Tuskegee Social Work Transforms its Experience Management System to Defy a Pandemic

TIME2TRACK
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The Challenge

Leaving Operational Inefficiency Behind, Once and for All

The Tuskegee University Social Work Department was well aware that it was bleeding resources with its outdated manual system for the tracking and reporting of its students' training hours requirements when COVID-19 hit.

Suddenly, the inefficiencies that both students and administrators had been shouldering became untenable during an effective long-term quarantine. Huge paper and printer ink usage; ever-increasing storage needs for completed documentation; unwieldy time commitments to call and remind students and supervisors about required paperwork, deadlines and missed deadlines; and the need to search filing cabinets just to see a student's profile and agency information were just a few.

Even getting students set up to begin documentation of their experience hours was tedious and convoluted. Students had to purchase a three-ring binder for time tracking and approvals that would become so full by semester's end that it would not shut, according to April Jones, LMSW, Ph.D. and Social Work Department Chair. This ritual meant students spent three to four hours initially preparing their binder each semester. Then as their hours were logged, they had to get timed signatures and manually count their clock hours, which also required numerous hours of support from the department secretary.

"We can't operate this way anymore," had become Jones' longstanding refrain of concern to her colleagues. "It was really bloody before Time2Track," she admitted with a chuckle.

Knowing that a system upgrade was long overdue, when Coronavirus arrived Jones and her colleague Andrea Imafidon, LCSW-Inactive, Assistant Professor, Director of Field Education and program graduate, realized that making a change was now an imperative for the feasibility of the program.

"No agency was going to do paper and pencil with us during COVID, so that meant our students, as well as the university, were about to lose our current agencies," Jones said. That was a devastating prospect for all stakeholders.

Equally concerning, Jones had become keenly aware that some students did not have a laptop for their studies. "Some of them rely on brick and mortar in person to go to the library. And they use the library computers, or they use a free roommate's computer. And then the libraries would close due to COVID — that was a big barrier."

In what Jones describes as a quest for a better way, she mobilized to select a robust solution, and it had to be in short order. "We became strategic," she reflected.

"Many of our longstanding educational sites rate the Time2Track system with 5 stars for being user-friendly and for ease of supervision."

Dr. April Jones
Social Work
Department Chair

TUSKEGEE
UNIVERSITY

Results

With Time2Track, Tuskegee Social Work found:

A move to the cloud that eliminated archaic and time-consuming documentation practices for students, field supervisors, and secretaries.

A paperless system that saves the program the expense of, and storage requirements for, over 50,000 sheets per year and enables them to proudly go green.

An affordable and more equitable solution requiring only the app and a smartphone that makes participation feasible for first-generation/marginalized/disadvantaged matriculants.

A 21st-century programming approach that field education sites and students expect and seek out.

The Solution

Newfound Efficiency When Students and Supervisors Needed it Most

Jones had been methodically searching for an upgrade to her program's manual approach for years. She had already been having ongoing communications with a handful of software vendors but had not felt ready to commit. Without a formal budget for implementation, lack of clarity on how to move forward had become an old familiar feeling. She also felt that she was being shuffled around as a "smaller fish" in the marketplace.

"First of all, it was pleasant to just be respected and heard," she said about her experiences speaking with Time2Track staff during her initial vetting process. "And the Time2Track folks were trying to figure out how to make this work for us and look at the big picture and just to have something that is affordable and workable," Jones said.

In addition, Jones is always prioritizing student expectations and sees her job as bringing solutions that continuously enhance Tuskegee's Social Work offerings and reputation. She understands that her students have been raised in the Digital Age, and what that means.
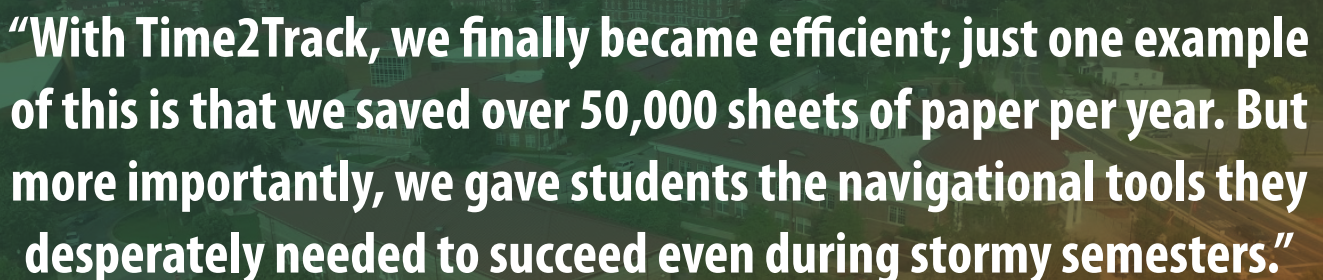
"Generational cohorts are coming in and they want more technology. They want more engagement. While this is a new norm for Social Work, I have always aimed to incorporate technology during my tenure. So, it was time to really push for it."

The Tuskegee Social Work program signed on with Time2Track in the fall of 2020, with the pandemic in full swing, students suddenly forced to work remotely and no time left to shop for options.

Immediately the need for scores of paper, binders and future filing cabinet space disappeared. Tuskegee Social Work became a green program to Jones' delight. Students and supervisors alike reclaimed considerable time with the ability to bring hours tracking and experience management processes online. Besides the obvious value this provided, newfound time provided both groups the "luxury" of focusing their energy on doing their best work.

"Time2Track has reduced email overload, contact with paper that can carry the Coronavirus and labor hours with the help of automated systems and a help desk," Jones shared. "The students enjoy engagement of the system from their mobile phone or other electronic devices. Also, more field education sites have signed on knowing the department has upgraded our documentation system and that the system is safe. Regardless of the location, information can be shared anywhere, anytime," she said.

One of their site directors, Guy Trammel at Tuskegee Youth Safe Haven, echoed the positive effects of switching to Time2Track from a supervisory standpoint. "The COVID-19 pandemic made in-person activities unavailable. This new system was great and provided a good platform to continue without dropping feedback."

> "With Time2Track, we finally became efficient; just one example of this is that we saved over 50,000 sheets of paper per year. But more importantly, we gave students the navigational tools they desperately needed to succeed even during stormy semesters."
>
> Dr. April Jones, Social Work Department Chair

The University's Outcome

A Freeing Solution for Pandemic Peace of Mind

Jones and her team knew immediately that they made a smart choice in Time2Track. She and Imafidon find themselves freed up by the seamless and automated nature of the platform. "We were so used to having to do everything ourselves. Then the students come and say, 'Wait a minute, call the Time2Track help desk!' It's just remembering that I don't have to do all these things anymore for the students," Jones said.

Jones and Imafidon are feeling energized that their program can now capture and visualize student data in ways that finally bring them up to speed with 21st-century learning, per the Tuskegee University mission. One example, she shared, is that "the Council on Social Work Education is doing digital inspections and they can pull up the necessary data for the required inspection period seamlessly by cohort for those using Time2Track," she said.

> **"Our students love Time2Track. One student thinks those tags in the Time2Track app are the best thing since popcorn. She even told another university about what we have that they don't have!"**
>
> Dr. April Jones, Social Work Department Chair

Perhaps most important of all, Time2Track enabled them to help their students succeed during two school years filled with unprecedented pandemic hardships. It was not lost on the team that some of their students were directly impacted by COVID with the loss of family members. As social work experts, they understood well the multifactorial mental-health strain on their students that also included loss of morale and feelings of isolation as they worked remotely toward their degree. Time2Track's online structure and requirements enabled program staff to keep better tabs not only on matriculants' learning progress but also on their ability to continue participating even during high stress.

"All of our students completed their hours and internships while navigating all the COVID restrictions, so I'm amazed… I'm very proud of our students for pushing through," Imafidon shared with emotion.

ABOUT TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY

Tuskegee University is an independent and state-related institution of higher education in Tuskegee, Alabama. As a historically black college/university, its programs serve a student body that is coeducational as well as racially, ethnically and religiously diverse.

Founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881, Tuskegee University's five colleges and three schools offer over 50 degrees including 39 Bachelor's, 13 Master's and three Doctorate degrees.

The mission of Tuskegee has always been service to people, not education for its own sake. The school stresses the need to educate the whole person: the hand and the heart as well as the mind.

Learn more about Time2Track, the leader in experience management, at **time2track.com**.