

Baylor Finds Clarity, Agility and Business Continuity In The Cloud

Baylor University, the oldest continually operating university in Texas, brought to life a new financial and human capital management (HCM) cloud platform weeks after the COVID-19 pandemic struck. While many institutions struggled to quickly and effectively respond to the crisis, Baylor didn't skip a beat. Its ability to stabilize operations, fuel research, and keep students and faculty safe in a rapidly changing environment hinges on enterprisewide data — and the clarity, agility and insights it yields. Baylor's new platform is helping the university find new ways to advance its mission, provide students with a safe and enriching learning experience, and drive long-term business continuity.

Igniting Strategic Focus on Research

Before the pandemic sent the U.S. into its first major lockdown, Baylor University was just six weeks away from the go-live launch of its new Oracle enterprise resource planning (ERP) and HCM cloud system. Baylor worked closely with Huron to plan and implement the Ignite project and, in doing so, bring

Results

- Allowed quick, agile mobilization of testing and tracing plan, empowering IT to focus on campus safety and data security
- Helped swiftly secure vendors and calibrate campus densification
- Empowered leaders to deliver an enriching experience and a healthy learning environment for students, faculty and staff
- Replaced over a dozen HR systems and decreased pay cycles from 11 to two per month
- Consolidated all procure-to-pay activities and created an integrated marketplace
- Created opportunities for procurement to negotiate terms and discounts, reduce costs and monitor spending
- Streamlined financial planning, purchasing, HR and grant management to reduce costs
- Streamlined grants processing, vendor setup and payroll administration across HR, financial, budget, procurement, research and reporting functions
- Positioned Baylor for success along growth trajectory and strategic road map
- Expanded a sponsored program to feed 260K+ food insecure children nationwide
- Identified new career opportunities across campus to focus staff on mission-driven work

the university's five-year strategic plan into focus. The new platform promised to improve efficiency for Baylor's mission-driven staff; empower employees to focus on students, research and the community; increase financial and operational insight; and help Baylor achieve its goal of achieving an elite Tier 1 Carnegie Classification for academic research.

But to propel the university on its strategic growth trajectory, Baylor leaders realized that they would first need to modernize the systems and operations supporting its doctoral research and grants management, human resources (HR), finance, and enterprisewide administration. This would require them to re-imagine and rebuild the university's antiquated, fragmented and cumbersome technology infrastructure and business processes. It also meant they would need to replace the host of legacy systems bolted onto the core HR and finance architecture, which Baylor Chief Human Resources Officer Cheryl Gochis [likened to "barnacles."](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the necessity and value of Baylor's plans. As Chief Business Officer Brett Dalton recalls, "The pandemic only accelerated our desire to achieve our goals and stay on course for the June 2020 go-live, stabilize in the summer and bring students back in the fall."

"We couldn't do what we needed to do without the right technology. It was impossible with the antiquated systems we had."

BRETT DALTON, VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICER

Adapting the Approach in Real Time

Huron guided the Ignite project team through an iterative, strategic and collaborative process to implement Baylor's enterprisewide platform for finance and operations, which comprised integrated Oracle Cloud ERP, HCM and Analytics Cloud systems. The new platform was launched on time and on budget, despite significant disruptions, including:

- **Remote implementation.** The pandemic forced the Baylor-Huron team to shift to a virtual model for the final leg of the Ignite implementation. By remaining agile and committed to collaboration, Baylor discovered many efficiencies that will remain long after the pandemic abates.
- **Nationwide expansion of a sponsored program.** In March 2020, Baylor expanded a pilot program to deliver nutritious meals to children in rural areas. The pilot, Meals-toYou, was originally launched in the spring of 2019 after Baylor and the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In March 2020, as the country entered a lockdown, the USDA [significantly expanded the agreement](#). To address the immediacy and the magnitude of the pandemic, Baylor quickly transformed a program that served a few thousand children into one that would meet the needs of over 260,000 children nationwide. Ignite provided the platform and efficiencies Baylor needed to scale and manage the financial complexities of the project. Over the summer alone, Baylor tracked invoices for over a million boxes delivered by three food distributors. The successful project empowered Baylor to deliver on its mission to care for the community, and in doing so, the university made progress toward achieving Tier 1 research status and expanded its support for populations experiencing food insecurity.
- **Ongoing safety and suppression efforts.** Baylor made a business and a philosophical decision to give its students the opportunity to come

back to campus for a safe, enriching residential experience. Working with health experts and engineers, Baylor invested in creating a healthy environment on campus and launched a robust campuswide testing and tracing program. With a new platform in place that alleviated the strain on their internal information technology (IT) teams, Baylor's IT staff could pivot to focus on mounting the university's testing and tracing plan, building vendor relationships, and securing processes and data. To scale a strategy that would protect students, faculty and staff, university leaders required clarity about enterprisewide spending and operations, constituent health, locations and contact information, and the institution's overall financial health. Insights generated from the new cloud platform across financial, HR, administration and [procurement](#) operations are critical to helping Baylor deliver on its mission and safely calibrate community density on campus.

Driving Success and Charting a Course for Growth

Several factors contributed to the success of Baylor's multiyear, enterprisewide transformation, and continue to catapult Baylor toward achieving its strategic goals.

Committing to A Holistic, Iterative Approach

Baylor realized that its strategic plan hinged not only on data, but on the insight that data provides. Leaders trusted Huron's implementation team to think strategically and holistically about systems and processes to uncover opportunities for greater insight across their research enterprise, operations, HR, administration and procurement.

For example, early in the planning process, Huron noted that the university used 11 payroll cycles to calculate employee earnings each month. With a modern HR and payroll system, the finance and payroll team reduced the cycles to two — one for

monthly paid employees, and one for biweekly paid employees. By alleviating the strain of an inefficient payroll system, Baylor's staff members are now empowered to shift their focus toward more valuable, mission-driven tasks.

Likewise, Huron's specialists analyzed the university's end-to-end procurement and grant management processes while Huron's Oracle Cloud implementation was underway. This integrated approach allowed the implementation to be deliberate and strategic so that the cloud platform could maximize insight across the research enterprise and help leaders gauge its impact on institutional spending, funding and investment.

Reminding Everyone Why

Too often, the language that characterizes university transformation efforts is sprinkled with dictums and edicts about efficiency and optimization. Rarely does it capture the concrete benefits that institutions reap by modernizing their systems and operations. Baylor leaders made a decision to change that. As Brett Dalton noted, "Too often, we speak about transformation as if it's greater if people don't have to work harder — greater if we spend less time doing mundane tasks or non-valueadding tasks, but we fail to talk about the upside of that." By illuminating the tangible benefits the transformation held for Baylor's constituents across the enterprise, the university's leaders championed change management and sent a clear message: Rather than spending thousands of hours operating under onerous and inefficient processes for payroll, accounting, employee benefits or hiring, Ignite is helping leaders focus on their mission, their students and their success.

Driving Business Continuity And Transformation

By modernizing the infrastructure supporting the university's operations, Baylor is equipped to lead with clarity, agility and focus. While many leaders may continue to struggle to lift their gaze from the pandemic and plan long term, Baylor continues

to bring its strategic objectives into focus and strengthen its business continuity plan.

By adjusting its cost functions, re-imagining its enterprisewide systems, and committing to becoming more nimble and strategic, Baylor can maximize spending to advance its mission. In doing so, the institution can advance its progress toward securing a seat among the nation's top research universities and continue to focus on creating enriching experiences for students, faculty and staff.

Located in Waco, Texas, Baylor is a nationally ranked institution serving 17,000 students per year. Its vibrant body of faculty, students and scholars is devoted to excellence in education and athletics as well as service. Baylor aspires to be America's preeminent Christian research university



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