

With Brava's Content Sealed Format (CSF), The George Washington University makes the grade in transcript security

Industry

- Higher Education

University Facts

- More than 20,000 students enrolled
- Created in 1821

Challenge

- Transition from paper to electronic process
- Maintain the integrity and security of electronic transcripts

Environment

- EMC Documentum

Brava & Net-It Solution

- CSF to lock down and securely share transcripts
- Watermarks to identify unofficial transcripts

University Overview

Located in the heart of the nation's capital, The George Washington University (GW) was created by an Act of Congress in 1821. The University enrolls more than 20,000 students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 130 countries. The largest of GW's academic units, the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, has 440 faculty members teaching courses ranging from Japanese, Journalism, and Judaic Studies, to Biophysics, History, and Interior Design.

The Challenge – Securing Electronic Transcripts

GW's Columbian College has an Undergraduate Advising Department dedicated to advancing the academic, professional, and personal development of its students. Toward that effort, Department advisors rely on transcripts for critical information such as the student's current class load, past academic performance, and any previous notes made by the advisor.

A great deal of the college's documentation is stored in and managed by GWDOCUMENTS, a custom application built on the EMC[®] Documentum[®] Webtop application. GWDOCUMENTS stores student applications, transcripts, college admissions materials, as well as documents used in the advising process. Despite having this solid document management system, GW faced challenges around the still paper-based advising process.

Rick Gilchrist, GW's Director of Enterprise Document Management, recalls, "A student would go to the Advising Department to schedule an appointment. The employee at the front office would schedule it, call up the student's transcript from Documentum, print it out, and then walk over to a large filing room where all the records are kept. The employee would then search for the student's file, put the paper transcript into the folder and do an internal transfer of the folder over to the student's advisor."

The manual process didn't end there. Gilchrist goes on to explain that once the student would come in for his session, the advisor would hand-write changes to the student's curriculum, such as class hours or units, on the transcript. Sometimes the notes were written directly on the student's transcript, other times the advisor would attach sticky notes to the document. Then the advisor would make a photocopy to give to the student and put the original, marked-up transcript back in the student's folder for the student to return to the front office.

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Because transcripts are so important in the advising process, GW needed a way to give advisors access to viewing, annotating and sharing transcripts in a more timely and efficient manner. GW also needed an electronic solution that would not compromise the integrity of its students' transcripts.

Gilchrist explains that the school Registrar has high security requirements so any kind of transcript coming from an electronic base has to be secure. "We needed a way to lock down the transcript so that a student could not pick it up electronically and change his grades or modify the transcript in any way."

GW looked into converting the transcript to PDF, moving it into the EMC Documentum repository, and having the advisor print it out and work from the PDF. But according to Gilchrist, the school was concerned that PDFs were too easy to compromise. Because PDF is an open format there are a number of software packages available to edit PDF documents. "Initially, our plan was to encrypt and password protect the PDF but then one of our developers went out into the internet and for \$20 bought a package that was able to hack the transcript and so we decided PDF was not a good direction to go in."

GW's direction eventually led them to Net-It® and Brava!® solutions by Arizona-based Informative Graphics Corp. and their proprietary Content Sealed Format (CSF).

The Solution – CSF, Net-It, and Brava

GW's Registrar has high security requirements and any kind of transcript coming from an electronic base needs to be locked down so that no one can pick it up, change grades, or do anything to tamper with the official document. Able to meet these tough requirements, Informative Graphics' CSF file format is a great fit for the Registrar's document security needs.

Similar to PDF and TIFF, CSF is an accurate, encrypted rendition of the source file. But unlike PDF or TIFF, CSF is not an open format so no third party translators, editors or conversion tools exist to compromise content security. Viewable only with Brava products, CSF ensures that transcripts cannot be modified.

GW uses Net-It Enterprise to automatically convert PDFs of student transcripts into CSF, then the CSF file is imported into GWDOCUMENTS. Gilchrist describes the efficiency of securely sharing CSF transcripts. "Another thing we did that's kind of neat is that when an appointment is scheduled for a student, the front desk can now send the transcript directly to the advisor's 'Favorites' list in Documentum," he explains. This means no more searching for paper transcripts; no more walking folders over from the front office to the advisor's office.

Once the student and the advisor do sit down to meet, the advisor uses Brava to view and annotate the CSF transcript before saving it back into Documentum. With Brava, electronic notes stay with the transcript---no sticky notes fall off. And with CSF, the transcript can be securely and conveniently shared with the student.

Having done its homework, GW uses Informative Graphics' CSF, Net-It, and Brava products to enable a more efficient and secure advising process with its faculty and students.