VU University Amsterdam: Simplifying Student Life – and Saving Money – with SAP® Student Lifecycle Management

Company
VU University Amsterdam

Industry
Higher education and research

Products and Services
College courses and degree programs

Web Site
www.vu.nl/en

SAP® Solutions
SAP® Student Lifecycle Management application

Partners
itelligence BV (Netherlands)
SAP Consulting

VU University Amsterdam has a bold ambition to become a major research university. That takes resources, a challenge in today's financial climate. So VU wants to run efficiently to conserve its money for education and research. It implemented the SAP® Student Lifecycle Management application to let students manage their affairs online – from admissions through graduation. The initiative **reduced administrative expenses** and cost one-third of what another university spent using a competing product.
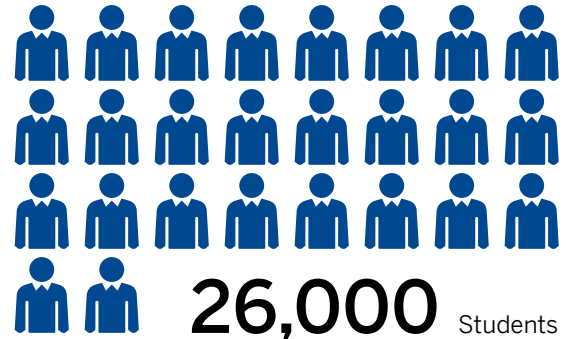
Standing for values

VU University Amsterdam first opened its doors to students in 1880. The initials stand for Vrije Universiteit, which means Free University. In this context, "free" refers to freedom from state and church involvement.

VU offers 12 areas of study to some 26,000 students. The campus is located in the southwestern part of Amsterdam, one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing business districts in the Netherlands. The international Amsterdam Airport Schiphol is 10 kilometers away and just eight minutes by train.

With more than 50 undergraduate and almost 100 postgraduate programs, VU offers a wide choice of study options for those looking to complete their Bachelor's or Master's degrees. The programs are of high quality, the atmosphere is conducive to study, and the teaching staff is accessible.

The VU logo depicts the griffin, a mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. The griffin represents the university's values. The spreading wings stand for the quest for knowledge, in complete freedom. The griffin's feet, planted firmly on the ground, represent VU's commitment to the well-being of society as a whole.

26,000 Students

Becoming a global university

VU wants to be known by 2025 as a major research university. It aims to be perceived as a school that conducts internationally outstanding research in a number of fields and is ranked among the top global 75 universities. VU wants to have a competitive range of renowned research and academic Master's programs. It also has international ambitions and is establishing partnerships with universities in emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil.

But VU is mindful of today's economic climate and wants to operate efficiently. "Another part of our vision is operational excellence," says Anne Kaldewaij, program director for the new student information systems at VU. "Our university wants to have the best administrative practices, which means low cost and high quality for VU. We want simple, standardized solutions. This fits very well with the SAP Student Lifecycle Management application. We really think the SAP software can help us save a lot of money."

VU's goal is to reduce the proportion of direct government funding devoted to operational management from 43% today to 37% by 2015. This will be achieved through process standardization and redesign, the clustering of activities and services, and changes to management procedures. VU also seeks, by 2015, to increase the ratio of academic staff to support and management staff to 1.7:1, compared to the current ratio of 1.3:1.

~100
Graduate programs

Getting positive feedback

VU people were spending too much time on administrative tasks, especially when they were searching for information. "We had no integration in the old systems," Kaldewaij says. "We also had no centralized student self-services. The services we did have differed by department, with varying login names and passwords. It was basically an intelligent database and was not connected to finance or HR."

VU already had the SAP ERP application and SAP ERP Human Capital Management solution in place. Says Kaldewaij, "We considered either SAP Student Lifecycle Management or the Oracle PeopleSoft Enterprise campus solution. We received very positive feedback during our visits to universities using the SAP software."

"SAP Student Lifecycle Management is a state-of-the-art solution. It is fully integrated. And we believe it's future-proof."

Anne Kaldewaij, Program Director for the New Student Information Systems,
VU University Amsterdam

Getting top-notch assistance

VU worked with SAP Consulting on the initiative. "Rob Jonkers from SAP Consulting stayed throughout the whole project, which was really great," Kaldewaij says. "He helped us to create the initial design. He was there to answer lots of questions and drew upon many SAP contacts all over the world. He also conducted quality reviews and conducted the first training courses."

VU also selected itelligence BV as an implementation partner. itelligence is an international full-service provider of SAP solutions for the midmarket and has implemented SAP software for more than 3,000 customers around the world. The consultancy applied lessons learned from previous rollouts of SAP Student Lifecycle Management at other universities to bring the project in on time and within budget.

Kaldewaij says faculty involvement and training were key success factors in the rollout: "The solution design was coauthored by the various departments at VU. Our IT people trained everyone. No one was given user authorization without the appropriate training."

"We had a very highly qualified, motivated team.
It was considered an honor to be part of this initiative."

Anne Kaldewaij, Program Director for the New Student Information Systems,
VU University Amsterdam

Encompassing the student lifecycle

SAP Student Lifecycle Management covers the entire lifecycle of a student, starting from the application to the program of study up through graduation. The solution encompasses matriculation, enrollment, course registration, fees, grading, and graduation. It also allows VU to manage its academic structure and curriculum and maintain student master data.

Every day some 9,000 VU students access the university portal through Microsoft SharePoint, which is powered by the SAP solution to support self-service processes. They see their schedule via an interface to Scientia's Syllabus Plus planning and scheduling software. They can sign up for courses and retrieve their grades on the portal. They can also go directly to solutions from Blackboard Inc. to access course information as well as their e-mail – processes that are also supported by SAP Student Lifecycle Management.

VU also gets valuable reports. "Administrators can see reports on admissions – how many applied, how many were admitted, how many were rejected, and so forth," says Mark Arts, project manager with intelligence. "There is reporting on progress, grades, student pass rates, and completion rates by program of study. Reports also list things like elements missing from student applications or programs, enabling VU to provide the proper guidance."

"When students register online for a course with SAP Student Lifecycle Management, they also get their bill. All the financial processes are integrated with SAP ERP."

Anne Kaldewaij, Program Director for the New Student Information Systems, VU University Amsterdam

Strengthening organizational cooperation

VU administrators are now speeding through their tasks. "In our science program, one task – setting up the diploma supplement – took 20 minutes for each student," Kaldewaij says. "Now it takes 2 minutes; it's as simple as pressing a button. We have also automated parts of the financial aid process."

VU is especially pleased at how it has improved the student experience. "We now have a complete, fully integrated solution that gives students a user-friendly, self-service portal – accessible from any place, at any time, and from any platform," Kaldewaij says.

"Another benefit," Kaldewaij reports, "is that we now have much better cooperation between departments, student services, and IT. This implementation has become the benchmark for how to successfully complete a larger initiative. We have established a strong basis for future collaboration between stakeholder groups in the university."

"With SAP Student Lifecycle Management, we are now positioned to realize significant financial benefits in the coming years."

Anne Kaldewaij, Program Director for the New Student Information Systems,
VU University Amsterdam

Extending reporting capabilities

VU wants to extend its use of the solution's reporting functions. "We already have standard reports from SAP; now we want to tailor the management information in more specific ways," Kaldewaij says.

The customized reporting will cover things like how many students enrolled per department or program or per degree, which countries they came from, and so forth. VU will also offer training on SAP Student Lifecycle Management to departmental staff. It will provide self-service support for professors so they can do things like input grades. "We also want to make it possible for them to see which students are registered for their courses," Kaldewaij says.

In short, he is determined to find more ways to improve VU processes. "At the end of this month, I will meet with all the faculty heads and address their top 10 issues," Kaldewaij says.