

# Higher Education Institutions Join Forces in the Cloud

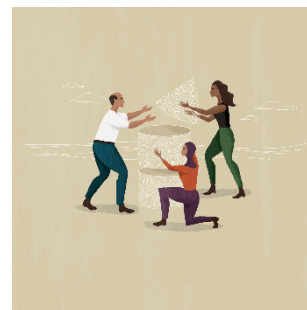
Today's institutions of higher education are transitioning to a new era of online education. In response to the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, digital services have become the norm rather than the exception. Leading institutions have discovered the power of cloud technology to deliver digital experiences that increase student success, improve academic outcomes, and drive new innovations and discoveries. But it takes more than new technology to succeed. Colleges and universities are also forging new alliances—with each other and with the technology vendors they depend on.

To learn more about the dynamics of these relationships and the power of the cloud in education, Oracle spoke with Keith Fowlkes, vice president of technology contracts at E&I Cooperative Services, the largest non-profit buying consortium for higher education in the United States.

## EXPERT VIEW: KEITH FOWLKES FROM E&I

**Oracle:** Tell us about E&I and your role at this organization.

**Keith Fowlkes:** E&I Cooperative Services was founded in 1934, and today we have well over 5,000 members, from large universities to small private colleges, as well as a number of large municipal K-12 members. My role at E&I is the strategic oversight and direction of the E&I Technology Contracts business unit and our business partner relationships. I am also a veteran CIO within higher education and the co-founder, executive director, and board vice president for the Higher Education Systems and Services Consortium (HESS Consortium). The HESS Consortium is a rapidly growing group of 202 private, non-profit colleges and university CIOs and CFOs focusing on finding innovation and savings in ERP solutions as well as cloud software and services.



*“More than 90% of the respondents to a recent Educause survey indicated that their institutions are either in the process of a digital transformation or are considering digital transformation as a way of reducing institutional costs.”*

### EDUCAUSE

- COVID-19 QuickPoll Results

### Why Cloud for Higher Education

- Unify IT administration and reduce operating costs
- Support future-proof applications and services
- Leverage big data to amass greater insights
- Utilize advanced cybersecurity features
- Enable superior disaster recovery capabilities
- Enhance collaboration for students, faculty, and staff



**Oracle:** How does E&I help higher ed institutions with technology purchases?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Just about every college and university in the United States is a registered member. They use our contracts to select technology products and services without having to go through individual RFP processes. Cooperative buying saves time and reduces costs for public and private institutions, no matter their size. Each contract is standards-based, competitively bid, and well negotiated. State institutions recognize our cooperative contracts as compliant to their own standards so most institutions can use E&I contracts instead of doing their own RFPs. E&I also makes it easier for technology vendors since they don't have to respond to multiple RFPs individually.

**Oracle:** What role does cloud technology play in today's higher education purchases?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Cloud computing enables students, teachers, and staff to create and deliver content from anywhere, anytime, on any device. It frees up IT administrators and lowers hardware and software licensing costs. During the pandemic, cloud technology has made it easier for administrators, faculty, and students to work from home yet collaborate effectively.

There is a potentially massive return on investment in cloud operations that was not possible with on-premises applications, infrastructure, and services. The cloud makes it much easier to scale applications and share resources. Institutions have access to infrastructure support and secure backups. Funds formerly spent on traditional hardware and software systems can be re-allocated to improve student outcomes.

**Oracle:** When institutions embrace cloud, what three things would you advise them to do?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Institutions need to stop thinking about short term operations and define a long-term ROI strategy for cloud. Then they need to establish relationships with vendors as well as buying agreements that are flexible and specific to each institution. Most importantly, they must reallocate and educate professional staff to better use cloud technologies.

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**Keith Fowlkes**

Vice President of Technology  
Contracts  
E&I Cooperative Services

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**Keith Fowlkes**

Vice President of Technology  
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**Oracle:** How do today's ERP systems need to change to accommodate this new world of collaboration and resource sharing?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Rather than the "highly customized model" that typifies legacy applications, with cloud apps the focus is on easy configuration – without custom development. For example, within an HR application, a business analyst can use drag-and-drop tools to manage salary increases. Older tools forced them to go through a 10-step approval process or a completely customized and complicated internal solution. Oracle and other cloud vendors are jumpstarting this evolution.

**Oracle:** Are cloud applications from large technology vendors affordable for smaller institutions?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Yes, they can be, but software vendors need to meet institutions where they are today. For example, instead of trying to close a large sale with a single institution, the vendor should create contracts that enable them to work with multiple institutions as a community. This is the wave of the future: establishing buying cooperatives for applications, databases, professional services, infrastructure, and so forth—ideally delivered as scalable services. The next step in the evolution of higher education technology is to make buying decisions together as a group using a cooperative contract and sharing resources to make that happen.

**Oracle:** In addition to sharing the cost of these large purchases, can higher education institutions also share skills and expertise?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Absolutely, and many other resources too. A consortium of universities in the Big 10 Alliance recently announced that they will be cooperating to share courses and faculty members. For example, two or more institutions could share a specialty language instructor. In some cases they can even share course credits and substantiate and validate accreditation information among institutions. This will revolutionize the way education is conducted in the United States and will help lower costs.

**Oracle:** What specific technologies enable these collaborative efforts?

**Keith Fowlkes:** These groups need an ERP platform that is flexible enough to handle their specific needs while providing a homogeneous programming environment so that they can share resources together in a secure, multi-tenant environment. All customers must be able to use a common version of the software and receive software updates on the same schedules. Oracle has innovation labs that demonstrate how likeminded public and private institutions can share data, staff, and resources.

**Oracle:** Let's drill into some of the specific application modules. What efficiencies can an institution or group of institutions gain by using a cloud-based financial aid application?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Financial aid is one of the most complex processes for higher education. Many schools retain large staff groups to counsel students through



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**“Oracle’s new financial aid software is the first solution that allows student self-service. It’s intuitive, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. It’s an outstanding product. I don’t believe there’s anything in the industry today that can touch it.”**

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“Using a suite of solutions from one vendor is easier than trying to combine best-of-breed applications. There are simply too many moving parts to rely on something that is not fully integrated.”

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the financial aid process, and then they do it again the following year, or even the next term. Automation and self-service can reduce the need for so many of these expensive resources. The objective is to empower students to confidently manage their own financial aid decisions, but higher ed institutions need a good, strong, easy-to-use interface that helps financial aid officers manage the process on the backside. Oracle’s new financial aid software is the first solution that allows students to do that. It’s intuitive, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. on the backside. Oracle’s new financial aid software is the first solution that allows students to do that. It’s intuitive, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. It’s an outstanding product. I don’t believe there’s anything in the industry today that can touch it.

**Oracle:** How important is it to have integrated applications from one vendor?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Integrated solutions are important for finance, human resources, student information, and financial aid. Having human resources and finance on separate systems doesn’t make financial sense. Those two areas have to be in sync in order to create a strategic budget model, mainly because human resources is such a big part of the planning and budgeting process.

Using a suite of solutions from one vendor is easier than trying to combine best-of-breed applications. There are simply too many moving parts that add unnecessary costs and delay decision making to rely on something that is not fully integrated. However, institutions need to make sure that an integrated suite of applications includes platform-as-a-service [PaaS] tools so they can integrate other technology as well, such as cloud-native development tools, cloud data storage, and analytics.

**Oracle:** What should institutions look for in a planning and budgeting module? Are scenario modeling capabilities important?

“79% of companies that use cloud systems have increased collaboration across Finance, HR, and IT.”

**MIT Technology Review  
Survey**



**Keith Fowlkes:** Today's higher education institutions are facing very unstable financial times. They have to be able to create multiple planning and budgeting scenarios to project various outcomes. And they need current, highly accessible data to pivot quickly in times of financial need. Flexible modeling capabilities for planning and budgeting allow a finance team to create "what-if" scenarios to accommodate fluctuating endowments and changes in funding legislation. It should be easy to project forward and back over multiple years. Historically institutions could do those things in a spreadsheet, but today it's far too complex. Colleges and universities need detailed, accurate, and flexible financial modeling capabilities. The best cloud applications give them the flexibility to generate the reports they need and also create custom reports on the fly.

**Oracle:** How important is change management technology when you're making a major application change? Is having a partner through the process helpful?

**Keith Fowlkes:** Change management is absolutely crucial to large deployments such as a new ERP system, but you need to have the right implementation partners. Small institutions in particular need help moving from one ERP platform to another, mostly with project management. This is another place where having a consortium can help institutions achieve best practices. Approaching these transitions as a group gives each institution a second layer of trusted support. Change management is less stressful if multiple institutions form a network. In an environment of flat or decreasing revenues, many smaller schools want homogeneous models that allow them to share resources and processes. If they are all on different platforms or on different versions of the same platform, it quickly becomes chaotic.

If your technology modules for finance, human resources, student information, and financial aid are seamlessly integrated, then it's much easier to complete these transformations. That's why we are beginning to see the industry migrate back to an integrated services model for the core business and student systems functionality.

## FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION

Keith Fowlkes speaks from experience—not only as an industry expert who has advised hundreds of colleges and universities, but also as a CIO who has led major technology transitions and upgrades. He is intimately acquainted with change, and he has experienced the cultural upheaval that accompany these transformations.

Consider the current state of affairs at most colleges and universities in response to the COVID crisis. During the Spring 2020 term, many higher education institutions relied heavily on their IT teams to pivot to remote educational methods, emphasizing video conferencing and expanding their distance learning models. These stop-gap efforts have helped colleges sustain basic operations, but new investments are needed to enable a seamless transition to cloud-native operating models, even as many institutions face one of the most significant financial crises ever to hit higher education. This places great pressure on IT organizations to meet institutional expectations for cost reductions while



**“73% of HR and Finance leaders say that cloud systems improve business performance by making it easier to share insights between Finance and HR.”**

**Connected Enterprise:  
Analytics Research Survey**

**“As the COVID-19 pandemic upends higher education in 2020, institutions are relying on digital alternatives to missions, activities, and operations.”**

**Educause poll results (May 6, 2020)**

preparing to deliver expanded digital services.<sup>1</sup> Cloud technology holds the key to strengthening the curriculum, simplifying IT administration, and helping students succeed.

## START WITH THE RIGHT PLATFORM

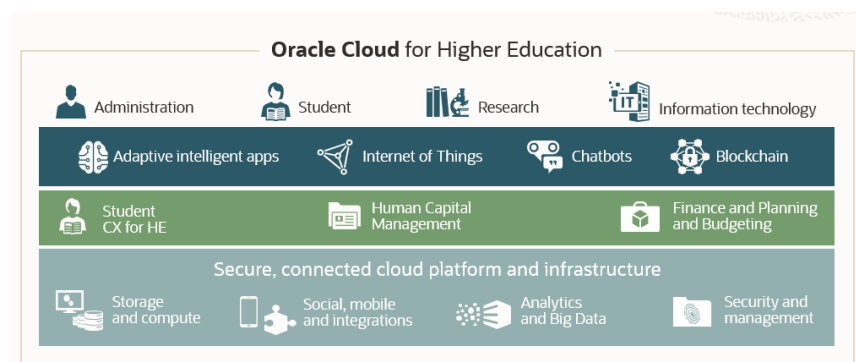
Yesterday's legacy applications deliver outdated experiences for students and require too much on-site administration and maintenance by IT staff. Today's cloud-based student information systems are mobile, connected, and designed for easy access and collaboration.

For example, Oracle Cloud for Higher Education streamlines activities for administrators, simplifies access for students, and anchors advanced data-driven research initiatives powered by the latest information technology, including adaptive-intelligent apps, natural language interfaces driven by chatbots, and campus-wide integration of data and workflows through blockchain. The platform includes integrated cloud solutions that have been optimized for Higher Education:

**Student Experience:** Comprehensively manage the student lifecycle, from recruiting through alumni and donor management.

**Human Capital Management:** Simplify the process of hiring and retaining top faculty and staff. Recruit, grow, and retain employees with integrated talent acquisition, learning, and performance management systems.

**Finance, Planning, and Budgeting:** Unite disparate accounting systems, improve project profitability, and streamline payment processes through automation and social collaboration, while controlling costs.



Oracle's integrated cloud platform enriches the teaching and learning experience with innovative cloud solutions that enable student success and institutional sustainability.

## ENABLE BETTER STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Oracle's integrated suite of cloud-native solutions puts students at the center of the academic process with a connected set of digital experiences that improve

### Why Standardize on Oracle Higher Education Cloud?

#### Improve student

**outcomes:** Optimize Finance, HR, Student Lifecycle Management and Operations with a unified cloud platform—and direct the cost savings towards serving students.

#### Maintain financial

**sustainability:** Assess financial performance with an industry-leading Enterprise Performance Management (EPM) solution that leverages sophisticated scenario simulation capabilities.

#### Streamline the financial aid process:

Automate financial aid for students and staff with a Student Financial Planning module that leverages AI and machine learning to make the process easy and intuitive.

#### Simplify human

**resources:** Turbocharge HR and talent management with a Human Capital Management (HCM) solution driven by rules-based algorithms, AI, and machine learning.

<sup>1</sup> <https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2020/5/educause-covid-19-quickpoll-results-it-budgets-2020-2021>

academic outcomes and ensure student success. Powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and accessible through a modern user interface, Oracle Student Cloud enhances the student experience at every stage of the academic lifecycle. Personalized dashboards display real-time data such as grade point averages, graduation timelines, course completion calendars, and detailed account information to help students stay motivated and engaged.



Oracle Student Cloud turns the entire student journey into an engaging digital experience.

## WORK WITH AN EXPERIENCED TECHNOLOGY PARTNER

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the social and economic landscape for many schools. Yesterday's business and academic models have been stretched to the breaking point. Some institutions won't recover. Others will turn the crisis into an opportunity to transform their fundamental business processes and emerge even stronger than before.

With nearly three decades of experience in academia and over ten thousand of higher education customers worldwide, Oracle's charter is to help educational institutions use data to unlock new possibilities for students, faculty, and staff.

To [learn more](https://www.oracle.com/industries/higher-education) about Oracle Cloud solutions for higher education, visit [oracle.com/industries/higher-education](https://www.oracle.com/industries/higher-education).

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