

## CAN ALL UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS BE SHARED VIA THE CLOUD

This paper explores whether University Administrative systems could ever be moved fully to the Cloud, and delivered as Software as a Service. Whether this is possible depends on what Universities can or will share services, how integrated their systems need to be, and how specific their needs are, nationally and individually.

In Australia there are already many examples of sharing, including the collaborative sources for the sharing of platforms for research data, global library systems, which are part of the merging of digital and physical access in libraries, and global teaching and learning platforms such as Blackboard. According to Brad Wheeler, one of the plenary speakers at EDUCAUSE Australia 2011, this aggregation is critical if Universities are to flourish as they become more dependent on IT for research, teaching and administration. He gave examples of globalisation in scholarly communications, and of sharing via collaboration, including books, journals, textbooks, learning and administration.

Many shared technologies are now offered, and used, via the Cloud. The Cloud allows the delivery of a variety of services, including Platform as a Service, Database as a Service and Software as a Service. This discussion focuses on Software as a Service, and in particular, administrative services, and asks whether they are ever likely to be made available to a broad community via the Cloud. For this to happen, Universities would have to use services which had potentially been standardised at a global level. They would also need to integrate such services, either on a site by site basis, or using Integration as a Service.

Certainly there are some areas where Cloud based administrative services are taking hold – for example 50% of Australian Universities now use a Cloud-based customer relationship system for student recruitment.

However, there are some aspects of Australian university systems that may not be amenable to broad, international sharing. Curriculum is often unique to a university, or set of Universities, as are rules regarding the student record, enrolment and graduation. The federal Government introduces legislation which forces mandatory system changes, often within tight deadlines. These regularly include ever more complex and detailed external reporting needs. Moreover, some aspects of student administration require tight integration of complex data; something that is problematic when using cloud-based sharing.

The first attempt at sharing systems, on a national scale, was in the 1990s, via CASMAC, and the difficulties of providing a system which suited all needs was demonstrated in the negotiations for software design. Currently student administration systems in Australian Universities are divided into three main groups, of roughly equal size, serviced by specific vendors. Each vendor has its own model of sharing, and each model of sharing has matured and changed over time. Universities vary in their choice of HR and Finance systems, some choosing best of breed and others using the same provider as their student administration system, but in many cases HR and Finance systems are also currently unique to Australian universities.

This paper discusses the detailed issues surrounding the possibility that Australian universities would move towards cloud based services for the full range of administrative services. Such a large-scale move would depend on changes on several fronts. Australian universities would have to be prepared to change their curriculum design in line with some sort of global standard. The Australian Government would have to be prepared to modify its demands in line with those of other countries.

These broad, political moves may not be possible. It may be that the current cluster sharing within Australia is the best model for the future. On the other hand, there may be some sort of middle ground. The fundamental needs for integrated systems which encompass the specific needs of Australian universities may be more closely defined, as cloud solutions “whittle away” at the needs for administrative support until just a small, integrated core is left. This would require extensive negotiation within clusters, and would also have significant repercussions for vendors.

The full paper for this presentation can be found [here](#).

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