



INDIAN RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Indian River Community College (IRCC), in Fort Pierce, Florida, with 12,000 current students, is a leader in the use of technology in education. In fact, they received a national #1 ranking for 2005 among medium-sized community colleges from the Center for Digital Education for their use of technology, both in their curriculum and in their administrative support functions.

As a technology innovator, IRCC saw the need to move to an integrated document management solution to address their challenges with student records and in fact paper and business processes throughout their organization. IRCC selected Fortis from Westbrook Technologies as a replacement for their prior-generation image capture software, and found themselves with a powerful tool that they put to use in multiple functional areas of their institution.

Working with PMI Imaging of Florida, IRCC has applied the Fortis document management system to several areas, including major applications for student records, accounts payable, the office of the president and financial aid. For IRCC, Fortis is a second generation solution for imaging and document storage, archiving, and retrieval, replacing an older Minolta imaging system.

Fortis has proved to be a valuable and popular solution to the explosion of paper throughout education. IRCC embracing of document management is large and growing. Currently over one million documents reside in the Fortis system, with hundreds added on a daily basis.

THE STUDENT RECORDS CHALLENGE

Indian River is typical of a two-year community college, in serving a large, dispersed and diverse student population. Their students in many cases are contending with a range of educational and economic challenges. Indian River is a dispersed institution, with four remote locations, in a seventy mile radius.

The institution serves a student body that, due to necessity, interrupts and resumes its education several times, sometimes with gaps as large as ten years or more. Some students, who are combining work with study, take a long time to complete their curriculum requirements.

In this environment, Indian River needed a solution that would allow them to retain, manage and archive all student records – including all correspondence and files – indefinitely. In particular, the ability to quickly find a student's old records and both respond to the student's request for information as well as offer the ability to retrieve and re-activate a record when a student re-enrolls at the institution.

Also challenging to IRCC as a distributed campus was the effective management of the accounts payable process, where the accounting staff was attempting to respond to an increasing volume of information requests from managers at offsite campus locations.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

The federal FERPA legislation places important responsibilities on the institution's management of student information. In particular, FERPA requires the institution to maintain the strict privacy of student records and ensure that the use of student educational records fall within strict usage and redaction guidelines.

The state public records act (FPRA) requires the institution to retain and make available to the public all official information, such as board of trustees' minutes and other official business.

THE FORTIS SOLUTION

The Fortis document management system is used at IRCC for all phases of document handling, from capture through retention through archiving. In a distributed campus setting, the Fortis implementation is design to improve business processes involving access to, retrieval of and archiving of records.

The initial application of Fortis and Indian River's biggest application is in the student records area. IRCC has a policy of retaining all student records – including all correspondence and files – indefinitely. All new records are now converted to electronic format, including transcripts, correspondence, and other student reports. The repository enforces a security regimen consistent with FERPA. With regards to the backlog of old paper records, current IRCC policy is to add old records into the electronic system when a student re-enrolls at IRCC.

Staff fielding requests for student records can now use the Fortis indexing and full text retrieval tools to quickly access records. The records in question can then be communicated directly over the phone, by email, or through hard copy output. Email is the most popular transmittal method.

A second major application of Fortis is in the accounts payable function. Invoices and invoice approvals are stored in Fortis so that account and payable inquiries can be handled quickly over the phone or by email transmittal of documentation. "High volume" users for both the student records information and accounts payables are given direct access to the Fortis application, with view only privileges, providing additional efficiency and responsiveness while still maintaining the integrity and security of the records.

A third application, providing compliance with the FRPA regulations is the capture and management of all board minutes and related official documents for the office of the President. These board minutes packages are typically 300 or more pages in length each, and the online repository provides significant savings in transmittal of these packages to the Trustees, as well as providing powerful search capabilities to find documents pertaining to a specific issue.

The overall implementation at IRCC, now entering its third year, currently involves over 1 million images managed online, with three scanners and a fiche reader used to capture new images.

BENEFITS TO INDIAN RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Indian River Community College has already achieved significant benefits from the Fortis System. The largest benefit has been in the area of speed and efficiency in servicing internal and external customers. Requests for both student records information and payables information can now be handled immediately, in seconds, directly over the phone or by email, saving minutes per request in search time and printing and transmittal costs. This results in an increase in servicing speeds of several hundred percent & the freeing of administrative staff time for other more valuable work. As older records are backfilled into the system, there are increasingly savings in storage real estate.

An added, important benefit is the ability to fully comply with FERPA through holding student records within a system that imposes a clear and auditable security policy. The use of Fortis in the Office of the President has also provided an ability to easily and fully comply with the Florida FPRA public records regulations.

The PMI Imaging / Fortis solution has within two years already provided a significant return on investment and competitive advantage for Indian River Community College. Other areas of application of document management within the community college are envisioned for the future, especially once it is fully established that vital physical records, such as personnel records, might be legally replaced by electronic versions.