

CONNX[®] Case Study

Appalachian State University

Boone, North Carolina



University enhances Web and reporting capabilities with CONNX

- Web-enabled applications using CONNX give students, faculty, administrators, and alumni at Appalachian State University (ASU) easier access to information from campus or home
- CONNX's ease of use empowers staff and frees IT programmers to develop new applications
- ASU's administrative departments accomplish timely ad hoc reporting without IT intervention using CONNX

*Carol Grotnes Belk Library
Appalachian State University*

When the names of graduating seniors are about to be announced at Commencement, the dean needs an accurate list. When generous alumni make donations, the Alumni office needs to track the distribution of pledges and gifts destined for hundreds of different funds. And when students bring their cars to campus, they want to know parking privileges, then easily register their vehicles. At Appalachian State University (ASU) these tasks – and many more – will be made easier by CONNX, a data access engine that makes it simple to access data for many uses, such as Web and PC application development and reporting.

In 1998, the university began implementing CONNX to gain easy access to RMS files residing on the school's Alpha cluster through popular PC front ends such as MS Access,

MS Word, and Brio. CONNX was modified to handle the data format requirements of a new version of Systems and Computer Technology (SCT), an application widely used by colleges and universities, including ASU.

As a result of its use of CONNX, Information Technology Services (ITS) has increased its contribution to the goals of the university by undertaking more application development, including Web-enabled applications. According to Steve Hopper, Associate Director of Administrative Applications, the Alumni, Human Resources Traffic, and Financial Aid offices will all enjoy the benefits of new programs that rely on CONNX.

For the Web applications, CONNX provides a real-time Web connection to RMS data. "We built an e-mail directory application

for the Alumni office using Active Server Pages," Hopper explains. "We use CONNX to validate in our legacy system that the person submitting the information for the directory is a graduate." The Human Resource department requested a Web-based application so employees could access the department's in-house OpenVMS legacy HR application to look at all aspects of their employee record. "The new browser-based application gives our employees the information and frees the department from fielding numerous questions daily," according to Hopper. Also, members of the university community will be able to use the Web to identify and validate parking lot options, then pay their fees electronically using a credit card.

"Probably the biggest users of CONNX are in the Financial Aid office," says Hopper. "For example, the

Appalachian State University continued department recently used CONNX to select the names of the athletes from our RMS data. Then employees used Word and the merge feature in Access to create customized letters. A task that used to take two to three weeks only took a couple of days with the CONNX solution."

CONNX has also improved the school's ability to produce ad hoc reports. Prior to the CONNX implementation, each administrative department at ASU had only one employee with the skills to create reports using FOCUS. If another employee needed information, the sole departmental expert generated it, a task that frequently derailed an already tight schedule. Sometimes departments called upon the programming staff in ITS (Information Technology Services) to produce urgently needed reports, compromising that group's schedule and procedural policies.

Two to five employees per administrative office can now generate reports, an expansion in expertise with positive results for everyone. Individual administrative departments gain autonomy for their reporting activities thanks to CONNX. Users can get their reports much faster because they can create the reports themselves. In addition, ITS has been relieved of much of its reporting responsibility, freeing it to do more application development, especially Web to legacy programs, in such high demand at the school.

Although users never have to learn the technical features of CONNX, Amy Winebarger, ASU's Applications Programmer/Analyst, and Hopper agree that a key technical benefit is the way it breaks very large files into a (logical) flat-file or relational presentation, which simplifies legacy data access and use. "Users

don't have to do extra coding to get to the data in a recurring segment and they don't have to learn file structure software, which makes their work much easier," Winebarger says. Programmers also appreciate CONNX's ease of use for their purposes. "I'm an application programmer accustomed to working in a mainframe environment," explains Winebarger. "CONNX has given me the opportunity to develop PC applications."

As the university improves its use of CONNX and plans ways to extend it, ITS relies on technical support from CONNX Solutions. An on-site visit helped the school enhance performance of its back-end system and pave the way for easily getting updated versions of the product out to users. "These individuals spent time in every functional department that was using CONNX and showed the employees, one-on-one, how to use the keys," recalls Winebarger. "They also gave us tips on changing features that would make our back-end querying efforts more efficient. And they showed us how to set up Quick Install, which will make future upgrade installations even simpler," She feels that, "Their time here reinforced that the company is very customer-oriented and wants to provide a high level of support."

Appalachian State University, founded in 1899 as Watauga Academy, is located on 340 acres in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. With an enrollment of over 12,000 students taught by over 500 faculty members, the school offers nearly 100 undergraduate majors, more than 80 graduate majors, and is the sixth largest university in the University of North Carolina system.

About CONNX Solutions. CONNX Solutions, Inc., with its flagship software product, CONNX, brings EAI/universal data access technology to over 3,000 organizations worldwide by enabling access to all enterprise data, regardless of origin, through one interface. The company maintains strategic relationships with industry-leading organizations including Microsoft Corporation; Oracle Corporation; Sybase Inc.; Informix; Computer Associates International, Inc.; IBM Corporation; and Compaq Computer Corporation. Founded in 1989, CONNX remains locally owned and managed through its headquarters in Redmond, Washington.



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