



Southern New Hampshire University unifies data and project management platforms to support the school's mission to reinvent higher education



When Operations and IT leaders at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) decided to create a project management platform built around Microsoft Teams, Power Platform, and Project Online, their objective was to design and deploy a comprehensive technology infrastructure to support the entire university consistently and efficiently. The new system provides standardized tools that help streamline project management processes and enable departments and teams to have increased visibility into each other's projects and priorities. This transparency has stimulated more cross-department collaboration and facilitated a deeper connection to the school's mission to transform the lives of learners through innovative educational best practices.

Customer
[Southern New Hampshire University](#)

Partner
[Innovative-e](#)

Products and Services
[Azure](#)
[Microsoft 365](#)
[Microsoft Teams](#)
[Power Apps](#)
[Power BI](#)
[Project Online](#)

Industry
[Higher Education](#)

Organization Size
[Large \(1,000 - 9,999 employees\)](#)

Country
[United States](#)

Downloads
[SNHU_SummarySlide](#)

SNHU is a private, nonprofit educational institution founded in 1932. With a distributed workforce of more than 4,000 fulltime and part-time employees across the US, in addition to more than 6,000 adjunct faculty, the university serves more than 160,000 learners worldwide, including full-time, and part-time students. SNHU offers approximately 200 accredited undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs taught either online or in person at its 300-acre campus in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Based on an annual *US News & World Report* survey of college officials to identify institutions making innovative improvements in terms of curriculum, faculty campus life, technology, or facilities, SNHU has been named the “Most Innovative” regional university in the survey's north region each year since 2015.¹ It is also one of the fastest-growing universities in the US and is committed to expanding access to high-quality, affordable education that meet the needs of each learner.

Recognizing the impacts of variable systems and processes

The university had developed a variety of systems to manage the institution and deliver academic programs to its diverse student population. However, these systems had been built with different technologies and were maintained through different processes. One team had been using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and pivot tables, another had been using Smartsheets, and another relied on SharePoint and PowerPoint. Consequently, data was dispersed, and system access was inconsistent.

“A lot of people just weren’t sure where to go for project information because it was stored in different places. And tools were not seamless,” says Lori Lavalley, Director of Project Management and Value Creation at SNHU. “There was a lot of confusion about how to request projects because different teams had different methods,” adds Jess Singelais, Microsoft 365 Platform Owner at SNHU. “You’d have someone start a project in a tool and they would have to resubmit to create awareness of the effort. This would require extra time and rework. There was a lot of confusion.”

Providing university leadership with key metrics—such as project status on timeline, budget, and objectives—was challenging, and the limited visibility into these metrics was impacting

¹ "[SNHU Once Again Recognized as a Top Employer in Higher Education, Most Innovative in the North](#)," SNHU Newsroom, 2021.

resource management, among other areas. The university ran the risk of running redundant projects or projects that were not closely aligned with business goals.

Designing a university-wide project management platform

SNHU was seeking a comprehensive platform with the functionality and capacity to serve the entire organization, and which would be maintained and supported through a consistent project management process. It needed a dashboard that could provide a comprehensive view of project information across the entire university. The SNHU team, led by Kurt Mithoefer, Assistant Vice President of Planning and Value Creation, started evaluating options. The team identified Innovative-e, a Microsoft partner, to help them plan and implement a system that would creatively address the university-wide challenges.

The Innovative-e team included Mike Taylor, CEO, and Matt Froelich, Vice President of Project and Portfolio Management and Business Intelligence. The initial phase of the collaboration was a rigorous analysis of the current environment to help develop a strategically designed system for project management and reporting.

“We’d recently established Office 365 and Microsoft as the choice for the university. From there, the ease of access to other tools was seamless,” Mithoefer says. “Because of the Microsoft ties and what we were already launching internally, it just made it a very easy transition and a very easy implementation as well.”

Synchronizing processes and tools

SNHU successfully migrated its university-wide project management activities exclusively to [Microsoft 365](#), making full use of [Teams](#), [Power Platform](#) ([Power Apps](#), [Power Automate](#), and [Power BI](#)), and [Project Online](#). In addition, as part of this effort, Innovative-e deployed its T4PM project management product as a pre-written Power App that brought the Project Online experience completely into Teams.

With the platform built into Teams, which was already used widely across the university, including a central dashboard using Power BI, everything is now “just a fingertip” away, providing easy, quick access to new project management capabilities and information for everyone. Now different departments in the university have visibility into what others are working on. Onboarding for project managers is easier now, too, because the interface and process is the same for each project. They can also find the data they need for any project because reporting metrics are standardized, and documents and artifacts have been strengthened through templates.

“The Microsoft solution has brought the ability to pull everyone together into one synchronized system that allows for more transparent visibility into what folks are working on,” says Mithoefer.

Fostering high-performance collaboration

The project management solution has positively affected staff morale and drive. With the opportunity for more efficient communication between departments, staff now have a broader, university-wide perspective. They have visibility into the role their projects play in the university's collective focus on better supporting students and faculty.

"The system is designed to help us better understand the impact of the projects to the university. Before there was just a lot of work being done. Now we can prioritize around goals, see how they are progressing, and start to measure the resulting benefits," said Lavallee. "Leadership at large can go into the university dashboard and project management platform and see what's driving to the university's goals."

Mithoefer expands on this. "The big takeaway is the ability to connect all the data points into one single platform and allow for that robust conversation and understanding and transparency of effort to happen."

Using technology to reinvent education

Taylor, from Innovative-e, emphasizes that "technology has gotten to a place to enable pretty much anything you need. A couple of years ago the platforms did not have the capabilities they do now. On the Microsoft platform—SharePoint, Excel, Project Online, with Teams being the principal component—you now have secure ways to tie everything together."

Froelich notes, "It wasn't that long ago that this would've been all custom code we had to stand up and maintain. Now we can use Microsoft tools that connect everything easily." Using tools like Power Platform, which enables simple drag-and-drop connectors with Power Automate, means vast time savings for organizations like SNHU. "It's not like in the past where you spent years and millions of dollars to put something together like this," Taylor adds.

For other organizations on a similar digital transformation journey, Taylor emphasizes that they should take the time to understand how technologies have evolved even from where they were just a few years ago, and that a lot more is possible. "You can start to put these pieces together and get real benefits pretty quickly."

As those benefits accumulate, Mithoefer expects they will continue shaping the future of SNHU as well. There have always been lots of ideas and work being done to improve the student experience and the organization's operations, he notes. What is different now is the school's ability to see which ideas and projects are truly moving the university toward its goals. "It's not just getting work done, it's actually understanding what the right work to be focused on is. And we are seeing it come through the system and making sure that we have priorities where they need to be," he says.

It is an excellent example of how solving a problem in one area can have a significant impact across an entire organization, especially when that organization chooses a technology platform

that supports its overall strategy. With information available through a central location, he says, SNHU leadership "can go in and see what's driving our growth. What is driving our focus on our students? What specifically were we looking at for enhancements for our students directly? What are things that operationally need to get done for our day-to-day management of our students and our business at large? Now it's all in one spot that leadership can see."

PULL QUOTES

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