Customer: Whitman College  
Industry: Education  
Web Site: www.whitman.edu

Critical Issue  
Getting offers for admission in the hands of prospective students faster required a better way to manage a mountain of paper files in the student admissions process.

Solution  
Replacing paper and hard copy distribution of admissions documents with a digital system that puts information in the hands of decision makers sooner and at a lower cost.

Results  
Admission process is streamlined and more efficient, and a flexible platform is in place that supports Financial Aid records and other areas of campus operations.

Software and Services  
Document Locator  
WebTools  
ScanStation

"Document Locator is not only saving us money from shipping and labor, but the more important benefit is that decisions are made faster."

Michael Quiner  
Director of Enterprise Technology  
Whitman College

Document management earns top grades at one of America’s top colleges  

Ranked among the Top 100 Colleges by Forbes magazine in 2011 as number 36 in the nation, Whitman College in eastern Washington State is a distinguished liberal arts institution known as much for its academia as its Pacific Northwest campus lifestyle.

Whitman students and faculty enjoy an outdoorsy presence at a campus that doubles as both an arboretum and an outdoor art museum. Located in the welcoming college town of Walla Walla, the 117 acre campus is home to an extraordinary diversity of talents, interests, activities, and people that embrace distinctive qualities and sense of balance.

From its early beginnings 1859, to its transition to a four-year college in 1882, and up to the present day, Whitman College has prized its independence and set a course of leadership in education. In 1913, the college was the first in the nation to require undergraduate students to complete comprehensive examinations in their major fields.

Winning the race for students in Admissions  

The front runner spirit lives on today at Whitman, where it is no surprise the college was an early adopter of new technology designed to solve a problem faced by so many colleges and universities: How to better manage a mountain of paper documents in the student admissions process.

Staff in Whitman’s Admission Office needed to find a way to manage and distribute student application packets more efficiently. The application packets contain everything from essays, to references, to student applications, and are the primary basis on which decisions to offer admission are made. There simply had to be an easier and faster way to drive the decision-making process, and paper was slowing down everything.
“Admission wants to get their offers in the hands of students as quickly as possible,” commented Michael Quiner, Director of Enterprise Technology at Whitman College. “Document Locator has taken our admissions review process completely paperless, putting files in the hands of the Admissions Committee right away so that decisions can be made and offers for admission get out sooner.”

Using Document Locator, the contents of student application packets received in the mail or by fax are digitally scanned into the admission repositories of the document management system upon arrival. Files received electronically via email and The Common Application admissions system are brought in as well.

As files arrive in the system, Document Locator’s AutoPath technology speeds categorization and organization of the records. Folder structures are automatically created, file names are auto-generated, and metadata (facts about the files) are tagged with values like student identification numbers that make it easy to correlate and find records later.

Meanwhile, electronic workflows automatically notify Admissions Committee members so their review process can begin immediately. A convenient Web access portal hosted on-site by Whitman allows authorized committee members to log-in and review records over the Internet from any location. Files remain securely managed on campus servers, while information is in the hands of decision-makers sooner.

“Prior to Document Locator, every admission packet for every student was photocopied many times over and FedEx’d to committee members. Files were misplaced, they had to be reshipped, and the whole process was manual.” said Quiner. “Document Locator is not only saving us money from shipping and labor, but the more important benefit is that decisions are made faster.”

Easy audits in Financial Aid

With admission optimized, Whitman turned its already-deployed document management system towards the next biggest paper-trail on campus: Financial Aid.

Regulatory requirements that govern retention periods for student financial aid documents presented a long term storage and auditing challenge. Files can be requested at any time in audits. The school must provide all relevant and required information quickly.

“Filing cabinets are an inefficient and risky way to store sensitive documents, and this is particularly true when the information contained within is subject to any kind of regulatory control or potential audit,” commented Quiner. “With everything searchable in Document Locator, the amount of time it takes to retrieve information when needed is dramatically reduced and everything is backed-up so it is fully-recoverable in the event of a loss.”

From Admission and Financial aid it was easy to share the documents with other offices on campus that need access to a student’s file such as the Dean of Students and the Registrar office. Seeing the ease and accessibility afforded these offices has prompted the student accounts office to start attaching account and payment documents to student’s records using Document Locator.

Leveraging an investment

Finding a better solution for managing admission packets, even when it came to extending access to decision-makers who were off-campus, turned out to be a simple fix at Whitman College with Document Locator. Having taken care of the immediate need in Admission, Whitman now has a flexible system that can be leveraged in virtually any area of paperless administration in the college. Financial Aid records are a case in point. With the software deployed, and staff familiar and comfortable with the easy Windows integrated interface, the system is ready to improve everything from facilities management, to academic offices, to accounting, to human resources... and more.