



UNION
UNIVERSITY

Union University slashed admin time by 50%

How one institution kicked off
its transformation with the
6-week launch of a new digital
assessment solution



watermark™

At a glance

UNION UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTION SNAPSHOT

Union University | Jackson, Tennessee



Institution type:
Private,
4-year university



Total enrolled students:
2,674



Total full-time faculty:
197



Number of campuses:
4

The obstacle

- Information overload complicated accreditation and assessment processes
- New administration learning curve; legacy systems; and internally developed, secure website made report-building and report creation tedious and slow

The solution

- [Watermark Planning & Self-Study](#)

The outcome

- Administrators cut reporting time by 50%
- Easier processes drive faculty buy-in, with better results
- Focus and assessment increase alumni engagement

“

“Now, we are building a culture of continuous improvement. We don't do this because SACSCOC tells us to; we do this because we have core values at this institution, and one of them is 'Excellence-driven.' Watermark Planning & Self-Study makes it easy to demonstrate outcomes.”

Michele Atkins

Associate Provost for Accreditation and Research;
Title IX Coordinator, Union University



CASE STUDY: UNION UNIVERSITY

The problem

In 2020, with a SACSCOC reaffirmation on the horizon, Union University needed a new way to manage their accreditation and assessment processes. “With four campuses and 3,200 students, we had a lot of information,” said Michele Atkins, PhD, Associate Provost for Accreditation & Research and Title IX Coordinator at Union University. “We had a brand new administration and were dealing with Word documents and PDFs. It was extremely time-consuming to build and create reports using our internally developed, secure website.”

The solution

“The transition was almost too easy,” Dr. Atkins said. Union University created a digital accreditation and assessment reporting process with Watermark software, transitioning to Watermark Planning & Self-Study in just six weeks. “It was all on our timetable, and if we needed additional support, Watermark was there.”

The wins

Administrators cut reporting time in half. “I was working 80-hour weeks to complete our reaffirmation report, and Watermark made it possible for my teammates and me to get the work done during our 40-hour week,” Dr. Atkins said. “We created report templates in Planning & Self-Study that will allow me to write longer reports in less than half the time.”

“I was working 80-hour weeks to complete our reaffirmation report, and Watermark made it possible for my teammates and me to get the work done during our 40-hour week.”

Easier processes drive faculty buy-in, with better results. Union’s faculty are entering their assessment data annually, which makes it easier to pull reports and act on the data. “Before Planning & Self-Study, there was a lot of frustration. Faculty didn’t understand the process — they thought it was just a compliance thing,” Dr. Atkins said. “Now, we are building a culture of continuous improvement. We don’t do this because SACSCOC tells us to; we do this because we have core values at this institution, and one of them is ‘Excellence-driven.’ Planning & Self-Study makes it easy to demonstrate outcomes.”





In-depth training clarified the assessment process and Planning & Self-Study's role in it. "Academic support found the platform very intuitive and user friendly. While one attendee was initially anxious about the shift to annual reporting, they ultimately said, 'The Annual Cycle of Continuous Improvement provides a built-in focus each year, and Planning & Self-Study is a place for me to see our progress over time,'" Dr. Atkins said.

Focus and assessment increase alumni engagement. "Faculty members better understand how tracking these outcomes is helping them, and our non-academic units have eaten it up," Dr. Atkins said. "Our Office of Institutional Advancement continues to grow engagement and connectivity with alumni via multiple new endeavors such as a quarterly alumni newsletter, a bimonthly alumni podcast, and the addition of an alumni Instagram account. One such endeavor this year was a targeted alumni fundraising campaign in which 211 alumni donated to provide a cup of coffee to an incoming freshman during move-in day. Out of those 211, 70 were first-time donors."

Conclusion

Union continues to see the benefits of their implementation as they enjoy a seamless reaffirmation cycle. "We used Planning & Self-Study to organize, write, and submit our SACSCOC Fifth-Year Interim Report, which was due in March 2023. It was a smooth process from beginning to end," said Dr. Atkins. "From a customer service perspective, we wanted a feature in accreditation management that was not there. We asked Watermark if it would be possible to add the feature. It was added within a couple of weeks."



At Watermark, insights inspire progress. Watermark's software gives higher education institutions the insights they need to improve, evolve, and empower student success. Watermark's integrated digital solutions support assessment and accreditation, faculty activity reporting, course evaluation and surveys, and catalog and curriculum development for more than 1,700 higher education institutions around the world.

To learn more, visit www.watermarkinsights.com.