



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

Modernize Document Workflows for Business Continuity and Improved Services

Document digitization and electronic signatures modernize workflows to provide more accurate, secure, and convenient services for students, faculty, and staff.

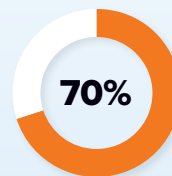
Drivers of Digital Workflows in Higher Education

Changes in Response to COVID-19:



of educational institutions indicate that student engagement and remote work will be permanently changed as a result of COVID-19.

Operations Resilience:



are currently focused on business continuity and cost optimization.

Digital transformation has rapidly accelerated in higher education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to potentially permanent changes in services delivery and business models. As a result, colleges and universities are working to rapidly modernize workflows to deliver digital content and services characterized by a mix of onsite and distance learning, remote work and telework, digital administration, and new virtual offerings.

Colleges and universities, whether public or private, large or small, are all competing to attract students—and must offer convenient, fast, online services, such as digital admissions and student onboarding. As student expectations evolve and technology features and functionality advance, what were once considered essential onsite interactions will fundamentally change.



In particular, higher education institutions need to accelerate the development of digital document workflows—moving from manual to automated, and from paper to digital—to ensure continuity of operations and to meet students, staff, and faculty demands for contactless, online services. As a result, many colleges and universities are looking for ways to ensure that their document workflows are fully digital—for example, using PDF-based workflows to eliminate the need to print, get wet signatures, scan and/ or mail student-facing forms as well as operational forms, such as faculty onboarding packets or vendor contracts.

Modernizing Document Workflows for Business Continuity and Improved Services

Bimonthly surveys conducted by IDC from April 2020 to November 2020 show that permanent changes in higher education will include more remote work by staff and faculty, more online and distance learning, and much less onsite student engagement for recruitment, admissions, student onboarding, and other administrative activities. At the same time, 71% of higher education institutions are “digitally distraught,” with legacy processes and content that is siloed by departments and disparate systems. Over 25% of higher education institutions report difficulty with sharing content, accessing documents, and collaborating both with colleagues and students, resulting in slower and less efficient processes.

Current document workflows are disrupted by manual and paper-based steps. Although many documents may start in digital format, getting wet signatures requires printing, scanning, and in-person meetings for staff and faculty for onboarding, student admissions, and enrollment paperwork, and contracts for facilities management. Capabilities like e-signatures need to be part of a larger document workflow digitization effort. The key is to integrate with student and staff portals and other document software, so the entire workflow is digital, allowing documents to be easily accessed and shared.

The Benefits of E-signature Technology

E-signature technology supports a wide range of functions within college and universities, and provides multiple concrete benefits, such as:

Supports compliance: E-signatures work in support of regulations, such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and can be used in student financial aid forms, health forms, and legally binding documents.

Reduces errors and improves productivity: A fully digital document workflow eliminates manual reentry which is a source of errors. It improves productivity with faster turnaround times for forms and documents from parents, teachers, and outside contractors, enabling staff to focus on other more important tasks.

Ensures technology parity: Technology parity is the requirement that all workers have secure access to the resources required to do their jobs, no matter their preferred device or location—whether onsite, remote, or in the field. In an IDC survey conducted in August 2020, 40% of schools are looking to invest in e-signatures software, and 30% in electronic forms, to ensure technology parity for their workforce.

Enables resilience: E-signatures help to ensure a digital workflow for remote and contactless services. This enables schools to quickly respond to changing conditions, such as a weather-related event or public health emergency, which may close schools and require remote work.

Ultimately, the key benefit of e-signature technology is of a smooth and seamless digital workflow that provides an improved experience for faculty, staff, and students. For example, in a digital student registration process, health forms, course selection, and financial documents can be emailed, signed, and managed without paper or in-person visits to multiple departments.

As these processes may be new or unfamiliar to faculty and staff, e-signature solutions should be supported by a partner ecosystem that can help colleges and universities with implementation and change management support. E-signature solutions provide maximum benefits when they work with existing forms, such as PDF-based forms, and when they are integrated with systems across departments, between institutions, and with state and federal agencies.

Message from the Sponsor

Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Sign are trusted solutions for educational institutions that want to go paperless with e-signatures and PDF-based workflows that are seamless, secure, and compliant.

[Learn more](#) about how your school can reduce the administrative burden on faculty and staff and free up more time for creating a nurturing educational environment.

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