



Montana State University Transforms Data Integration, Budgeting, Reporting, and Labor Planning with Axiom Software

Challenges

Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman, Montana, is the state's largest university with an enrollment of 16,902 total students, 602 full-time faculty, and 460 part-time faculty. The largest campus of the Montana State University System, MSU also ranks among the top 3% of the nation's higher education institutions for research expenditures, averaging more than \$100 million annually.

Solutions

Like many higher education institutions, MSU's budget team recognized that the increasingly complex demands of managing today's universities had outpaced their spreadsheet-based budgeting and reporting systems.

After an extensive evaluation in February 2017, MSU selected Syntellis' Axiom® Budgeting and Forecasting and Reporting and Analytics solutions. A key requirement of the evaluation was the ability of the budgeting and reporting solution to integrate with MSU's Ellucian® Banner® finance, HR, and student information systems.



Results

Axiom Budgeting streamlines the annual budget request process

MSU sought an enterprise performance management (EPM) system to standardize the budget process across the university, replace multiple spreadsheets with a single system, automate workflows between individual units and the Budget Office, and support budget initiatives. MSU's Budget Office used to build Excel-based budget spreadsheets and distribute them annually to each unit for budget proposals. Each unit would fill out its spreadsheet and return it to the Budget Office for review and approval by the budget committee. The process was time intensive, cumbersome, and not scalable.



Integration of financial data with student, human resources (HR), and operating ledger (OL) data from Banner



Streamlined annual budget process that ties budget requests to long-range and strategic plans



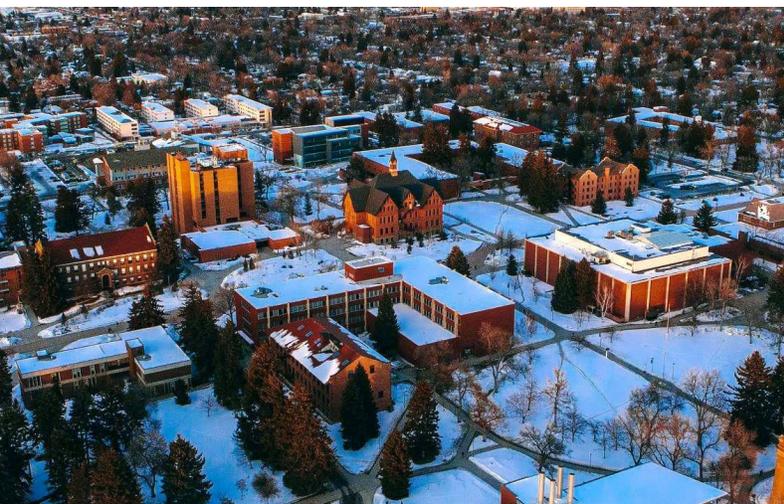
Simplified reporting and ad hoc analysis

Yearly, each unit budgets at 98% for the upcoming fiscal year, utilizing Axiom to identify where the 2% reduction is being made and identify strategic reasons for such decisions. At the same time, units can ask for additional funds via an on-demand request process that provides an explanation of the request, includes assessment measures, and ties to the strategic plan. The amount approved by the Budget Committee feeds into the long-range plan and pushes into the allocation file, which is what each unit ties to when they budget for the upcoming year. The workflows are managed by Axiom, simplifying the multi-tier approval process and giving the Budget Office better oversight. With the data feeding to Axiom tables, the Budget Office can quickly generate reports that summarize investment data as needed.

The Budget Office quickly recognized the power of Axiom software versus Excel when a state revenue shortfall forced the university to implement an institution-wide budget initiative. Montana State mandated a 2% budget cut after the Budget Office had already built the budget templates. Axiom's flexible templates made it easy for the Budget Office to modify the templates on the fly and distribute them to each unit.

Ad hoc reporting saves time and increases transparency

The ease of writing reports with Axiom Reporting and Analytics reduces manual work and saves considerable time



“ Our old system required that we download a lot of information from different sources and then manually input several adjustments to calculate 9-, 10-, and 12-month pay structures. Axiom Labor Planning does all of this – and more – for us. ”

Megan Lasso, Director, University Budget Office
Montana State University

for MSU's Budget Office and end users. Before implementing an EPM system, the Budget Office collected data from several sources and then relied on Excel to analyze the data. Axiom software's integration with Banner enables MSU's users to now access finance, HR, and student data from within the budget system.

Axiom software's easy-to-use ad hoc reporting capabilities allow end users to quickly create reports and respond to requests from stakeholders. Users can pull a single report and drill down into transactional levels of detail in their variance reports. Improved reporting has increased transparency and data confidence across the institution, helping them make more informed, data-driven decisions for the short and long term.

Managing complex labor planning processes across multiple campuses

Similar to most universities, labor comprises MSU's largest expense. The complexities of the university's labor planning processes were exacerbated because each of its four campuses managed labor planning differently. The university sought a solution to help standardize all four campuses to best practice planning methodologies. The university also needed a budget system that could

extrapolate payroll and HR data from Banner so users could view and analyze budget data and payroll data side-by-side, including historical data, position reports, and position management reports.

MSU uses a decentralized model for its labor planning budget process. The Budget Office builds labor budgets by organization and distributes them across 65 users. Last budget cycle, users reviewed their files in Axiom Labor Planning, downloaded reports from those files, and made adjustments as needed. "Our users are happy with the format and the ease by which they can make changes to their labor budgets," says Megan Lasso, Director, University Budget Office.

Axiom Labor Planning enables users to complete operational budgeting for individual budgets using index files, which include prior years of actual expenses. With budget data and historic trends in one place, teams build faster, more accurate budgets.

Transforming budget adjustments to an on-demand, electronic process

A core element of the new budgeting systems is the automation of the budget adjustment process. Prior to Axiom, the one-time budget adjustment process was time-consuming, error prone, and necessitated multiple points of communication around a single adjustment. With Axiom, MSU now has an end user on-demand process with an automated workflow that routes approvals to the appropriate parties, notifies the Budget Office, and automatically posts finalized adjustments to Banner Finance.

Driving end user engagement and adoption

MSU identified end-user adoption as critical to success, so the Budget Office involved users through all phases of the process — vendor selection, system design, training, and ongoing communication. One of the selection criteria in

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*Megan Lasso, Director, University Budget Office
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purchasing an EPM system was a solution in which users would feel comfortable with the interface and would not have a steep learning curve.

After go-live, the Budget Office drove user adoption by developing streamlined processes. End users quickly realized the value of Axiom because the powerful features simplify processes, reduce complexities, and save time.

What's in store for the future?

The university uses Axiom Tuition Planning to automate its assumptions and models to perform long-term forecasting. The automation has improved planning and enables MSU to respond to changes in this important revenue source.

Since rollout, due to factors affecting all of higher education, MSU is looking to update its tuition models. "Now that I understand its power, I think about all the other things we can do in the future," explains Lasso.