A Unified Approach to Improved Student Placement Operations

at University of Sunshine Coast

BY QSR INTERNATIONAL WITH SONYA SMITH

Introduction

Sonya Smith uses Sonia to improve student placement operations in Australia.

·   The use of spreadsheets for placement administration proved costly when a file corrupted and the data recovery process proved to be time-consuming and laborious.

·   Sonia brought greater efficiencies and improved experiences to staff, students and site supervisors

·   Sonia streamlined and automated many processes

·   Support for off-campus activities, on-campus learning and integrations with payment and learning management systems

·   Sonia manages inventory requirements and supports risk assessments

A relatively young public university located on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland, Australia, the University of the Sunshine Coast opened in 1996. Renowned for its research, the university places students in rotations, internships and other work integrated learning programs, with the nursing program as its largest cohort. Student placement operations for the university are managed by Sonya Smith, System Administrator, Student Services and Engagement.

Before using Sonia, Ms. Smith, an experienced education placements officer was feeling the stress of tight deadlines and varying requirements for teaching areas. The use of spreadsheets for placement administration proved costly when a file corrupted and the data recovery process proved to be time-consuming and laborious. This led to research into student placement software solutions, a vetting process, and ultimately the selection and implementation of Sonia.

University leaders were watching as Sonia was rolled out to various departments, and Ms. Smith worked with each school and discipline to tailor the product to their needs, bringing greater efficiencies and improved experiences to staff, students and site supervisors. Now an official record-keeping repository for 25 disciplines, the platform streamlines data and saves time.

Automation Supports Personalized Placements

Since implementing Sonia, Ms. Smith and her centralized team have turned a critical eye towards various processes that could be streamlined and automated. The implementation at the University of the Sunshine Coast has grown to support all off-campus activities, including field trips, study tours and placement courses. Sonia also supports on-campus learning by managing requirements for classes students take at the USC hospital. Integrations with payment systems and Blackboard (LMS) enable better experiences for staff and students.

Sonia has proven itself to be a powerful tool with its electronic forms. Student placement workflows are no longer paper-based, and automated email reminders are a big time-saver for administrators and students. Students in the Nursing cohort are assessed via an electronic form in Sonia. Pass/fail grades are automatically sent to Blackboard, an improvement over the previous manual importing of grades into the LMS.

A Critical Communication Tool

The dashboard serves as a simple interface for managing critical communication and data needs for students participating in off-campus coursework, and the communication features proved critical when news broadcasts warned of a large cyclone headed for India. With students studying there, school officials moved quickly. By using Sonia, administrators were immediately able to identify those students studying in India and get news of the cyclone and safety procedures to them.

Sharing Best Practices

A leader in student placement operations, Ms. Smith traveled to Western Australia in 2018 to share her knowledge and best practices with peers at four universities. Sonya presented on USC's model of providing university-wide placement support via a central team. She highlighted new product features and how they apply to various placement models.

Representatives from local universities learned about time-saving features and functionalities that generally apply to any placement program.

Looking Ahead

Ms. Smith and her team continue to look at expanding the use of Sonia across the university for further improvements to processes and stakeholder experiences. She is currently looking into integrations with other key components of the campus technology ecosystem.

"The developers are so clever. They really do listen to their customers."

- Sonya Smith

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