How the University of Wisconsin–Madison uses Apply as a force multiplier

Stats
$100k+ annual savings
Staff effort amplification of 1.5 FTE
40,000 researchers impacted

Strategic goal
Streamline admissions and funding processes
Collect data for informed decision-making
Work more efficiently

Solution
SurveyMonkey Apply

Success factor
Ease of use
Efficiencies of scale
Actionable data

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> It was the best available product at the time, and it continues to be. Apply is so simple, bulletproof, and self-explanatory that we don't have the challenges that we do with other systems that have a lot of quirks and idiosyncrasies.

Max Coller
Distinguished Business Systems Analyst,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Supporting research and graduate education programs

The University of Wisconsin–Madison's Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education (OVCRGE) is dedicated to addressing the complex challenges of the University's broad research enterprise and supporting the needs of graduate education across campus. With oversight for about $1.3 billion in annual research expenditures, a figure that puts it in the top 10 universities in the nation for volume of research, that's a not-insignificant task.

The OVCRGE has long used the SurveyMonkey Apply platform to streamline how it collects and reviews applications for prospective graduate students, research grants, scholarships, awards and other programs. The office is charged with reviewing research proposals and allocating funding as well as awarding financial aid to graduate students and ensuring that the people who are doing the research and who conduct graduate education do their work efficiently according to compliance standards set by the University, the state of Wisconsin, and the United States government.

Streamlining funding and admissions decisions

The OVCRGE uses Apply for multiple work streams involving prospective applicants, successful candidates, and researchers who are applying for admission, scholarships, and funding. Its workflows make the application process as well as decision-making about people and processes simpler and more efficient, said Max Coller, distinguished business system analyst for the OVCRGE.

The OVCRGE also used Apply to restart research activities after the pandemic shuttered the University in March 2020. As the university prepared to bring back students and researchers to campus to work in what were traditionally tightly packed labs and research spaces, leaders wanted to ensure that anyone who wanted to return to campus could do so safely.

Coller's team needed a way to track each person in each building on the UW-Madison campus to ensure that they weren't exceeding pandemic occupancy limits and enable contact tracing if an outbreak occurred. Coller used the Apply platform to collect data from all of the university's researchers—data that was used by university health services as well as facilities, planning, and management teams.

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> All of our internal customers would receive a fresh batch of data each morning about what had happened the previous day. It was an all-hands-on-deck situation, and we needed to have results. This tool helped us create those results.

Max Coller
Distinguished Business Systems Analyst,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Reducing the need for support staff

Apply serves as a force multiplier that enables an IT team member to help multiple users configure their own applications—even people without strong technical skills can use the platform. With Apply, the office has also been able to turn non-technical team members into "quasi-technical functional people" who then help other members of their teams as needed, Coller said.

"They become essentially like an IT support person for their domain," Coller said. "If people need a new form, they can add a new form. If they need a new user, they can add a new user. And at any point in time they can just click on that little help icon in the upper right-hand corner and get help from customer service. They're not being thrown to the wolves—there's still a collaborative approach to this, but they're not waiting on me to do all the technical work."

Apply helps the OVCRGE oversee research and graduate programs more efficiently—a critically important capability given ongoing staffing challenges. "The labor savings are huge, because IT is always short-staffed," Coller said. "We're throwing software at a human problem."