

# University of South Dakota

## Data Drives the Future



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—Jim Moran, Ph.D., USD Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

The University of South Dakota (USD) needed a systematic process for assessment and strategic planning. The school’s course outcomes were not directly linked to academic program outcomes nor were department goals effectively tied to the institutional strategic plan. Annual assessment reports contained only one year of data, so they didn’t provide any longitudinal insight. Department goals were not part of any larger strategic initiative, and the data required for program or other ad hoc review were not readily available, as they had to be requested from Institutional Research.

Jim Moran, Ph.D., USD Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, recognized that the school needed a better system for tracking student learning outcomes. He also knew that the vision could be broader. Nuventive was just the company to help bring a comprehensive vision to life.

USD began implementation of the Nuventive Improvement Platform in summer of 2015; it was completed in 2017, with a goal of incorporating institutional data into strategic planning, assessment, and budgeting strategies. “To meet university goals, you have to focus on what’s going on at the department level,” Moran explains. “And often, the data and information are scattered. We’re really pleased to have the Nuventive Improvement Platform.”

### Technology to the Rescue

USD is now engaged in a continuous program review process for improvement across the institution. The data required for program review and external accreditation are available to all faculty at all times. Within the software, information about annual progress toward enrollment goals or other metrics can be directly linked to department goals, and reports can be generated to show cumulative progress toward the departments’ goals and initiatives. Following program review, departments can create action plans that include curricular changes and strategic planning necessary to make more headway. These action plans, ingredients in the strategic goals and budgeting initiatives for each department, are tracked annually and tied to institutional strategic initiatives.

With the Nuventive Improvement Platform, USD can now track course-level student learning outcomes and map course-level information to program-level outcomes, department goals, and accreditation standards. And now, if a particular course-level assessment is related to an institutional initiative, the information is readily available and easy to track. The University can also easily create reports to show examples of data-informed decision making as documentation for accreditation, both at the program and institutional levels. USD has been using the Platform to report on

### Customer Profile

The University of South Dakota is a public liberal arts university located in Vermillion, South Dakota. As the oldest university in the state, with a student body of approximately 10,000, the university offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs as well as online learning.

### Opportunity

The University was looking for a way to turn single-year, paper reports into a data driven process that would provide longitudinal insights. The Nuventive Improvement Platform was the school’s choice, followed up with Managed Services to help its goals become reality.

### Improvement

University of South Dakota has optimized its system for tracking student learning outcomes and is on the road to bringing a comprehensive vision to life.

progress toward the Quality Initiative associated with the Higher Learning Commission's Open Pathway for accreditation. Moran explains, "After an accreditation visit, we usually have recommendations. Those recommendations are built right into this software so that we're not doing one thing for accreditation and one thing for the institution. What we tried to do here is make the information, the data, the student learning outcomes, and also the department goals available to all faculty in the department."

## Big Gains in a Short Time

It hasn't been long since the school implemented the Nuventive Improvement Platform, but Matt Heard, M.B.A., Senior Budget and Finance Specialist, says that the changes can already be felt. "Before we had this 'one stop shop', we used to have to go to multiple places on campus to get the student-side data, and now that that's pretty readily available, we're able to make a lot of our decisions a lot faster and track trends. It's nice to have it all in one dashboard."

Lisa Bonneau, Ph.D., USD's Assessment Associate, agrees that the improvements are palpable. For instance, she says, "the data have assisted college deans and their respective department chairs in recognizing programs with too many credits required for graduation and programs with hidden prerequisites." In addition, she notes, faculty from many programs have revised their student learning outcomes after training on the software. "We've done a variety of trainings with faculty so they're able to utilize the software to the fullest extent." And this training and engagement has had a profound effect on USD's faculty. Heard says, "The data that is coming out of this now is part of the transparency that we really wanted with this budget model. And now that we're sharing this [data] with the faculty, they feel more involved with the process. They see what mark they make by the class sizes and number of sections that they teach."

In December of 2016, the school purchased Nuventive's Managed Services. Some of the school's staff had left and Bonneau had recently joined the University, so this was a logical juncture to add on-going professional services to aid with the transition. Nuventive has since helped with the Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS) standards. The school's student services group needed help tracking the 14 student service units around the CAS standards, and Nuventive helped lay out a model so that the school can now align its assessment efforts to the standards.

The transition to the Nuventive Improvement Platform has been smooth. Moran says, "Oftentimes as we bring in a new innovation and new ideas, we don't know how the faculty are going to respond. In this case, the response has been extremely positive, and I know it's going to make a difference for our institution. That's a real compliment to our faculty at the University of South Dakota and also our partnership with Nuventive."

The transformation at the University of South Dakota has been huge, but the school isn't finished. "Our next step is to assure that the department goals are living documents. The integration of this information to our budgeting structure is pretty critical," says Moran. The data that has been harnessed by the Nuventive Improvement Platform is part of the transparency so important for the school's progress; making the financial picture more accessible will be yet another way for the school to shape and achieve its goals. It's an exciting time at the university, says Heard: "I think we're on the road to something really great."

## Key Benefits

- + Make better use of data in strategic planning, assessment, and program review
- + Track course-level student data
- + Map course-level assessment to program-level outcomes
- + Align departmental action plans with university strategic plans
- + Obtain longitudinal views into student learning assessment data
- + Establish planning as a living process
- + Save time and resources
- + Improve faculty and staff engagement

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