

From Complexity to Confidence:

Building Scalable Operational Infrastructure in Higher Ed





Colleges and universities are cultivating their online and professional studies programs while welcoming more international students. In many cases, administrative processes have not evolved to keep up with this change.

At Trine University's College of Graduate and Professional Studies, enrollment grew from fewer than 1,000 students in fall 2021 to more than 10,000 in fall 2024. The rapid expansion at the Indiana-based institution forced leaders to confront a difficult question: Could their existing operational infrastructure support more growth?

"We reached the point of it becoming not as exciting and a little bit more stressful," says Keirsten Eberts, Trine's vice president of online and international studies. "We realized our infrastructure needed to change."

Fragmented Systems and Risk

At many institutions, disconnected systems have strained campus operations.

At Trine, scheduling was handled using shared spreadsheets. Course development meant digging through long email chains. Student requests were forwarded from one administrator's inbox to another.

International services, advising, academic leadership and the registrar's office operated in separate communication loops, limiting visibility across teams.

"When we were doing it manually, it obviously took longer, especially if multiple people had to be involved in the process," says Hannah Ewing,

executive director of international services and operations at Trine. "One individual would take care of it and then send an email to another person, and they would do their steps and send it over."

A connected campuswide system replaces fragmented handoffs with shared visibility, clear ownership and frictionless workflows.

Redesigning Institutional Workflows

When enrollment accelerates, the first instinct can be to add staff. However, a key to sustainable scaling is to first redesign the work itself.

At Trine, rather than adding administrative staff, leadership replaced disconnected spreadsheets and email threads. They brought in **monday.com** shared boards, centralizing several core processes.

- Intake forms now capture requests in a consistent format.
- Automated routing moves tasks to the next office without relying on email chains.
- Connected boards give teams real-time visibility into each other's progress.
- Routine documentation updates and status changes in international services become streamlined workflows.

One significant change involved syllabi requests. What had required hours of manual searching and emailing was centralized and automated inside **monday.com**.

With full visibility into academic scheduling, leaders and advisors can view course scheduling in real time rather than waiting for spreadsheet updates.

"I can type in a student ID number and see everything that has happened on our side and also on the international services side," says Brittnei Desmond, assistant vice president and dean. "I have a full picture before I actually even respond to that student."

Shared visibility has also improved compliance responsiveness. Ewing says she once received a documentation request from a federal agency and was able to respond within an hour. "I completely attribute that to having everything centralized," she says.

Investing in Sustainable Scale

Modernization requires deliberate investment at the front end. Designing effective workflows takes time, especially when staff are already overextended.

"You do have to make it a priority to build out those complex processes," says Eberts. "It takes a lot of time in the beginning, but once it's built, it frees up so much time."

Trine leaders began by redesigning repetitive, high-volume tasks before tackling more involved workflows. Over time, they extended ownership beyond the initial leadership team. Staff members were trained to build and manage workflows themselves, supported by internal and governance standards.

As success became visible, other departments began exploring their own modernization processes — proving that early, intentional investment creates a foundation that scales across the entire institution.

Importantly, modernization was not framed as workforce reduction. "When we talk about automations and AI, our focus is not on whether we can eliminate positions," says Eberts. "It's, what can we do more of now? How can we make the student experience better?"

By redesigning workflows and automating everyday work, staff capacity grew without increasing

Institutions experiencing rapid growth need visibility and structured automation to scale their operations.



headcount. Employees could now focus on complicated compliance issues, individualized student needs and program development.

Conclusion

Institutions experiencing rapid growth should not wait until operational strain forces them to react. Operational infrastructure, such as academic programs and enrollment strategies, must be designed intentionally to support scale.

At Trine University, replacing fragmented tools with centralized visibility and structured automation transformed rapid growth from a source of anxiety to one of institutional confidence.

"It's given our student advising team time to focus on community connection," says Desmond. "Monday.com has helped us automate tasks and given us more time to connect on a one-to-one basis with students."

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Education Content Studio, with information and input from monday.com.



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