

A Migration Experience with Nelnet



Brookdale Community College needed to quickly migrate to a new payment solution with custom features - Nelnet made it happen.



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Brookdale Community College

Institution Type: Community College

Enrollment: 9,566

Solutions: Payment Plans, Service Fee

Challenge: Brookdale was preparing for a new student account presentment/payment facilitation platform after learning their current platform provider, TMS, was acquired by Nelnet Campus Commerce. With the acquisition, they needed Nelnet to create payment plan features in Enterprise for multiple Parent Terms, along with maintaining the ability to continue the use of a Service Fee program to offset the absorption of merchant fees associated with credit card acceptance.

Result: The Nelnet Campus Commerce Enterprise platform was selected as the successor to their previous provider. The Nelnet development team worked hard to quickly complete the desired enhancements and did so within a tight 2-3 month timeframe. Nelnet was able to build the features in Enterprise needed for the Parent Term functionality and implemented the Service Fee program which continued to realize a cost savings to the college.

Brookdale's Migration and Implementation Journey

Brookdale Community College serves over 20,000 students per year. With six locations across all parts of Monmouth County, New Jersey, [Brookdale's](#) mission is to empower a diverse community by providing open access to high-quality and cost-effective educational and lifelong learning options with clear paths to personal, educational, and economic success.

When it was announced that TMS had been acquired by Nelnet Campus Commerce, the Brookdale team began evaluating their options for a new student account presentment/payment facilitation platform. After much consideration and a meeting with Nelnet team members, they decided to continue to leverage Colleague along with the Nelnet Campus Commerce Enterprise platform to deliver [payment plans](#) with one-time tuition payment processing via Student Billing and Payments, all within one centralized platform. Also, Brookdale implemented two-way integration, as well as SSO authentication. In the span of just a few months Nelnet worked with Brookdale to ensure the migration would be complete by the upcoming term. "After 13 years with TMS, Brookdale transitioned to Nelnet's Enterprise platform. [Nelnet's Implementation Team](#) guided us all the way through a seamless and quick conversion in time for the fall 2020 term," shared Mike DeStefano, Manager-Accounts Receivable at Brookdale Community College.



Developing the Parent Term Payment Solution

At the time of migration, Nelnet saw the opportunity to resolve two issues Brookdale faced regarding payment processing across campus. The first was they needed the ability to offer payment plans for multiple Parent Terms for a single enrollment fee. Nelnet brought their ability to scope, develop, and deliver this functionality on time, filling in the gaps, and making this custom payment solution a reality.

Brookdale gained several benefits with this new payment plan. Now, their families saw enrollment fees as more affordable since this new solution allowed for one enrollment fee per term, regardless of whether charges spanned multiple mini-terms. Internally at Brookdale, the staff saw similar payment plan processes, which increased their level of comfort with the new system. "Brookdale was the beta institution for offering multi-term payment plans in a real-time environment, which helped save students taking classes in multiple mini-terms per semester both time and money. Partnering with Nelnet has proven to provide many advantages for institutions and students alike," explained DeStefano. As for other institutions using similar payment plans, Jake Wilderman, Account Manager for Nelnet Campus Commerce, shared, "Many community college students do take mini-term classes, and since it's not feasible to charge them more than one agreement fee within a term, we found grouping them together is a fair approach for all those involved."



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Continuing the Use of a Service Fee Program

The second issue Brookdale faced was they needed the new payment platform to function similarly to what they previously had. Rather than the Discount Fee setup that institutions usually offer, Brookdale needed to continue offering a Service Fee configuration. A Service Fee offsets the absorption of merchant fees associated with credit card acceptance and passes the fees onto the payer. A Discount Fee requires the institution to pay the credit card fees. With the use of a Service Fee, Brookdale needed to be transparent with the payers who chose to use credit cards as their payment method. And, with costs increasing at their institution, they needed to justify the reason for this change that would help keep education affordable.

The news of the Service Fee program was clearly communicated within the Enterprise platform, which offered a convenient way to let the payers know these fees were being passed on to them. Since Brookdale offers other no-cost options of paying, credit cards were viewed as an additional choice of payment. When it comes to fees like this, Wilderman said, "Having a Service Fee is becoming commonplace as colleges and universities continue to look for ways to reduce costs. Generally, this transition is straightforward and is becoming more accepted in the Higher Education marketplace. Because credit cards are not the only payment method offered, and other means exist, it's merely presented as a choice for those who prefer to pay via credit card and don't mind the fee associated with that option."

By using a Service Fee, Brookdale has saved roughly \$275K in merchant fees. There has been no negative impact on enrollment or service — just a positive impact on budget.

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- Mike DeStefano, Manager-Accounts Receivable