



Collaboration was one key to helping Tufts University hone in on its mission

Higher education institutions—even universities with extensive resources—are exploring how to remain financially strong while continuing to evolve support of their teaching, learning, and research missions. Tufts University took a hard look at its administrative processes and discovered that redundancies and fragmentation in administrative areas were leading to inefficiencies and unnecessary spending. So they enlisted a leading service provider to develop a shared services strategy — one that would allow Tufts to focus more on its mission and to greatly improve administratively while reducing costs.

A "TEAM" effort

Located outside Boston, Massachusetts, Tufts University is among leading schools in American higher education. Its rare combination of research and liberal arts offerings affords students flexibility in their educational paths. Tufts competes with other universities for students, faculty, and research funding. To assure a sustainable balance between aspirations and available resources, and to address common administrative work that could be more effective, Tufts created a strategic initiative entitled "TEAM" - Tufts Effectiveness in Administrative Management.

Remaining competitive requires a second look

In the course of its work on this efficiency project at Tufts, Deloitte worked with the Tufts TEAM members on a solution that could help the university increase the focus on its educational mission and address costs. Tufts wanted to be more efficient with its funds, particularly around common and sharable administrative work. Deloitte found that overly complex administrative processes, as well as the process of assigning tasks to staff, was difficult and inefficient.

For instance, administrative staff completed some tasks infrequently with limited training or supervision, which led to a higher probability of errors. In addition, with a significant number of administrative staff using various systems and processes, the time and effort needed for training and maintaining access and security to systems and processes were tremendous. Therefore, much time and resources that could have been used elsewhere had to be committed.

Deloitte suggested a shared services implementation project. Working together, Tufts and Deloitte were able to identify and assess opportunities for creating greater operational efficiencies.

True collaboration breeds real results

The Deloitte team worked closely with Tufts' administrative leadership and managers throughout TEAM's five-phase project for Tufts Support Services (TSS) with the objective of implementing a services-oriented approach to HR and finance tasks. The Tufts and Deloitte teams worked as one and met almost daily to share ideas, provide feedback, and explore scenarios. Both teams agreed that the mix of collaboration and open and honest communication was key to the success of the support services project.

Focusing on what matters

In the initial research phase, the teams assessed opportunities across all areas of administrative services, including human resources and finance. They also performed analysis, conducted interviews, and led focus groups to identify and prioritize administrative operations improvements both in the administrative departments and out in the schools. To dive further into the information, the teams developed detailed business cases for potential implementation to realize cost savings, revenue generation, and operational efficiencies. They also developed a high-level implementation road map as well as future state organizational structures and processes that assessed support services and outsourcing.

Armed with this valuable information, Deloitte and Tufts launched Tufts Support Services (TSS), an on-campus shared services center, as one of the TEAM initiatives. The reallocation of work to TSS has allowed administrative staff to be more efficient with their time. Likewise, faculty have been able to spend more time on important activities supporting teaching, learning, research, and scholarship.

The goal of TSS was to provide human resource and finance administrative support to individuals and departments, supported by a client relationship management (CRM) platform, to allow faculty and staff to focus more of their efforts on work that advanced their core mission and goals. Collaborating on this project contributed to a successful launch of TSS. Deloitte Consulting LLP senior manager, Jen Ivey said, "This project was by far the smoothest go-live I have ever been a part of. We didn't have any issues. It was as if we flipped a switch, and it was ready to be used. From start to finish, we functioned as a true team working side by side for a common goal. We were accessible and responsive with each other."

Meeting their goals

By redesigning and coordinating human resources and finance services across the university, Tufts' goal for this project was to be in a better financial position to invest in teaching and research and provide high-level services. The ultimate goal of university administration is to support students and faculty in learning and research.

One key to a successful TSS implementation was the open, honest, and continual collaboration between the university and Deloitte. Together, Tufts and Deloitte were able to refine the shared support organization to help the university save money and create a new, as well as sustainable, model for excellence in administrative support.

For more information, please contact us at highereducation@deloitte.com

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