Moving from Paper to Electronic Applications:
One Nursing School's Experience

Background

Located in a thriving urban center with a diverse population and a growing demand for nurses, The University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio School of Nursing (UTHSC) experienced a sudden increase in applications that stretched its administrative and processing capabilities. The admissions department at UTHSC was forced to increase efficiency in the face of more applicants across programs and pressure to maintain current staffing levels.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Calculating applicant GPAs was manual and time-consuming. Three times a year, up to 1,300 paper applications would be delivered to the Nursing Admissions Office (NAO). An enormous amount of student data was manually entered into a spreadsheet to make calculations. To make matters worse, upon manual review, staff would typically discover calculation errors in three out of ten applications.

- The NAO coordinated committee reviews with busy faculty members. Setting up meetings that accommodated everyone's schedules was extremely difficult.

- Faculty members were forced to come up with visual reference systems, including color-coded labels, to organize which applicants qualified for admission, those requiring further review, and those not meeting admissions standards.

- Committee review results were entered manually by admissions team members. Three people were required for data analysis, calculation of GPAs, and entering data. Additionally, temporary help was also hired for at least two months to assist in the process.

- Communicating with applicants was also paper-based and manual, increasing the risk that the school would lose desired applicants to a faster-moving program.

Solution

In 2011, after presenting NursingCAS to the dean, associate deans, the admissions committee, and faculty, the NAO had gained approval to move forward with the centralized system and assembled a team from various stakeholder groups.

After a few weeks of training for admissions staff and faculty, NursingCAS launched.

Results

With NursingCAS, admission decisions can be made within 6 weeks of the application deadline, which is about 6 weeks less than without it. This gives the school an advantage of quickly contacting the brightest, most qualified students.

Further, costs have reduced, as the need for temporary help, mail merge letters, envelope stuffing, filing, and postage have all been eliminated.

Implementing NursingCAS has allowed UTHSC to expedite all aspects of the admissions process. In particular, the primary issues identified by the NAO have been resolved.

- NursingCAS staff conduct reliable calculations, and the analytical capability within its admissions portal ("WebAdMIT") can customize GPAs including or excluding any type of coursework.

- NursingCAS takes the pain out of committee review coordination. Since all materials are digital, it's easy to assign faculty to work on reviewing applicants and submitting scores from a centralized online portal.

- Applicant ranking is virtually automated. Scores are collected automatically from reviewers' submissions and ranked.

- Quality control and GPA review, which previously required three people, is now accomplished by one staff member.

- Not only is the admissions staff able to communicate with applicants and schedule interviews in real-time via the NursingCAS Applicant Portal, applicants are able to check the status of their applications online with 24/7 access to the NursingCAS portal.

NursingCAS was exactly what UTHSC needed to streamline and centralize the information flow of their admissions process. Students, faculty, and administrators now enjoy unparalleled security, flexibility, and accessibility – enhancing the user experience for all. Among countless other benefits, staff members have more time to focus on recruitment and admission. Data integrity of student records is increased across the board. Data reporting to leadership is more accurate, and reports are very easy to create.

Perhaps best of all, customer satisfaction, as indicated in surveys distributed to students enrolled at UTHSC's School of Nursing, has greatly improved.

Video Case Study

Several stakeholders from UTHSC were featured in a live video case study that was recorded at AACN's 2012 Baccalaureate Education Conference. View the full case study here.

About NursingCAS

AACN survey data from its 740 public and private member institutions show that 75,000 qualified applicants are turned away from nursing schools annually over even though 14,000 seats go unfilled. NursingCAS has three overarching goals: to guide qualified students to nursing programs with open seats; to provide excellent data to schools and other stakeholders about nursing admissions and applicant trends, and to streamline entry into nursing education programs for schools and students.

AACN partnered with Liaison International in 2010 to establish a national centralized application system (CAS) for nursing programs. Similar systems had been serving other academic health programs well, including medicine and dentistry.