



Efficient Budgeting, Strategic Planning Made Easy for The University of Alabama

When The University of Alabama (UA) finance staff sought to leverage the data from its Ellucian Banner ERP, it turned to Axiom to manage key financial processes with a single source of truth, data visualization, and reporting.

"We have a nightly data load from Ellucian to Axiom that occurs automatically and seamlessly," says Adam Tate, Executive Director of Finance at The University of Alabama Central Office. "We go home, and when we return the next day, the data is updated."

Previously, data was updated monthly about a week after month-end close, so reporting lagged by as many as five weeks. Central office executives wanted to better leverage the data it had to make decisions and share with users beyond central administration staff, so daily data feeds are crucial to timely and insightful reporting.

"Axiom provides the opportunity for almost any user on campus — even non-financial users — to quickly and easily assess high-level performance for nearly any area they would be interested in," Tate says.

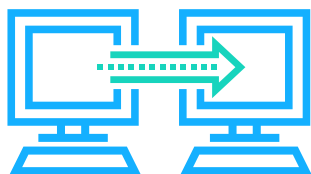
THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA[®]

Consistency in Data Reporting and Dashboards

The UA central office sought consistency in how data was leveraged and discussed among those who review and approve budgets. The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and UAB Hospital both use Axiom, so UA took advantage of the existing contract to purchase Axiom without the need for an RFP. The university adopted Axiom™ Budgeting & Forecasting, Axiom™ Reporting & Analytics, Axiom™ Capital Planning, Axiom™ Long-Range Planning, and Axiom™ Tuition Planning.

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Automatic nightly data feed from Ellucian Banner ERP to Axiom

5 weeks
to **1 day**

Improvement in data timeliness



faster report creation

"We were not trying to match what the other institutions were doing, but we certainly did want there to be familiar reports and a uniform way across campus that we talk about certain reports," says Tate, whose areas of responsibility include budgeting, financial accounting and reporting, tax office, and procurement. "We now have budget review meetings annually with each college and its divisions. Participants come to these meetings with a standard template powered by Axiom dashboards and reporting."

The finance team created several dashboards that focus on specific topic areas. One scorecard shows where a department stands financially as a percentage of actual to budget. In the third quarter, for example, department spending should be about 75% of budget. Other dashboard examples include scholarship spending and an endowment dashboard that lists the top 25 fund balances for a department or college.

Daily Data Load Enables Up-to-Date Reporting

The Ellucian integration features daily data transfer that makes up-to-date reporting possible, Tate says, as does the ease of creating periodic and custom reports. He estimates the department creates reports 20% faster than in the former system and adds that those reports are much timelier.

"We had lots of reports in the old system that would line up by position, like by faculty member, but we didn't have a very good way of looking at summary totals by academic department or college," Tate recalls. "You could spend a lot of time in the line-item detail and still not have a good idea if overall we were meeting the goal set for the college or department."

The university has undergone significant growth in the past 15 years, so much so that going over budget was nearly impossible, Tate says. But as the pace of growth slows,

the finance department wanted timelier data to make more proactive decisions. The university is beginning to leverage Axiom Long-Range Planning and Tuition Planning to create differing scenarios to inform medium- and long-range strategic plans.

Flexibility to Adjust Budgets as Needed

A positive implementation experience sets the stage for a healthy working relationship, and Tate was pleased with the Syntellis experience. "With Axiom, the implementation team met the upfront discussions. The product met the sales pitch. And we got what we thought we were getting, which is not always the case with other vendors," Tate says.

After more than two years since implementation, Tate remains impressed with the responsiveness of the Syntellis team with product updates, maintenance, and dedicated support.

But at the end of the day, it's the quality and usability of the software that matter most, along with its ability to integrate with an institution's other software. Compatibility with Ellucian certainly helped, and Tate and his staff deeply appreciate Axiom's ability to bring consistency, transparency, and flexibility into budgeting, planning, and decision-making processes.

"We have been able to translate our annual budget proposal and recreate that at the individual college or division level," Tate says. "Then we pulled back that curtain and can now show people how their piece of the pie rolls into the consolidated budget we're proposing to the board or reporting on quarterly.

"I really appreciate the flexibility that Axiom offers," Tate says. "Whether we change our budget practices or see the need for additional reports or dashboards, we can quickly change and adjust as needed."