

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY



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Arizona State University

Selection and implementation of Huron Research Suite, an integrated solution that streamlines and simplifies research administration.

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Arizona State University is a public research university that spans the Phoenix metropolitan area and has four regional learning centers across Arizona. It is the eighth largest public university by enrollment in the U.S., with about 80,000 students, including over 66,000 undergraduates and 12,000 postgraduates. ASU has a robust online education program that serves over

36,000 students and contributed to the total enrollment at ASU surpassing 100,000 in 2018. *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked ASU number one on its "Most Innovative Schools" list for four consecutive years.¹ ASU is also a co-founder of the University Innovation Alliance, a group of public research universities dedicated to testing new initiatives, sharing data, and scaling best practices that will increase the number and diversity of college graduates in the U.S.²



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INITIAL CHALLENGES FOR THE RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY OFFICE

Ten years ago, Sean Dudley, Executive Director of Research Technology, founded a dedicated Research Technology Office at ASU that supports all research administration and provides direct support to sponsored projects. The Research Technology Office offers a variety of services ranging from web development to business intelligence and high-performance computing. The ASU research enterprise has grown by approximately half a billion dollars in expenditures since Dudley joined a decade and a half ago. According to Dudley, the Research Technology Office provides a sustainable approach to managing ASU's enterprise research administration systems. The specialized team of analysts, project managers, and developers address this enterprise interest without a need to compete for resources against high-value interests among the academic enterprise. Before implementing the Huron Research Suite, formerly Click, the Research Technology Office used the MIT-developed Coeus System for conflict of interest issues and post-award research administration. It used Microsoft SharePoint for pre-award administration and several areas of compliance.

When ASU decided to evaluate a new centralized solution, the institution started a pilot project with InfoEd Global; however, due to resourcing and communication challenges with the vendor, the pilot was discontinued. ASU then issued a request for proposal, which led them to examine, among other solutions, Click, Cayuse, and Quali. Click and Quali were then invited to the ASU campus for demonstrations. Dudley prioritized the expertise surrounding each product during the product evaluations, asking each of the two vendors to perform specific tasks, such as adding a field to a particular view and adding data entry validation to a provided field. Click stood out for its speed, efficiency, and ease of use in accomplishing tasks. Further, Click's staff showed an apparent understanding of research administration and the platform proved to be configurable enough that ASU's technical staff could manage the system without needing to hire outside business analysts and functional experts. In 2013, ASU signed a contract with Click, which by then had been acquired by Huron Consulting Group. Since then, Huron has renamed the Click software to "Huron Research Suite."



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IMPLEMENTATION

Dudley led ASU's implementation and worked closely with a Huron engineer and a project manager, who also served as functional expert and business analyst. ASU's goal was to insource development expertise and shift support from Huron to ASU staff as quickly as possible. ASU developers worked with Huron's engineers to gain product expertise and were able to transition away from Huron support after about two years. ASU is now managing the Huron Research Suite in house, with minor support from Huron's engineers.

The ASU team began their implementation of each module with a gap analysis, where business processes were re-examined and stabilized. Within five months they had implemented the first and lightest module, Conflict of Interest (COI). ASU followed COI with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) module, which took about six months to implement. ASU then deployed the proposal arm of Huron Grants. Most recently, ASU implemented the award management segment of Huron Grants and the Huron Agreements module, a contract management solution that assists with the management of agreements. All of ASU's modules are integrated, from a data perspective by way of two integration modules that work hand-in-hand and present several complex data business process integrations that span multiple modules.

ASU was able to implement up to three modules at a time until the Grants module implementation, which was the most

complicated. Currently, ASU is pursuing implementation of the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) modules. The team is also in the midst of upgrading and testing every solution.

For the past four years, ASU has leveraged Huron's hosting services, and the institution reports that Huron continues to provide ASU with strong technical support. Huron recently assisted the Research Technology Office during a go-live weekend and has proven to be a capable partner during these events. The company also manages the ASU servers and fine-tunes their environment to make sure it is optimized for the Huron platform. As another option, institutions can choose Huron's software as a service (SaaS) plan, which surrounds the hosting with full-service management of platform upgrades, product progression, and customization.

SOLUTION STRENGTHS

According to Dudley, all of the modules that ASU has implemented have worked consistently well since their initial deployment, and the environment has experienced no unscheduled downtime in six years. ASU has had tens of thousands of proposals go through the Huron Research Suite, and there has never been a failure to submit.

Dudley reports that ASU finds the Huron Research Suite to be a highly flexible and adaptable platform that has been able to support ASU's research administration needs. Huron remains engaged with institutional customers and responds to



presented interests. For example, since ASU's initial implementation, Huron has introduced a more efficient way to integrate modules. Based on requests from client institutions, Huron also automated and continues to improve how they test and release new versions of products, and Huron is working to make the cadence of releases more predictable.

BEST PRACTICES

Dudley reports that several key factors have contributed to ASU's success. First and foremost is the fact that, prior to selecting a grants management solution, ASU spent two years conducting an end-to-end process evaluation across all research administration business units. Once processes had been revised and stabilized, setting key performance indicators was an essential follow-up step that provided the institution with a baseline understanding of important indicators, such as contract execution and time to award account activation. For example, when ASU first implemented the Huron Research Suite, the time from notice receipt to award activation was approximately

29 days; now it is down to just over 4 days. ASU uses Tableau as a primary business intelligence tool, along with SQL Reporting Services, which is easily installed into the Microsoft-based Huron Research Suite.

Dudley recommends that institutions take a close look at a vendor's planned approach for data migration and ask for reference implementations that involved data migration to help identify data migration costs. Regarding data, ASU has also prioritized closing the loop on any information that feeds into the Huron system, such as human resources or organizational hierarchy data. Dudley reports that ASU benefits from running sanity checks to make sure all the modules are in agreement from a data perspective, as well as rational checks to catch possible issues. For example, in terms of a rational check, a disclosure in their COI certification system should always have an affiliation with a certification. ASU's Research Technology Office implemented a check process that runs nightly to ensure there are no orphaned disclosures and that hundreds of other relationships and artifacts across the ecosystem are rational.



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Another ASU best practice is running Huron Research Suite through an independent security audit, which the institution does for all of its critical systems. According to Dudley, the Huron Research Suite scores well because the solution set is hosted in Huron's data center, and security fixes are treated as a priority work item by the Huron platform development team. ASU feeds their accessibility and security reports to Huron engineers, who can incorporate provisions into the platform.

ASU has enacted a rule to treat sponsors as customers, equal to staff, students, and faculty. When new regulations come out, the ASU Research Technology Office figures out how to authentically address them and to communicate their compliance to the sponsor on behalf of ASU faculty. This increases the security posture and perceived capability of the institution and faculty.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

ASU's Research Technology Office has been working with Huron to build solutions where they have found functional gaps in the product set. For example, Huron's Animal Operations module did not initially include drug and water tracking, so ASU built a system to fill those gaps, and Huron has now incorporated that functionality into its product suite. As a product development partner, ASU intends to continue leveraging Huron Research Suite to develop novel solutions. ASU is also working with Huron to bring robotic process automation and machine learning into the Huron Research Suite environment.



REFERENCES

As part of this research, Tambellini briefed with Sean Dudley, and those briefings helped inform this case study. Sean Dudley is the Executive Director of Research Technology at Arizona State University and founder of the Research Technology Office, which now operates across all ASU campuses, serving research administration and faculty. Information in this study was also gathered from www.asu.edu.

¹ <https://asunow.asu.edu/20180909-asu-news-ranked-most-innovative-US-school-fourth-time>

² www.theuia.org

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www.thetambellinigroup.com

800-414-3405

P.O. Box 685, Irvington, VA 22480



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The purpose of this report is to provide higher education institutions with information about the objectives, solutions, and outcomes related to the utilization of technology in colleges and universities across the U.S.

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