

Caring for the Everyday Student

Canadian university's comprehensive portal connects and empowers student body with solutions to everyday needs

Summary

Canadian university creates comprehensive education portal to support 55,000 students.

My.Yorku.ca

In Brief

INDUSTRY:

Education

COUNTRY/REGION:

Canada

USE CASE:

Portal

KEY FEATURES:

Documents & Media,
Comprehensive Integration,
Mobile Responsiveness

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Liferay Portal is a solid base on which to build to realize our goals with the required degree of flexibility and control over how we needed everything to work.

Peter Rowley, Director of Applications and Integration in
University Information Technology

Challenges

- Comply with educational standards and pre-existing applications in need of integration
- Support a student body of 55,000 without being able to extensively train its users
- Aggregate personalized education information and tools for daily student needs

Results

-  One-stop shop for students with access to both internal resources and external data
-  Responsive design helps students get important class information wherever they are
-  Comprehensive integration with calendars, newsfeeds, finances, class information and more
-  Creation of additional prospective student portal for learning more about the school

Supporting the Modern Student

Founded in 1959, York University is now Canada's third largest university and world renowned for attracting students who forge their own unique paths to success. York offers full and part-time graduate and undergraduate degree programs to almost 55,000 students through 10 faculties. For an institution of York University's size, keeping its students engaged and involved is crucial to retention. So when students began to voice frustration about making sense of all the content and tools available to them on York's website, York set new technological goals to remedy their pains.

It was decided that a portal would be the best functional and technological fit by pulling together course schedules, grades, financial information, library account status and campus news in one centralized hub. York needed a high degree of flexibility in a portal framework. Issues like standards compliance and the need for extensive application integration drove their eventual selection of Liferay Portal for its SOA design and adherence to open standards.

"We found that we were better served by an open source solution as it allowed us to understand it thoroughly before we made a full commitment," said Peter Rowley, Director of Applications and Integration in University Information Technology, York's central IT organization.

With the portal presenting a wide variety of content and tools, ease of use was paramount.

"Liferay's simple user interface was key to the portal being adopted by a large audience of students who didn't have time to be trained," said Kate Stewart, an independent consultant on the project. "It was also important that it was straightforward to adapt the portal to reflect York's brand and to support a French language interface for Glendon, our bilingual campus."

Building a Student Portal

In the first phase, York focused on the integration of its many data sources (grades, student records, repositories of course and financial information) with Liferay's framework. Today, My.Yorku.ca is the central information source for 55,000 students and supports up to 18,000 visits per day. The site offers access to both internal resources and external data, including:

- Class and grade information
- Financial account information
- Library account information
- A personalized exam schedule
- Research published guides for courses
- To-do lists and bookmarks
- Personalized class calendar
- University email and personal IMAP email accounts
- Daily news and information from the campus

In subsequent phases, York University rolled out a convenient portal for prospective students (myfuture.yorku.ca) and provided integration of the learning management system Moodle for easy access to online course content. My.Yorku.ca has also gone mobile for viewing and navigation on users' smartphones.

"When students understand the resources available to help them succeed at York, they are more likely to graduate, which is of course one of York's primary goals," Rowley said.

At the end-user level, Liferay Portal's granular system of role-based authorizations grants each individual user the ability to move, add or delete the tools in his/her own view to suit their needs. Looking forward, York University will explore Liferay's new collaboration tools for use in portals to be built for York's staff and instructors.