



## CASE STUDY:

# Virtual desktops give students access to courses anytime, anywhere

## Schoolcraft College supports distance learning with Ellucian Ethos

Schoolcraft College is a two-year institution in Livonia, Michigan. Focused primarily on the culinary arts, nursing/health sciences, manufacturing, and emergency response, the institution aims to further their engagement and retention of students through the modernization of applications designed to create a more interactive classroom setting.

To fulfill that mission, Schoolcraft College began a complete IT overhaul in 2015 to evolve from a mostly traditional face-to-face classroom setting into a stronger focus on distance-learning environments. They have 70 computer labs on campus, all of which were virtualized. In the process of implementing virtual desktops, the need for greater remote access to classroom and lab computers became apparent.

"It became a mission of mine to allow students to take classes that required either high-performance computing or highly graphically intensive software and be able to access that from off campus," says Patrick Turner, vice president and chief information officer at Schoolcraft College. Virtualization would increase accessibility to necessary software from anywhere, anytime, on any device.

To achieve virtual accessibility, Schoolcraft College began to examine how its desktop systems were allocated to students. The classroom systems required students to log-in as a numbered user and save their actions on a USB stick. The computer was not aware of, or retained, any student specific information once the USB stick was removed.



**Enrollment**  
36,000

**Primary challenge**  
Integrate ERP database with virtual desktops

**Solution**  
Ellucian Ethos

**Results**  
Gave students remote access to specialized software  
Freed professors to focus on instruction rather than troubleshooting technology  
Increased efficiencies and cost savings for IT staff

To provide access to programs off campus, the computers needed to be able to identify specific students and the virtual desktops to which they were entitled. This required accessing data from the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system about which classes students were enrolled in and entitling them to a virtual desktop based on that data.

Then, students could log-in from any location, whether that be from home or their favorite coffee shop, from any device, and be granted access to the same desktop that the computers on-campus provide.

## Powering student success through data accessibility

Schoolcraft College needed a method to pull student class schedule data so that the virtual desktops could provide access to the software and computing power students were looking for. Using Ellucian Ethos, an integration platform that connects people, processes, and technology across the institution, they were able to pull that information from the ERP into the Ethos data model, where VMware, the digital workspace, could sort through the data and provide the correct virtual desktops for each student. This integration provides students with virtual capabilities across different platforms and different environments.

"Rather than doing point-to-point integrations with different virtualization systems," says Turner. "We are able to put the data into the cloud. The data is always there and accessible in the same way."

According to Turner, this solution "changes the course delivery model in that a student can access any class that requires any kind of special software or special computing environment, from anywhere."

With this modernization, access to all class offerings for every student, no matter their socio-economic level, has been equalized. Students no longer have to purchase expensive laptops and tablets. All the computing and graphical processing happens in the data center and is made available through any device.

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### PATRICK TURNER

Vice President and Chief Information Officer

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## Improved engagement and efficiencies

Turner notes that the reaction from students and professors has been marvelous. Professors no longer spend time helping students troubleshoot software installations or problems on their personal devices because they're using the virtual desktops.

The IT team is able to move computer labs across campus within an hour to accommodate the needs of professors. Being able to move computer labs so easily has increased efficiencies.

For institutions considering integration with Ethos, Turner recommends understanding what data is needed for the applications that will be integrated, in this case what data the virtual desktop needed from the ERP, to make sure the data aligns with the Ethos higher ed data model, and to make sure the data is as clean as possible.

Through modernization, Schoolcraft College has eliminated a barrier to education, implementing virtual desktop systems with special computing software and hardware that are accessible from remote locations anytime, a goal Turner has had since 2014.

"The relationship with Ellucian has made that dream a reality," says Turner. "We can provide access to highly demanding applications from anywhere by anyone. And that's going to expand the course delivery in higher education."



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