

PowerFAIDS® Case Study

“There’s a direct correlation between student satisfaction and the sophistication of an institution’s financial aid system. With PowerFAIDS, our students enjoy timely awards and the ability to check the status of their financial aid information online.”

—**Michael J. Bennett,**

Director of Financial Aid, Brookdale Community College



Brookdale Community College Boosts Student Satisfaction and Staff Efficiency with PowerFAIDS

Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey, a public institution with 13,000 students, confers the highest number of associate’s degrees in the state. The college faced several financial aid challenges, including the need to give students and employees working off-site easy access to information online, as well as to strengthen regulatory compliance and streamline the workflow for the IT and financial aid staff. To automate its processes, Brookdale implemented the College Board’s PowerFAIDS® solution, which was smoothly integrated into its ERP system. PowerFAIDS has significantly improved process efficiency, reduced costs, and given financial aid office staff control over the system. Perhaps most important, it has raised student satisfaction by providing Web-based self-service and allowing staff to spend more time building relationships with students and families.



Solutions Deployed:

PowerFAIDS®

PowerFAIDS NetPartner

PowerFAIDS Web Client

Solution Summary:

Institution

Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, N.J.

Challenges

- Greater control and efficiency in financial aid process
- Web-based access for remote locations and students

Benefits

- Increased student satisfaction
- System control by FA Office
- Optimized FA and IT staff time
- Improved reporting and compliance

The College

Brookdale's main campus occupies 230 acres of former racehorse farmland near the New Jersey shore in Lincroft. It was founded in 1968 with about 2,300 students, and today enrolls 13,000 credit and 30,000 noncredit students—primarily from Monmouth County. By 2003–04, the college's full-time enrollment had increased by 8 percent. Brookdale offers 65 associate degree programs and 20 certificate programs through its Lincroft location and five higher education centers around the county. In addition to classroom and laboratory learning, students participate in cooperative education experiences and/or Brookdale's nationally recognized Service Learning Program.

As a community-based institution, Brookdale offers affordable, open access to postsecondary education, including skills assessment and development. One of every three college-bound students in Monmouth County chooses Brookdale. Through two partnerships—one with Rutgers University and another with the New Jersey Coastal Communiversities, a consortium of seven institutions—the college provides access to baccalaureate and master's degree programs for its students.

Brookdale has 837 faculty members and 460 administrators and staff. In the spring of 2004, Brookdale awarded 1,513 associate's degrees, placing it first among New Jersey's public community colleges.

The Challenge

Brookdale awards more than \$15 million in financial aid each year, and processes 8,000 applications. The college and its small financial aid staff (five professionals and three administrators, plus three student interns) faced several challenges. "As a community college, our focus was on balancing the need to simplify this complex process and provide students with immediate service, while ensuring compliance and adequate management controls," explained Michael J. Bennett, director of financial aid.

On the simplification side of the equation, Bennett wanted to achieve two goals: relieve his staff of administrative drudgery so they would have more time for face-to-face interactions with students and families; and quickly provide both online services for students and Web-based access to financial aid information generalists for Brookdale's five higher education learning centers.

On the management side, Bennett and his staff wanted to move the design and administration of financial aid IT systems under their department's control. He said, "With the continual changes to federal, state, and college regulations, we found it cumbersome to

be constantly requesting services from our IT staff. Although these system changes were essential to ensure compliance and maintain correct records for audits, our needs were diverting IT resources from important tasks for other groups. And we were always worrying about whether IT could respond quickly enough.”

The Implementation

In 1999, Brookdale purchased Datatel COLLEAGUE as its campus-wide management system. At that time, the college developed a set of guiding principles for choosing a financial aid solution. These included ease of use, efficiency, and Web access for staff and students. “One of the most important attributes we were looking for was the ability to configure activities to support the way we work, rather than being forced to adapt our procedures to the software,” Bennett recalled.

Although Brookdale considered enhancing the financial aid capabilities of COLLEAGUE to meet these criteria, this would have required significant additional staffing. To avoid these personnel costs and because Brookdale was a satisfied, longstanding user of College Board solutions, the college selected PowerFAIDS to automate its financial aid function. In addition, the college purchased PowerFAIDS Net Partner, a Web solution that interacts with the PowerFAIDS database and Brookdale’s Web portal to provide online self-service to students. The PowerFAIDS Web Client module allows an unlimited number of staff in remote locations to access key data in PowerFAIDS using a Web browser.

To align PowerFAIDS with the Datatel system, Brookdale wrote four interfaces:

- **Financial Aid Award Interface:** Awards are electronically transferred from PowerFAIDS into the COLLEAGUE Financial Aid module.
- **Importation of Student Information:** Student admissions and registration data are imported from COLLEAGUE into PowerFAIDS.
- **Federal Work Study Payroll Earnings:** FWS earnings are imported from the COLLEAGUE payroll system into PowerFAIDS to monitor them after each pay period.
- **New Jersey State Grant Awards:** These awards are electronically entered into PowerFAIDS from the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) financial aid applicant roster.

Today, financial aid information is accessed by the Financial Aid

Office staff using PowerFAIDS client software running on the local desktop. The five higher education centers, as well as accounting, registration, athletics, placement services (student employment) and the office of the dean of students access this data online using the PowerFAIDS Web Client. Brookdale students can view and update their own financial aid information via the college Web portal using PowerFAIDS Net Partner. Net Partner allows students to update selected portions of their own records in customized fields created by Brookdale.

The Benefits

Putting Control Where it Belongs— In the Financial Aid Office!

“PowerFAIDS gives my staff the tools to control their own destiny,” said Bennett. “With tools that manage grant processing, award packaging, communication, verification, reporting and research, as well as quality control, staff no longer have to rely on IT to get processing done on time, or to negotiate priority for their service requests.” PowerFAIDS allows the staff to write customized rules and formulas for awarding aid, and to update them as needed, without calling on IT. As a result, Brookdale’s IT staff can now devote more time to other departments’ needs and to strategic projects for the college instead of struggling to accommodate unexpected regulatory changes that must be incorporated into the system.

Optimizing Staff Time Through Automation

PowerFAIDS has enabled Brookdale’s financial aid staff to provide faster and more efficient service, thanks to automation of many functions. For example, need analysis is now performed by the software, according to applicable methodologies. Aid packaging and disbursement is done on demand and on an ongoing basis in accordance with Brookdale’s custom rules and formulas. And the use of batch e-mail to send out notifications about missing information and awards has greatly reduced administration and speeded up the overall process.

The solution’s ease of use enables staff members to be generalists instead of specialists, providing a full range of services. Student workers can be trained to do more meaningful work and make a larger contribution to the office.

Another benefit of PowerFAIDS is Web access to student data for staff working in remote offices or off campus. Using the Web Client, they can review awards, loan information, and the status of documentation instead of having to call the Financial Aid Office each

time. This convenient access saves time for everyone involved, and allows other branches to provide financial aid services without having to install PowerFAIDS software locally.

Improving Compliance/Audit and Reporting

“PowerFAIDS supports monitoring of important benchmarks such as verification and awarding, and federal and state loan reporting required for funds to be transferred to campus in a timely manner,” said Bennett. “Reporting is user-friendly—staff can produce complex reports in minutes, and import additional reports from the PowerFAIDS Web site.” The solution came with more than 40 standard reports and enables customized reports to be created with ease. This robust reporting capability is appreciated by Brookdale’s senior managers, who depend on PowerFAIDS as a key source for statistics, trending data, and forecasting.

In addition, the audit trail and reporting functionalities allow financial aid office staff to oversee work quality and identify problems, enhancing learning and building new skills. Staff can monitor their own work and design reports to pinpoint errors.

To support compliance, federal financial aid rules are written into PowerFAIDS. Changes and additions to these rules are delivered via quarterly software updates that are provided as part of Brookdale’s maintenance agreement with the College Board.

Enhancing Student Satisfaction

“With Web-based access to financial aid information, our students quickly moved from ‘in line’ to ‘online,’” said Bennett. “When we adopted PowerFAIDS, a top goal for our office was to improve customer service with anytime, anywhere access for students. Self-service over the Web is very convenient, allowing students to check information, complete applications or update their records. It also saves them postage and printing costs.” PowerFAIDS Net Partner enabled Brookdale to customize the look and feel of the student interface so that it matches other areas of the college Intranet.

The Conclusion

“Brookdale chose PowerFAIDS because it’s the most powerful, comprehensive, flexible, and economical way to automate financial aid. This solution gave us a financial aid system that makes complexity transparent for users and creates new opportunities for warm, face-to-face relationships with students and families.”

—**Michael J. Bennett**, Director of Financial Aid, Brookdale Community College



About PowerFAIDS

PowerFAIDS combines a broad range of data processing services into a single, easily manageable solution. It manages federal aid requirements, your institutional aid programs and objectives, and gives your staff the information and tools they need to provide smarter, faster service to your applicants.

PowerFAIDS automates your entire aid process and eliminates hours of tedious paperwork. It manages student eligibility, verification, Pell Grant management, award packaging, loan origination, reporting, and research. The latest federal rules are programmed into the software so you are always compliant with federal regulations. It's an intuitive, Windows-based, client-server solution that's easy to use. Unlike some systems that can take years to implement, you can be productive with PowerFAIDS in weeks. The College Board trains your staff to use PowerFAIDS and provides ongoing technical support, upgrades, and enhancements.

About the College Board

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,200 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns.



