



# A master's degree in communications

This Midwestern university has a long legacy of educational excellence. With roots dating back to the mid-1800s, this institution of higher learning has continued to redefine itself with changing times and the needs of the students, faculty and community at-large that it serves. Over its 150-year history, the university has continued to evolve and adapt, always striving to stay ahead in a changing world. When it found its antiquated communications system was unable to keep up with the growing demands of a thriving university, they decided it was time to brush-up on technology that would keep pace in an increasingly digital world.

## Industry

Higher Education

## Customer

Based in the Midwest

1,700+ students

250+ full-time faculty/staff; 50+ part-time

National award winner for innovation

## Challenges

Outdated analog phone system

Difficult/time-consuming to manage

Lacked failover protection

High cost

## Solutions

Mitel UCaaS

Internet/voice services

## Results

Ease of management/flexibility

Fully supported

Increased productivity

Opportunities for collaboration

Cost effective

## Admission standards

Imagine your phone rings during a critical meeting. You excuse yourself to answer your flip phone. Never mind the distraction, your colleagues are now focused on your outdated technology. The university's assistant director of IT services faced a similar situation, albeit at a grander scale. He and his team are responsible for the university's entire IT network, security operations, business continuity and cyber security. In addition to those duties, the team takes their core mandate, which parallels the university's mission statement, very seriously: innovate and explore new technology options that can make life easier for people in an educational environment. An opportunity to demonstrate their commitment was waiting for them.

Pre-dating the flip phone, more than 400 old analog phones and a premises-based PBX—carryover technology from the days when the school was required to use the state's purchasing system—comprised the school's communications system. They were fixtures on every desk across campus that were expensive to maintain with a high fixed-cost per line regardless of its use. Any time there was a change in a number or placement of lines, a technician had to physically come to campus to provision it, a process that could take two to three days. Adding to the urgency, the only employee with the skillset to maintain the old PBX was retiring. "It was a wake-up call for us. With high monthly operating costs and no cost-effective way to replace our end-of-life PBX, it was time for a change. We needed a fully-managed, flexible, intuitive and cost-effective IP-based solution that I could confidently propose to the university's president—and would meet the needs of end-users."

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## Solutions-based learning

Fortunately, the assistant director and his team were in the right place at the right time to meet the challenge. The state had lifted the requirement that institutions had to purchase communications from the state, so they were free to explore options outside the system. Another big driver in the decision-making process was that innovation is part of the school’s DNA. In 2017, the university was selected as the most innovative school of the year for the number of ‘home-grown’ technology solutions that it developed and deployed across campus including their bandwidth carving, virtual ID and digital signage. “We’re proudly innovative, especially for a school of our size. When we were introduced to Windstream Enterprise UCaaS, we knew we had a communications solution that matched the school’s commitment to innovation and a technology that would make life easier for our users.”

The assistant director was immediately attracted to the features and flexibility that cloud-based UCaaS provides. Overall network reliability has improved. Uptime and call quality are now superior to that of old analog phones. Provisioning time has been significantly reduced, as well. No more waiting for a technician to provision services when needs change. Featuring centralized, online administrative management, UCaaS provides greater customization options and allows staff to handle service changes more cost-effectively in house. When an employee changes offices on campus, UCaaS seamlessly ‘follows’ them, keeping their number intact regardless of location.

An unexpected benefit of UCaaS is that the university has been able to better leverage resources, leading to greater efficiency and employee satisfaction. When they decommissioned their centralized switchboard, they replaced the person with an Alexa device from Amazon. Guests speak to ‘Alexa’ and are routed directly to the department they want to reach. The switchboard operator is now performing more strategic duties than just answering calls. She is more productive and happier with her work.

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## Graduation with honors

Overall, UCaaS has been well-received by staff. “Ninety-percent of our users are happy just to have a phone on their desk. We’re encouraging staff to try more of the features, and we’re finding that as they learn what UCaaS can do, they’re very receptive to the features, like the call bridge function.” Meanwhile, training staff on the use of UCaaS’ collaboration features to boost productivity is part of his team’s longer-term goals.

Looking ahead, the assistant director notes the technology evolution he’s seen just over the last several years. “Most students and faculty bring their own devices, and as an innovative institution, we are ready to provide services where users can leverage these devices—or be able to issue smart or mobile devices to enable better communication on the campus.” While he anticipates that desk phones on campus will probably become a secondary way of communication over the next few years, the university is ready to adapt and innovate with the technology changes ahead.

### About Windstream Enterprise

Windstream Enterprise collaborates with businesses across the U.S. to drive digital transformation by delivering solutions that solve today’s most complex networking and communication challenges.

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