

Sierra-Cedar Helps ASU Graduate College Complete Online Letter of Recommendation Process



BACKGROUND

Arizona State University (ASU) is one of the largest public universities in the country, with an enrollment of 65,000 students and four campuses that are located in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. ASU offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs. ASU maintains a tradition of academic excellence in core disciplines and has become an important global center for innovative interdisciplinary teaching and research. ASU is pursuing an ambitious, progressive vision to create the “New American University” to serve the needs of a rapidly growing undergraduate and graduate student population.

To help prepare for this growth, Sierra-Cedar has been providing PeopleSoft ERP consulting and hosting services to ASU since 2005. To help address the increasing admissions process demands for graduate and professional schools, the ASU Graduate College asked Sierra-Cedar for assistance in automating the process of submitting and evaluating letters of recommendation for graduate admissions.

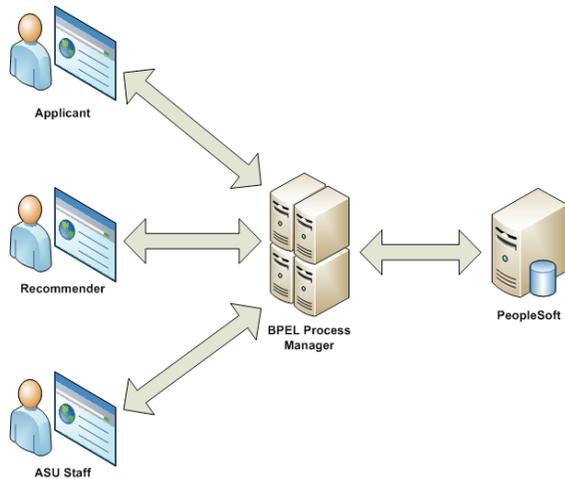
CHALLENGES

The submission and evaluation of letters of recommendation is among the most time-consuming aspects of the application process for admission to graduate school. Adequate lead time is needed to get the letters written and submitted. Applicants that apply for multiple degrees are required to submit letters for each degree, which often results in recommenders having to fill out multiple forms. Admissions decisions are frequently delayed because the admissions office has not received a letter of recommendation. ASU sought to simplify this process by providing a web-based interface to request letters of recommendation, to submit recommendations, and to serve as an automated communication channel between applicants, recommenders, and ASU staff. The desired solution required an email template system that could be used by a Business Process Execution Language (BPEL) process and an easily managed mechanism for generating tamper-aware URLs to be embedded in email.

SOLUTION

The letter of recommendation functional and technical requirements were met by building a composite application utilizing Oracle Fusion Middleware and PeopleSoft, as seen in the following illustration.

Industry	Higher Education
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project planning and management • Functional and technical implementation consulting • Hosting during implementation and in production • Custom design and development
Application & Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PeopleSoft Campus Solutions 8.9 • PeopleSoft Human Capital Management 8.9 • PeopleSoft CRM 8.9 • Data Warehouse/EPM • Oracle BPEL Process Manager • Oracle Fusion Middleware
Client Since	2005



Recommenders enter the web application by clicking the URL. Upon entering the web application, the URL is verified to ensure that it has not been tampered. The recommenders are then provided with a questionnaire-style form through which they provide the recommendation. This form can be customized based on specific departmental needs. The recommender can save a recommendation to be finished later and also has the option of declining to provide a recommendation. When the recommender finishes and submits the recommendation, the BPEL process notifies the applicant and ASU staff that the recommendation has been received. If a recommender has not replied to the initial email within a specified time limit, the BPEL process will generate a reminder email and subsequently notify the applicant of this status.

The ASU Online Letter of Recommendation solution is part of a larger ASU Online Graduate Application workflow solution, which sets and monitors several trigger points that generate emails as appropriate. Applicants use a secure web interface to begin the graduate school application process. The applicant provides contact information about each person from whom he or she requests a letter of recommendation. Upon receiving the new application, a BPEL process generates template-based emails notifying each recommender of this request. The email contains a unique URL directing the recommender to the web application.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

The Letter of Recommendation solution was successfully launched in the fall of 2008 and has contributed significantly to a more efficient graduate admissions process. This enables ASU to notify applicants of their admission and to receive their acceptance in a timely manner. The University expects that this newly acquired efficiency ultimately will have a positive impact on the quality of students who attend its Graduate College. From a public relations perspective, ASU saves the letter author time, especially when compared to traditional processes typically involved in writing and submitting a letter of recommendation. With this solution and others, ASU continues its progressive approach of using information technology and process innovation to build a New American University.

Sierra-Cedar enabled us to become productive rapidly in the development and deployment of Oracle Fusion applications. Their consultants are highly experienced in developing BPEL processes for enterprise solutions and transferring technical knowledge that enabled ASU developers to manage and assume responsibility for these applications. In addition, the server administration and infrastructure for Oracle Fusion involves a high degree of expertise and complexity that Sierra-Cedar has enabled and managed effectively.

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