



SUCCESS STORY
Education



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN | PROBLEM SOLVED

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee SAP University Competence Center needed a modern, flexible infrastructure to deliver increased performance, speed, and reliability to its member universities.

The University of Wisconsin Amps Up SAP Performance and Reliability

The mission of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) SAP University Competence Center (UCC) is to provide SAP hosting services and technical support to U.S. and Canadian universities that participate in SAP's University Alliance program. Unfortunately, an old and outdated infrastructure was holding the program back and creating productivity bottlenecks. Now that the UCC is using NetApp® AFF, performance and reliability are no longer a concern.

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1

minute snapshot
restoration

2

minute storage
provisioning

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“Performance and reliability have been night and day. We can now deliver software to more students, more quickly, and it’s a better experience for the students.”

Ross Hightower,
director of the SAP University Competence Center (UCC)

The UWM is home to one of only six UCCs worldwide. The UCC, which is part of the Lubar School of Business, currently hosts more than 150 universities, operating more than 50 production SAP systems while using its own private cloud environment to deliver SAP software to more than 100,000 students each year. However, it was becoming challenging to maintain the underlying technology infrastructure to keep the system running at full capacity.

SNAPSHOTS ARE MORE THAN JUST PICTURES

The UWM’s data center hosts the SAP software, which customer universities use in their coursework. UWM’s infrastructure requirements must scale up and down with the ebb and flow of the school year. At the beginning of every semester, faculty from member universities request access to SAP software. UCC personnel provision

the products for them and provide support. At the end of the semester, every SAP instance is basically discarded. The next semester, the cycle begins anew with fresh instances being created.

With more than 50 SAP instances running simultaneously, UWM needed an infrastructure solution that could keep up with its performance, scalability, and efficiency needs. University officials decided that NetApp AFF was the way to go.

“With NetApp, we can create a system, get it all ready, create a snapshot of it, and then we can reproduce that system later,” says Ross Hightower, director of the UCC.

The restoration can occur in as little as one minute. “It takes longer to boot the server up than it does to restore that snapshot,” adds Jerad

Lumina, senior information processing consultant, UWM. With the previous solution, the restoration took a couple of hours. Multiply that by 50 to realize the huge efficiencies that UWM experienced with NetApp AFF.

AFF Snapshot™ copies also help the UCC team when a student contests a grade. Because of the speed with which a server can be easily brought back up, faculty and students can come to an agreement faster, according to Hightower.

A COOL SOLUTION TO TOO MUCH HEAT

Before switching to AFF, the center was using standard hard-disk-based storage with tape backups. The legacy system required a great deal of floor space as well as extensive and expensive maintenance. One of the biggest issues associated with the legacy system was the amount of heat generated

in the data center. The servers were hooked up to auxiliary power in case of an electrical outage. However, the large air conditioners that cool the data center were not. The danger of the servers overheating was a constant threat.

Moving to AFF systems immediately alleviated all three issues, because the systems require less floor space and aren't on costly maintenance contracts. They also run much cooler than the legacy hard-disk systems they replaced. As an added bonus, AFF is much easier to use. Lumina explains, "The OnCommand storage manager console is super flexible. It

takes me all of about two minutes to provision storage on the NetApp server and get that storage to show up in VMware."

"Performance and reliability have been night and day," Hightower adds. "We can now deliver software to more students, more quickly, and it's a better experience for the students."

SAP HANA AND MORE ON THE HORIZON

Thanks to the flexibility of the NetApp solution, the UCC is now beginning to move to SAP HANA, which features an in-memory database.

A future roadmap has been developed thanks in part to the help of IT solutions provider Presidio, which assisted the UCC with the NetApp implementation. The roadmap includes offsite storage capabilities for disaster recovery.

"NetApp definitely exceeded our expectations," says Hightower. "We were thrilled that we had a lot more capability than we thought was possible."

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