



Columbia College Saves \$80,000 in T&E Expenditures with Help from Concur

About Columbia College

Since its founding in 1851, Columbia College has fulfilled unmet educational needs. It began as an all-female college at a time when nearby public colleges only accepted males. Over the years, Columbia has evolved into a private, nonprofit, coed institution that serves 29,000 students through 36 locations in 13 states and Cuba. Although this institution is known for its experienced faculty and stellar liberal arts, science and professional services curriculum, Columbia College is equally known for making it possible for nontraditional students—like adults with full-time jobs and military personnel—to earn their degrees without disrupting their lives. In fact, many of the campuses are located near military bases.

Fixing a Broken T&E System

Columbia College grew so rapidly that, although it added staff and numerous campus locations, in many ways, it operated like a small, one-campus institution—particularly in the area of travel and expense management.

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- Bruce Boyer, CFO, Columbia College

“When I came in 1999, we had no real travel policy in place, no infrastructure to manage expenses and no real visibility into this spend,” explained Bruce Boyer, CFO of Columbia College. “We had a credit card program, but it was a nightmare to manage. Employees got their bills at home, then submitted these with a bundle of receipts—and we had to find a way to make card payments on time. The process was so cumbersome that most people stopped using the corporate card altogether.”

To request reimbursements, employees produced an Excel spreadsheet, printed it out, and stapled receipts to the hard copy. This paper routed through the approval process, sometimes sitting in inboxes for weeks before making it through to Accounts Payable (AP).

“At the time, I had an AP manager who spent 45 percent of her time managing the 100 expense reports that came in every month. I was going to have to add additional staff to keep up, or find a way to improve our efficiency,” Boyer said.



Organization Name

Columbia College

Solutions

Concur® Travel
Concur® Expense
TripLink
Intelligence
Expense Pay
Concur® Request

Industry

Higher Education

Number of Employees

750 employees
450 Concur users

Location

Columbia, Missouri

Why Concur?

- Centralized travel and expense management
- Complete visibility into spend
- Increased efficiency
- Reduced AP reconciliation time from 18 hours to a few hours a week
- Standardized travel and expense procedures in 35 locations
- Saved \$80,000 annually through efficiency and policy enforcement

Although most of the staff tried to find the best travel deals, without a policy, there were some indiscretions. One employee used a relative's travel agency, which charged \$45 per booking. Another paid more than \$900 for a 30-minute flight that was a very drivable distance.

"We knew we had to clean up T&E. We needed a real travel policy, a new credit card program and a travel management system that would enable us to implement controls to reduce spend," Boyer said.

Centralized. Standardized. Efficient.

After careful due diligence, Columbia College leaders determined that Concur Travel, Concur Expense and Triplt, a part of Triplink, were just what the institution needed.

"With Concur, we could centralize travel and expense management, and add in controls for policy adherence. Instead of paper, everything was electronic. Instead of attaching physical receipts to spreadsheets, employees could take pictures of the receipts, and automatically route the reimbursement request through the approval process," Boyer said. "Managers could approve the reports remotely, so it eliminated the lag time between when the request was submitted and when it got to us for processing."

When Boyer began the search for a new credit card, he made sure the RFP stipulated that the card worked with the Concur system.

"Concur automates credit card processing, from initial purchase to the general ledger. It can actually match invoices with card charges for us," Boyer said. "This not only makes it easy for our staff to use the credit cards, but also speeds processing, so we get the bills paid on time."

Of course, introducing a new policy, a new credit card and a new T&E process is never easy, particularly in a non-mandate culture. To increase adoption, Columbia College leaders chose a nine-month staggered, department-by-department rollout, complete with customized training, continual communications and the top-down support an initiative of this magnitude required. Communications focused around employee benefits—like

faster reimbursements, mobile access and easier receipt management.

Bit by bit, the new process gained advocates. In some cases, the departments that objected the most to the change became its biggest fans.

Visibility, Control and Cost Savings

Since implementing Concur, Columbia College has realized some significant results. Remember that full-time Accounts Payable manager who spent 18 hours a week processing reimbursements? Prior to Concur, Boyer considered adding an additional full-time employee to help with that workload.

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By directing employees to a preferred carrier and leveraging credit card rewards, Columbia College gained free flights and gift card benefits totalling between \$30,000 and \$40,000 annually. Employees also are incented to use the designated credit card, earning a \$50 gift card for every \$5,000 in legitimate expenses charged on the card. Increased card adoption, in conjunction with Concur's automated credit card expense workflow, reduces the time previously spent reconciling and paying

these charges. Those efficiencies add up to cost savings; freeing accounting personnel to perform other tasks.

According to Boyer, Concur's Triplt is critical to the initiative's overall success by making booking the best travel option convenient for travelers.

"Triplt is a secret saver for any organization. It lays out the options and feeds data directly into Concur," Boyer said. "I have so many stories on how this has saved us money by offering alternative airports or options that worked for our travelers and our budget."

Columbia College is also saving money by having a real, enforceable policy with centralized exception management, guiding employees to make better travel choices.

"When employees book travel through Concur or through our travel agency, they have to choose a flight within \$100 of the lowest fair or get an exception from me. While there are reasons for not adhering to the policy, we reject some of these requests," Boyer said. "Based on the exception requests we get, I estimate we're saving another \$40,000 or more by forcing spend within policy. I have to assume that those bookings were just happening before. "

To date, Boyer estimates that Concur, the new credit card and a formal travel policy have easily reduced costs by \$80,000 annually.

"Now, because of Concur, we have data. We can look at other areas we can save, like mileage. We can look at hotel discounts. We have visibility, so we can identify waste and find opportunities for savings," Boyer said. "Our goal is creating a cycle of continuous improvement."

In a relatively short time, Columbia College has completely transformed its Travel and Expense process, reduced costs and made life easier for college employees.

"Concur technology, in combination with better business practices, has made all of the difference for us," Boyer said. "We have definitely saved more than enough to justify the cost of Concur, and we're not done yet. I anticipate more savings, more efficiencies to come."

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