to make business-intelligent decisions

System Administration

Configure workflows, staff roles and permissions, and business rules and fees

Want to learn more?

Contact us at
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