

# Professional development key to keeping higher ed IT departments ahead of threats and challenges



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Prior to the passage of data privacy legislation, such as the European Union's adoption of GDPR in 2018, the majority of higher education institutions across the United States thought they had a solid grasp on their data governance. Unfortunately, laws like GDPR, California's Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) and social media followings have catalyzed an evolutionary whirlwind of data protection, privacy requirements and the possibility of public relations fallout for uni-

versity IT departments.

These challenges have been a wake-up call for higher ed institutions, revealing how scrambled and segmented their data has been across their sprawling databases, data centers, and networks. As a result, universities have had to completely reimagine how they manage the massive amounts of data they house within their IT environments, as well as how they structure and develop their data gover-

nance strategies.

For example, let's say a student wanted to leave a university and they are covered by GDPR or CCPA. That institution would need to have a solid data governance infrastructure in place, capable of locating that student's data within their data estate and taking the necessary actions prescribed by law. Today's modern data environments require much more attention, consideration and governance reporting. This is especially true today, when the consequences of mismanaging data can lead to devastating impacts on affected students, and a PR nightmare for universities.

Colleges and universities must remain highly aware and knowledgeable of the location and protection of their sensitive student data.



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Here at NetApp, when our higher ed customers were working on GDPR compliance, we heard many of them say, "I had data sitting in my data center, and GDPR pushed me to really nail down and identify all of it." As universities moved to incorporate a hybrid cloud environment, data was pushed into

new areas. Backups were being placed in the cloud, applications and user data found new life and new locations that needed to be monitored. If governance policies weren't modified or if PII data had been unknowingly moved or copied, unfortunate consequences arose.

Thankfully for some, work that had been developed during the GDPR implementation period in 2018 provided a data governance foundation to work with and apply across their environments. This progressive shift away from legacy thinking and processes has enabled our educational IT customers and partners to easily adjust to this new, broadly defined environment.

However, more challenges are on the horizon

for the IT departments of college and universities. New technologies, advanced capabilities, and complex infrastructures are combining to create another IT headache that these organizations will need to overcome.

We are at a critical moment as it pertains to the rapid evolution of higher ed IT. It seems that nearly every day new requirements, challenges, and threats are being imposed upon university networks, databases, and applications. The fact is, university IT environments are everchanging and challenging, but there is a silver lining.

The current education IT market is flooded with cutting-edge solutions that universities and colleges should educate themselves on. Tools like NetApp's BlueXP, Cloud Insights and Cloud secure helps administrators wrap their arms around their data estate. By looking into databases, combining both on-premises and cloud data locations, and incorporating governance during migrations, IT departments can stay abreast with the newest solutions and technologies that are available to them and will reap benefits in the long run. Universities that build a solid IT foundation with the latest, next-generation solutions will be properly prepared and ready to springboard into whatever requirements, challenges, and threats they will face in the future.

## The workforce component

Even though these next-gen technologies have the capability to unlock great potential for higher ed infrastructures, there will always be workforce and cultural components that, if not handled properly, can slow down adoption and progress.

As I stated before, it is imperative that university IT departments keep up with the current challenges and solutions that are emerging within the higher ed space. Institutions cannot properly protect their data estate from the latest cyber threats if they are not aware of them or the solutions on the market that can protect them.

IT departments must prioritize the workforce component that accompanies the adoption of next-generation technology. Building education and professional development into IT departments' culture will keep teams in-the-

know and better prepared to maximize the potential of your data environment.

I can attest that the IT community can sometimes be siloed in our vision. We can be quite myopic and continue to work in environments with legacy processes and procedures that aren't maximizing the delivery of a robust and secure university network. But when we start to embrace new tech, we open a plethora of opportunities for higher ed IT infrastructures.

But to get the workforce on board, training is going to be paramount. For example, the IT industry is currently witnessing a massive evolution in containerization. In the near-future, I believe that we will start to see a heavier focus on applications and less on virtual machines and servers. As containers and IoT technologies continue to take hold within many industries, higher ed institutions must realize that they will have to adapt to these technologies eventually, as they will surely become ubiquitous.

Higher ed IT departments must always stay up-to-date with the latest advancements in their industry and understand the evolving, educational data center environment. That way when it is time to undergo another phase of modernization, their IT teams will be knowledgeable and prepared to do so.

