

## TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY



# Misericordia University Streamlines Budgeting with Syntellis Axiom Higher Education Suite

## MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1924 in Dallas, Pennsylvania, Misericordia University is a private Catholic liberal arts institution that serves approximately 2,236 students. The University offers 37 degree programs across three academic colleges: arts and sciences, health sciences and education, and business. Misericordia's stated mission is to promote intellectual curiosity and critical thinking in a supportive and inclusive community, inspiring students to engage in a life of service and global citizenship. Misericordia was ranked among the top 60 Best Value Schools in the Nation in the 2023 edition of *U.S. News & World Report: Best Colleges*.

## INITIAL CHALLENGES

Misericordia University Director of Budgets and Accounting Matthew Hornak says the University leveraged a spreadsheet-driven budget process for many years. Budget managers

manually entered budget information into spreadsheets, and then Hornak verified and compiled the information. The University had been wanting to move away from the inefficient manual data entry processes, and, in 2019, Misericordia hired a new vice president of finance and administration who secured executive approval to find and implement a modern budgeting, enterprise planning, and reporting solution.

## SELECTING SYNTELLIS AXIOM HIGHER EDUCATION SUITE

The University team conducted an extensive evaluation, narrowing its focus to several vendors. After meeting with the vendors, Misericordia ranked them based on each solution's demonstrated functionality and cost. Syntellis and its Axiom Higher Education Suite stood out to the selection team because the company had a proven track record of working with higher education institutions. The Misericordia team also noticed that the Syntellis consultants they met with had previously held finance positions in colleges and universities and demonstrated a thorough knowledge of higher education operations and requirements.

Misericordia discovered that the Axiom Higher Education Suite was robust and flexible, enabling it to support the requirements of the approximately 100 budget managers in the University's distributed budget management structure. Hornak reports that when Syntellis demonstrated the Axiom solution, the Misericordia team found its interface and sleek reporting dashboards intuitive. Hornak expected that Misericordia's budget managers would be able to adopt Axiom's straightforward dashboard reports and use the solution's budgeting functionality without the need for extensive training.

Beyond the University's immediate budgeting and reporting needs, Axiom also provided budget forecasting and tuition planning functionality that could benefit Misericordia in the future. In late 2019, Misericordia negotiated and signed a contract with Syntellis to implement the Axiom Higher Education Suite.



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## IMPLEMENTATION AND ROLLOUT

Misericordia began the Axiom implementation at the beginning of 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic began. It soon became clear that the implementation project team needed to redirect its focus to responding to the pandemic, so the progress of the Axiom implementation was slowed. Misericordia aligned its staff to focus on implementing Axiom's budgeting functionality, since optimizing budgeting was the most critical Axiom use case for the University.

The Misericordia team worked with Syntellis to implement the budgeting solution in time for the 2021 budget cycle. Hornak says Syntellis was flexible and worked with Misericordia to implement and configure the budget module despite ongoing pandemic-related disruptions. Misericordia's IT budget managers tested the solution, and Syntellis worked with them to address the issues they found. Misericordia went live with the Axiom Budgeting and Forecasting module at the end of 2020.

## PROJECT STATUS AND BENEFITS

Misericordia is currently in its third budget cycle using Axiom, and the solution's functionality has shortened the University's budget cycles. In the past, after each budget manager submitted their budget, Hornak had to compile the information from the various spreadsheets (which could take up to two months) before the budget committee could meet. Axiom has automated the compiling work, allowing the budget committee to meet immediately after managers submit their budgets. Further, department budget managers now have ongoing self-service access to view budget-to-actual reports in Axiom.

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## BEST PRACTICES FOR USING AXIOM

Hornak says that implementing the Axiom budgeting module has highlighted inefficiencies in the University's existing account and revenue structure. Currently, Misericordia allocates all undergraduate revenue into one general budget, which requires manual work to sort out the amounts for each department. The University plans to change the structure so that Axiom will automatically charge and allocate revenue to each department.

Once the team has addressed its account and revenue structure, it intends to implement the Axiom tuition module. Misericordia also hopes to free up resources so that it can devote staff to exploring and implementing Axiom's forecasting functionality.

Hornak says that it is important for institutions to understand that the Axiom Higher Education Suite is not likely to fully meet their requirements right out of the box. The solution is robust and offers many options, and institutions will need to devote resources to building it out and configuring it. To get the most out of Axiom, Hornak says it is best to dedicate a full-time employee to managing the solution, working in it on a daily basis, and creating and adjusting reports. Hornak also notes that Syntellis hosts a higher education Axiom user group that meets regularly online to discuss their projects, issues, and best practices, which is a great resource as institutions implement and identify use cases for the solution.

## REFERENCES

Tambellini interviewed Misericordia University Director of Budgets and Accounting Matthew Hornak for this research. Tambellini also used publicly available information.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The purpose of this report is to provide higher education institutions with information about the objectives, solutions, and outcomes related to the utilization of technology in colleges and universities across the US.

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